

PTI rejects sentences
F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: PTI has rejected the sentences handed down by military courts to May 9 rioters. Omar Ayub said that the party rejects the sentences awarded to civilians by military courts, adding that these verdicts are against the principles of justice. Ayub maintained that the individuals who have been awarded sentences are ordinary citizens and cannot be tried in military courts.

Military court jails 25 over May 9 attacks

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: The Field General Court Martial (FGCM) has handed down sentences to 25 individuals involved in the tragic events of May 9, 2023.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) on Saturday, the sentences have been announced after examining all evidences, affording all legal rights to the accused and completion of the due process. The statement said on 9th May 2023, nation witnessed tragic incidents of politically provoked violence and arson at multiple places, marking a dark chapter in the history of Pakistan.

Building on a sustained narrative of hate and lies, politically orchestrated attacks were carried out in the installations of the Armed Forces including desecration of the monuments of Shuhada. These blatant acts of violence

not only shocked the nation but also underscored necessity of checking this unacceptable attempt of political terrorism to impose own perverted will through violence and coercion.

The ISPR statement said sequel to the events of this 'Black Day', through meticulous investigations, irrefutable evidences were collected to legally prosecute the accused involved in the 9th May tragedy. Certain cases were subsequently referred to Field General Court Martial as per law, where they underwent trials following the due process.

On 13th December 2024, a seven-member Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court directed that the cases pending due to an earlier order of the Apex Court be finalised and judgments in the cases of those accused found involved in these violent incidents be announced. The promulgation of the sentences of remaining accused is also being done. The statement further said

this is an important milestone in dispensation of justice to the nation.

It is also a stark reminder to all those who are exploited by the vested interests and fall prey to their political propaganda and intoxicating lies, to never take law in own hands ever in the future. The statement said that many accused are also being tried in various Anti-Terrorist Courts (ATCs) and their cases are being pursued as per the law.

However, justice would truly be fully served only once the mastermind and planners of 9th May Tragedy are punished as per the Constitution and laws of the land. All convicts retain the right to appeal and other legal recourses, as guaranteed by the law and the Constitution.

The twenty-five people handed down the sentences are Jan Muhammad Khan s/o Toor Khan, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Muhammad Imran Mehboob s/o Mehboob Ahmed,

10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Raja Muhammad Ehsan s/o Raja Muhammad Maqsood, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in GHQ attack incident, Rehmat Ullah s/o Manjoor Khan, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Punjab Regimental Centre Mardan incident, Anwar Khan s/o Muhammad Khan, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in PAF Base Mianwali incident, Muhammad Afaq Khan s/o M Ishfaq Khan, 9 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Bannu Cantt incident, Daud Khan s/o Ameer Zaib, 7 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Chakdara Fort incident, Faheem Haider s/o Farooq Haider, 6 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Zahid Khan s/o Muhammad Khan, 4 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Multan Cantt Check Post incident, Yasir Nawaz s/o Ameer Nawaz Khan, 2

years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Punjab Regimental Centre Mardan incident, Abdul Hadi s/o Abdul Qayyum, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Ali Shan s/o Noor Muhammad, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Daud Khan s/o Shad Khan, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Umar Farooq s/o Muhammad Sabbir, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in GHQ attack incident, Babar Jamal s/o Muhammad Ajmal Khan, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in PAF Base Mianwali incident, Muhammad Hashir Khan s/o Tahir Bashir, 6 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Muhammad Ashiq Khan s/o Naseeb Khan, 4 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Khuram Shahzad s/o Liaqat Ali, 3 years rigorous imprison-

Kundi hails sentences
F.P. Report
PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Saturday welcomed the sentencing of those involved in the tragic May 9 incident, calling it a positive and necessary step. In a statement issued here, the Governor said that the entire nation had been waiting for this decision, as those responsible had not faced justice despite the passage of time.

ment, involved in Multan Cantt Check Post incident, Muhammad Bilawal s/o Manzoor Hussain, 2 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Said Alam s/o Maaz Ullah Khan, 2 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Punjab Regimental Centre Mardan incident, Laeeq Ahmed s/o Manzoor Ahmed, 2 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in ISI Office Faisalabad incident, Ali Iftikhar s/o Iftikhar Ahmed, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Zia ur Rehman s/o Azam Khurshid, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Jinnah House incident, Adnan Ahmed s/o Sher Muhammad, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Punjab Regimental Centre Mardan incident and Shakir Ullah s/o Anwar Shah, 10 years rigorous imprisonment, involved in Punjab Regimental Centre Mardan incident.



LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting on revenue related matters.

Four terrorists killed as infiltration attempt at border thwarted

F.P. Report
RAWALPINDI: Security forces killed four terrorists while foiling an infiltration attempt of a group of militants through Pakistan-Afghan border in the general area Rajgal Khyber District on Friday night.

The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said, "On the night of 19/20 December, movement of a group of Khwarij, trying to infiltrate through the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, was picked up by the security forces in the general area Rajgal, Khyber District".

Own troops effectively engaged and thwarted their attempt to infiltrate. Resultantly, four terrorists were sent to hell, it added. However, during the intense fire exchange, one brave son of the soil, Sepoy Amir Sohail Afridi, having fought gallantly, embraced martyrdom.

"Pakistan has consistently been asking the Interim Afghan Government to ensure effective border management on their side of the

border. Interim Afghan Government is expected to fulfil its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by Khwarij for perpetrating acts of terrorism against Pakistan", read the press release said. "Security forces of Pakistan remain committed to securing its borders and eliminating the menace of terrorism, and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," it said.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif praised the security forces for their operation in Rajgal area of Khyber District, in which four operatives of Fitna al-Khwarji were eliminated.

The prime minister expressed his deep grief over the martyrdom of Sepoy Amir Sohail Afridi of the Pakistan Army during an exchange of fire, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. He prayed for the high ranks of the departed soul and grant of strength and patience to his family.

The prime minister further said the sacrifices of the nation's sons would never go in vain and reiterated that the nefarious intentions of the ene-

mies of humanity would be thwarted. The government and security forces were active to completely eradicate the Fitna al-Khwarji from the country, he added.

Chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has lauded the security forces for thwarting a terrorist infiltration attempt on the Pak-Afghan border in Khyber District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He commended the security forces for their successful operation, noting that the elimination of four terrorists by our brave soldiers is a resounding response from the nation to those who challenge its sovereignty. The PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari paid tribute to Sepoy Amir Sohail Afridi, who embraced martyrdom during the operation. He stated that the nation is forever indebted to the sacrifice of every drop of the martyr's blood. He also expressed heartfelt condolences and solidarity with the family of Shaheed Amir Sohail Afridi.

CJP Afridi presides over JCP meeting

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Yahya Afridi presides over a meeting of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) to review the proposed draft of JC rules for the appointment of judges.

In addition, the meeting will also discuss extension in the tenure of the constitutional bench formed by the JC after the passage of the 26th Constitutional Amendment. It may be recalled that the constitutional bench is mandated to hear constitutional cases till Jan 4, 2025.

Meanwhile, senior puisne judge Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah has written a nine-page letter to the JC secretary demanding mechanism and criteria for the nomination and determination of the number of judges for the constitutional benches of the Supreme Court and the high courts. "The commission has already nominated and determined a number of judges of the Supreme Court and the Sind High Court for Constitutional Benches in the absence of any mechanism or criteria in place.

"Therefore, there has been no logic or reason backing the nomination and determination of the number of judges for the Constitutional Benches of the Supreme Court and Sind High Court," says the letter.

All involved in violence to meet their logical end: Tarar

F.P. Report
LAHORE: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Saturday that people involved in terrorism in the garb of politics had met their logical end.

Addressing party workers and people of his constituency here, he termed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder a mastermind of May 9 and his companions as planners. He said, "All those involved in May 9 riots will meet their logical end."

Attaullah Tarar said that people had strongly rejected anti-state elements who give priority to their personal interests over national interest. He said, "Promises related to development works made during the general elections 2024 by me and PML-N MPA Malik Asad Ali Khokhar are heading towards implementation."

He said that different development projects had been inaugurated today in the constituency to solve problems of the people. He said that with the passage of time people of the constituency would witness change as development works were ongoing. Attaullah Tarar said, "We are well aware of the problems of the people whether

gas-related issues, electricity wires or drinking water." He also thanked the people of the constituency who always supported the PML-N.

"The economy is growing, inflation is decreasing, the rupee is getting stable, exports are increasing and friendly countries are making huge investments in the country," he said and added that it was just because of the incumbent government which was making sincere efforts to steer the country out of existing problems. He said that with the grace of Allah Almighty all problems would be solved under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Attaullah Tarar said that the country's stock exchange had crossed 100,000 points and showing upward trend and it was just because investors, traders and the business community had a trust in the government. He said, "People know very well that the government is not involved in any sort of corruption. Unfortunately, those behind corruption of 190 million pounds still do not refrain anti-state activities."

He said that the credit goes to PML-N Qauid Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif who had made the

PM orders strict action against tax defaulters

F.P. Report
LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has directed authorities to bring tax defaulters into the tax net and take strict action against non-compliance. He made these remarks while presiding over a crucial review meeting on strategies to enhance revenue collection on Saturday.

During the meeting, officials briefed the Prime Minister on the installation and monitoring of video analytics in the sugar industry. Highlighting the importance of technology, the Prime Minister said, "Improving the Federal Board of Revenue's (FBR) performance through technology is the government's top priority."

He emphasized that the use of video analytics in the sugar industry would significantly improve revenue collection, eliminate hoarding, and help stabilize prices. "Our utmost effort is to ensure the availability of sugar at affordable prices for the public," he stated, directing regular monitoring of sugar stocks to maintain an uninterrupted supply chain.

The prime minister also ordered stringent and indiscriminate action against tax evasion and under-reporting by sugar mills. He underscored that ongoing measures for FBR's digitization would bring billions of rupees in benefits to the national treasury. Additionally, the prime minister instructed the swift completion of FBR's value chain digitization and called for the rapid implementation of video analytics in the cement and tobacco industries. The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Minister of State for Finance Ali Pervaiz Malik, and senior government officials.

Naqvi, Sherpao discuss Kurram situation

F.P. Report
PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visited the residence of Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao, Chairman of the Quami Watan Party, where he was warmly welcomed by Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao.

Mohsin Naqvi also held a meeting with Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao. Both leaders exchanged views on matters of mutual interests, politics, and the overall situation of the country. The law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was also discussed during the meeting.

Interior Minister apprised Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao regarding the measures taken to establish sustainable peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in Kurram. He said that Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao is a senior politician, and his political services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were acknowledged by all.

The Interior Minister said that important deci-

Pakistan rejects US missile threat claims as 'unfounded'

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: In response to media queries regarding the statement by a senior US Official at a think-tank, the Spokesperson, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, made the following statement:

The alleged threat perception from Pakistan's missile capabilities and delivery means, raised by the US official are unfortunate. These allegations are unfounded, devoid of rationality and sense of history. Since 1954, Pakistan and the US have enjoyed a positive and broad-ranging relationship.

The recent spate of US allegations towards a major non-NATO ally would be unhelpful for the overall relationship, especially in the absence of any evidence in this regard. Pakistan has never had any ill-intention towards the US in any form or manner, and this fundamental reality has not changed.

On the contrary, Pakistan has made monumental sacrifices for this relationship and continues to suffer hugely in sustaining the onslaught of the aftermath of US policies in

the region. It is regrettable that the US official alluded to bracketing Pakistan with those who are perceived to be in an adversarial relationship with the US. While ignoring and shielding the manifestations of a much more potent missile capability in our eastern neighbourhood, concerns on Pakistani capabilities are being raised seemingly at the behest of others to further accentuate the already fragile strategic stability in the region.

We wish to reiterate that Pakistan's strategic capabilities are meant to defend its sovereignty and preserve peace and stability in South Asia. Pakistan cannot abdicate its right to develop capabilities that commensurate with the need to maintain credible minimum deterrence as well as evolving and dynamic threats. Since 2012 when the US officials started broaching the subject, different Pakistani governments, leadership and officials, have endeavored from time to time, to positively address and remove the misplaced US concerns.

Moreover, Pakistan has also made it abundantly clear that our strategic pro-

gram and allied capabilities are solely meant to deter and thwart a clear and visible existential threat from our neighbourhood and should not be perceived as a threat to any other country. Hence, any irrational assumption of a hostile intent from Pakistan by any other country including the US is perplexing as well as illogical.

In view of the profound sanctity of strategic programme for the people of Pakistan and for the country's defense, our clear iterations and manifestation of intent and purpose thereof, any attempt to seek intrusion into it, in any form or manner, on any pretext whatsoever, is neither thinkable nor possible.

There is unshakeable resolve and complete consensus on this aspect across the entire political and social spectrum of the country. Pakistan has always sought to engage constructively with the US on all issues, including the need to pursue a balanced approach to security and stability in our region. We have a long history of cooperation and wish to build on this strong legacy.

sions were made during the meeting of the Apex Committee regarding the establishment of peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in Kurram. He underscored that all possible steps will be ensured to maintain peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He stressed that no party or group should do politics on the issue of Kurram Agency, as it is a highly sensitive matter. Provincial President of Quami Watan Party Sikandar Sherpao was also present on the occasion.

Meanwhile, Quami Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao underlined the need for dialogue to end the political instability as it was undermining the economy. He made these remarks while talking to the media after attending a ceremony to mark the death anniversary of those who lost their lives in a blast in a mosque in Charsadda's Sherpao village on December 21, 2007.

It may be recalled that around 57 people were martyred and over 100 injured

May 9 accountability incomplete until planners caught: Kh Asif

F.P. Report
ISLAMABAD: Defense Minister Khawaja Asif on Saturday emphasised that justice for the May 9 violence will remain incomplete until the planners behind the tragedy are apprehended.

He criticised delays in delivering swift justice, stating that such postponements embolden the accused and their facilitators. In a series of posts on X (formerly Twitter), Khawaja Asif addressed the sentencing of 25 individuals involved in the events of

May 9, 2023, by military courts. The sentences, handed down by the Field General Court Martial, range up to 10 years.

He remarked that while the law has reached the "necks of the workers who were used," it has yet to catch the masterminds behind the day's violent acts.

"The series of accountability should not end until the planners of this terrible day are brought to justice," Asif said. He added that those who insulted martyrs and ghazis were wrongfully glorified, and the failure to denounce the violence of that day amounted to tacit approval of such acts.

The violence stemmed from nationwide protests following the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan from the Islamabad High Court premises in the Al-Qadir Trust case. The protests, spearheaded by supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), escalated into widespread unrest, including attacks on military and civilian installations.



All govt schools will be gradually solarized: Shah

KARACHI (PPI): Provincial Minister for Energy, Development and Planning Sindh Syed Nasir Hussain Shah has said that all government schools in the province will be gradually solarized and along with this, every possible cooperation and help will be provided to solarize private schools so that school children can continue their education and exams in a peaceful environment.

According to a statement issued today, he expressed these views today in Paigham Pakistan on behalf of the Directorate Private Schools Education Sindh and All Sindh Private Schools and Colleges Education. In his speech as the chief guest at the All Sindh Science and Arts Gala at the PAF Museum under the title of "Stability of Pakistan".

Chief Organizer Paigham

Pakistan Sindh Allama Sajjad Tanoli, Chairman All Sindh Private Schools and Colleges Association Syed Haider Ali and Additional Director Private Schools Rafia Javed, among others, also spoke on the occasion.

Minister Nasir Shah said that it is the primary responsibility of teachers to educate school children about Pakistani history and positive awareness, and today's message to the builders of the future is stability of Pakistan.

Along with the PPP govt, the vision of President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto is that education should be made public and special attention should be paid to it. He added that Teachers should inform children that Pakistan's future is in bright and safe hands. The situation is improving day by day, new

employment opportunities are being created. Investment is increasing rapidly, not only domestic but also foreign investors are approaching the government for investment after seeing the good and peaceful conditions.

Sindh govt is busy taking steps to eliminate load shedding and overbilling in the summer. They are trying to provide affordable electricity to the consumers. For the peace, stability and eradication of terrorism in the country, our armed forces, Rangers, and police youth are being martyred every day, and mothers are carrying the funerals of those who sacrificed their lives for the country and the nation. Finally, Nasir Shah distributed prizes among the winning children in the competition and also gave cash from his own pocket as prizes to the children.

Naqvi visits passport office

LAHORE (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has completely wiped out the agent mafia from the Garden Town Passport Office for which people paid tributes to him on Saturday.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi made a surprise visit to the Passport Office Garden Town and met the citizens who had come to get their passports. Mohsin Naqvi inquired from the citizens about the process of getting their passports and the citizens expressed their satisfaction with the process.

Talking to the Federal Interior Minister, the citizens said that the immense rush had ended with the 24-hour opening of the Passport Office. The Interior Minister went to various counters and spoke to the citizens. The minister gave orders to resolve the problems of some citizens on the spot. Some citizens complained about the agent mafia in the area, to which the Federal Interior Minister took immediate notice and ordered a crackdown.

Mohsin Naqvi said that the convenience of citizens is the most precious thing, adding that complaints about delays in obtaining passports are also being addressed.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting Garden Town Passport Office. —APP Photo

Governor urges youth to eliminate negative thinking

KARACHI (APP): The Governor of Sindh and Chancellor of Public Universities Kamran Khan Tessori has called on the youth to eliminate negative thinking and adopt a positive mindset, ensuring success.

He emphasized that there is no shortage of talent or resources in Pakistan, and the youth must step forward to dismantle the outdated system, as the country's future lies in their hands. He made these remarks during his address at the 12th convocation of Dawood Engineering University at Governor House.

The event was attended by Federal Minister for Education Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Vice-Chancellor, faculty mem-

bers, students, and their parents. The Governor of Sindh urged parents to encourage their talented daughters and allow them to grow. He stressed that the country's resources must be invested in the youth. He also praised Dawood University for maintaining its quality consistently over the years.

In his address to the students, Chancellor Kamran Khan Tessori urged them to reaffirm their commitment to serving their parents, stressing that it is their duty. He also remarked that the students had not just received degrees but secured their future. He added that 90% of the female students are gold medalists and advised them

not to let their gold medals go unnoticed. Addressing the parents, he urged them to provide proper education to their daughters and not just showcase their degrees.

He also shared that modern IT courses are being offered at Governor House, with 50,000 students enrolled in these programs. He revealed that an IT course, usually costing 80,000 rupees, is available for free at Governor House. He further added that the doors of the Governor House are open 24/7, and if any young person faces difficulties, they can ring the "Bell of Hope," signaling the Governor's support in solving their problems.

Discussing the challenges faced by Karachi,

the Governor expressed concern over the city's deteriorating state, with garbage heaps and pot-holes everywhere, and the tragic incidents caused by reckless dumpers. He emphasized the need for collective action to solve these problems and encouraged the youth to embrace social media's positive potential.

The Governor Sindh also mentioned the celebration of "Muhajir Culture Day" on December 24, which will honor the efforts of their forefathers before and after the creation of Pakistan. He concluded by expressing hope for a brighter future and confidence that the solutions lie in collaborative efforts.

Hindu ceremonies at Katas Raj Mandir conclude

LAHORE (APP): Hindu pilgrims from India performed "Bhanu Saphami" rituals at the Katas Raj Mandir in Chakwal and a reception was arranged for them by the Evacuee Trust Property Board.

On this occasion, Indian leader Wijay Kumar Sharma said that they had received immense love and affection in Pakistan. "We are getting all the facilities here; our religious places are also being taken special care of. We are grateful to the government and ETPB Chairman Syed Attaur Rehman for the construction of the residential complex. We come from 12 different states of India and performed our religious rituals in the Katas Raj," he added.

Addressing the ceremony, Additional Secretary Shrinis Saifulla Khokhar said that the government of Pakistan takes special

measures to serve the people of minority religions and protect and maintain their places of worship. According to the direction of Syed Attaur Rehman, Chairman ETPB, projects worth billions of rupees have been started to renovate the religious places of worship of the Hindu and Sikh communities. Federal Minister Chaudhry Salik Hussain inaugurated a 36-room building adjacent to the Katas Raj Temple for Hindu pilgrims a few days ago. He also thanked the district administration.

Addressing the event, President of Pakistan Hindu Mandir Management Committee Krishan Sharma said that the ETPB is rendering excellent services to religious minorities, for which he was especially grateful to the federal government and Chairman ETPB Syed Attaur Rehman. "We have

complete religious freedom in Pakistan. Pakistani Hindus trade in various commodities all over the world. People belonging to the Hindu religion are performing their responsibilities in the security forces and other government institutions," he added.

The Hindu pilgrims described Pakistan as a peaceful country and said that they were grateful to the ETPB, the government and people of Pakistan for the way religious places are being protected here. The pilgrims said that the thought they had about Pakistan had changed as soon as they crossed the border. "Pakistanis are very loving and friendly people," they added.

Deputy Secretary General Shrine Umar Javed Awan, security officer Asim Chaudhry and other officers were present.

CCPO rewards police officers

LAHORE (APP): The Organized Crime Unit (OCU) Model Town team, led by their DIG Imran Kishwar, called on CCPO Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamyana at his office here on Saturday.

The CCPO commended DSP Ch. Faisal Sharif and his team members for their exceptional efforts to nab criminals. The team was awarded certificates of appreciation and cash prizes in recognition of their hard work. Those receiving the awards included Inspector Imran Yousaf, Malik Hussain Ali, Shahid Hussain, Sub-Inspector Shabbir Hussain, Nadeem Abbas, Afzal Ahmed ASI, Naeem Asghar, Abdul Ahad, Rashid (Ghazi), Head Constables Mohammad Jahangir, Liaquat Ali, Constables Adnan and Qaiser.

The OCU Model Town team successfully solved several high-profile cases in 2024. Under DSP Ch. Faisal Sharif, the team apprehended the murderer

of a two-and-a-half-year-old girl, Arslan from Shafiaqabad. The killer had thrown the child's body into a drain. Using modern technology and human intelligence, the OCU team also traced and arrested terrorist Faizan Butt involved in the serial killings of police officers.

Similarly, Farhan Asif, responsible for spreading fake news that caused riots abroad was traced and arrested within 48 hours.

The OCU also arrested TikToker Sara Khan allegedly linked with a controversial incident at a private college with the help of advanced IT technology. The team successfully apprehended two shooters Azhar Butt and Ilyas from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who were involved in the murder of Teefi Butt's brother-in-law, Javed Butt.

In another operation, the team traced and arrested the Shoaib Gang involved in the robbery at the home of martyred Maj

Ahmed Khan Tiwana, recovering Rs.70 million from the arrested suspects. The team also arrested Asad alias Jila, involved in bank robberies, along with Danish Masih, Vishal Masih and Cheeko Masih who were involved in multiple thefts.

Additionally, hired killers Azam Khan and Badshah Khan as well as sharp shooter and robber Azam, were quickly apprehended by the OCU.

The CCPO praised the OCU Model Town team's performance and encouraged them to continue their diligent work.

Organized Crime Unit plays a pivotal role in eliminating organized crime. Bilal Siddique Kamyana further stated that hardworking and capable policemen are an invaluable asset to the department, urging all police officers and personnel to embody competence, professionalism and a strong sense of public service.

Missing girl reunited with father

LAHORE (APP): Police reunited a missing girl with her parents after 23 days.

A caller reported that a 12-year-old abandoned girl has been found, who identifies herself as Momina. The "Virtual Center for Child Safety" dispatched the relevant police to the scene and took the girl into protective custody. The girl was connected to her father at the Edhi Center and safely handed over to him, a spokesman for PSCA said. She had been missing for 23 days.

Transgender community celebrates Christmas at Fountain house

LAHORE (APP): Fountain House, Institute of Mental Health, and Al-Jannah Group of Organizations, in collaboration, organized a dignified event to celebrate Christmas for the Christian transgender community.

Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs, Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, attended the event as the chief guest and distributed gifts and cash to the Christian transgender individuals. On this occasion GM Faces Pakistan Ayub Ijaz and a large number of transgressors were also present.

Speaking on behalf of the transgender community, Ishmael Chaudhry stated that the purpose of the event was to raise a collective voice for the rights of Christian transgender individuals and work together to have them recognized at the societal level. Fountain House and Al-Jannah Group of Organizations aim to send a message that the government and civil society are fully committed to supporting the welfare and develop-

ment of the transgender community. During his speech, the provincial minister emphasized that the transgender community is an important part of our society, and the government understands the challenges they face. He mentioned that various initiatives have been implemented to address these issues and ensure that this community is given its rightful place in society. He further stated that Christian transgender individuals would be included in the Christmas grant, with funds provided by the Chief Minister of Punjab.

Additionally, 50,000 minority families, including transgender individuals, will be issued minority cards. The provincial minister highlighted that the issues of the transgender community would be raised in the assembly, and skill development programs would be launched to enable them contribute to societal development. He stressed that efforts would be made to train transgender individuals, making

them a vital part of society. He commended their hard work and passion, acknowledging their struggles. The minister also stated that serving humanity in distress is our duty, and all necessary steps would be taken to provide the transgender community with a dignified life.

MPA Rukhsana Kausar also expressed her support for the transgender community, stating that their rights would be raised in the assembly, and efforts would be made for their welfare.

The minister also visited Fountain House, where he was briefed on the services provided to the transgender community, including mental health rehabilitation, education, and vocational training. He praised Fountain House's efforts and emphasized the importance of such initiatives for the betterment of society. At the end of the event, the minister, along with the transgender community and others, cut a Christmas cake to mark the celebration.

CTO Lahore transferred

LAHORE (APP): Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Lahore Amara Athar has been transferred. According to the details, the IG Police Punjab has appointed Amara Athar as AIG Discipline, while AIG Discipline Dost Muhammad Khosa has also been transferred. Dost Muhammad Khosa has been posted as SP Police School of Intelligence Lahore.

FOLLOWING VACANCY IS VACANT IN THE STATION SUPPLY DEPOT ARMY SERVICE CORPS PESHAWAR CANTONMENT

Vacancy	No of Posts	Pay Scale	Area	Educational Standards	Age	Documents Required
Chowkidar	02	1	Local Area	5 th	18 to 30 Years	CNIC, Domicile & Education Certificates

Applicant can submit application along with the above data till **05 Jan 2025**

Station Supply Depot Army Service Corps Peshawar Cantonment, Administration Officer: 0334-3335567, 0327-9528937

PAKISTAN CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY (PCAA)
OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME A PART OF PCAA'S PROFESSIONAL TEAM
SITUATION VACANT NOTICE NO. 15 /2024

Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority requires services of qualified individuals to fill the following vacant posts on contract basis for three (03) years (extendable) where selection will be made purely on suitability and merit:-

Post	No. of Positions	Prescribed Qualification & Experience	Quota & Pay Scale	Age Limit
Additional Director Information Technology (EG-07)	One (01)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Minimum 16 years of education with a Bachelor / Master degree from an accredited university with major coursework in Computer Science or Engineering / Information Technology.Experience of Twelve (12) years in the field of IT with at least Five (05) years of experience at Senior Management in the field of IT in any reputed organizationExperience in the development, implementation and integration of Business application with communication and navigation systemsExperience in implementation of Cyber SecurityExperience in design and development of IT infrastructure align with organization business needs. Working knowledge of enterprise Data Management, Data Communications, Data Centre and disaster recovery architecture, and related technologies.Knowledge of Aviation Cyber Security and Standards will be preferredPoses good analytical, creative, presentation and management abilitiesStrong decision making with organizing and planning capabilitiesExperience of procurement of IT Equipment / softwares etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">MeritLump sum Pay: Rs.479,370/- per month (negotiable) with 5% annual incrementContract for three (03) years (extendable)	Maximum 52 years (including all age relaxations)

Application Procedure:

- Interested candidates are required to fill & submit Online Job Application Form available at www.pcaa.gov.pk within fifteen days from the date of this advertisement.
- Candidates will be required to upload scanned copies of certificate / degree of the required qualification only of the concerned post as mentioned above and CNIC while applying for the job.
- In case a candidate does not upload the above documents with the online application form, his/her application will be rejected.
- All the interested candidates must read the Terms of Reference (TOR) mentioned in the detailed notice available at www.pcaa.gov.pk before applying for the post.

Terms of Reference:

- Candidates not fulfilling the above requirements or submitting incomplete application shall not be considered.
- Interview will be conducted at Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar and Quetta for which separate notices will be issued (depending on the number of candidates).
- The candidates to be called for the interview have to produce original documents for necessary verification while appearing for the interview.
- No TA / DA is admissible for test / interview.
- Appointment will be subject to CAA's medical fitness standards.
- Selected candidates will be required to serve anywhere in Pakistan as per requirement of PCAA.
- Government servants / employees of autonomous bodies / corporations will be required to submit NOC from current employer before interview.
- Application received after due date will not be considered / entertained.
- Misinformation and any attempt to influence the selection process will be considered as a definite disqualification for current as well as future recruitment in CAA, even if the candidate is otherwise qualified.
- In case, any educational documents or any other document provided by the applicants is found incorrect / fake / bogus at any stage, the services of selected candidate will be terminated immediately.
- PCAA encourages equal employment opportunity to women and people belonging to minorities.
- PCAA reserves the right to cancel the partial or whole recruitment process at any stage.

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Farmers forced to pay extortion: Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Saturday expressed concern over the exploitation of farmers and emphasized the difficulties faced by province's farming community, especially due to the ongoing security issues.

He said that at a Farmers' event in Lalamusa on the invitation of central leader of PPP Qamar Zaman Qaira, where he addressed various challenges faced by farmers, particularly in his province.

Kundi highlighted that farmers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are often forced to pay extortion money, a problem exacerbated by the region's struggle with terrorism.

He also pointed out that

the wheat price issue, which has been a concern in Punjab, is also affecting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Kundi criticized the lack of proper water distribution in the province, saying that it had barely even started.

He also mentioned that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa offers the cheapest electricity in the country, but the province still faces significant agricultural challenges.

The Governor highlighted that during previous years, when the Pakistan Peoples Party was in power (2008-2013), they managed to export food despite numerous challenges.

However, he said that even today, tobacco farmers are facing extortion from the government.

He emphasized the need

for unity among farmers across provinces, pointing out that Punjab's leadership often portrays Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a utopia on social media so they must visit KP to see the real face of the province.

Kundi also referenced recent security issues in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, saying that the provincial chief minister had acknowledged that terrorists were extorting money from the people.

Referring to a recent tragic incident in which three children were killed, Kundi questioned who would be held accountable for these acts of terrorism and the struggles the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa face daily.

Kundi also remarked that the people of the south-

ern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cannot move freely after evening due to security concerns, a situation that is not given the same media attention as issues in other parts of Pakistan, like mobile theft in Sindh.

He called for a unified approach to peace, asserting that all political parties, including the PTI, need to work together for the stability of Pakistan. He criticized PTI's leaders for focusing on division and unrest instead of peace.

The Governor ended by stressing that every province has its own unique problems, but Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's primary issues remain electricity, water, and oil despite its huge production in the province.



PESHAWAR: Director General KPCTA Tashfeen Haider visiting three-day Khyber Food Festival at Karnal Sher Khan Stadium.

New Islamia School's Sports Gala kicks off



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The annual Sports Gala organized by New Islamia High School and College Peshawar began with a grand ceremony at Thamas Khan Football Stadium Peshawar on Saturday. Over 500 students are participating in six different sports events. The chief guests, Member of Provincial Assembly Malik Tariq Awan and Chairman Peshawar Board Nasrullah,

officially inaugurated the Sports Gala by lighting the torch. Along with them, New Islamia School's CEO Iftikhar Liaquat Ali, Administrator Muhammad Amjad, Academic In-charge Waheed, and many teachers and parents were also in attendance.

The event began with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by the national anthem. Athletes presented a spectacular march past, and the chil-

dren showcased excellent performances in Chitralli dance and Telyboz, earning applause from the audience. In his address, chief guest Malik Tariq Awan encouraged the students to engage in sports, highlighting the importance of moving away from mobile phones and involving the younger generation in positive, physical activities. He stressed that sports are essential for both physical and mental development

and emphasized the need for teachers and parents to create opportunities for children to participate in healthy activities.

Administrator Muhammad Amjad stated that New Islamia High School and College has been organizing the Sports Gala annually, with hundreds of students taking part in various competitions. This year, over 500 students are competing in six sports, with six school teams-Tiger, Black Wolf, Warriors, Defender, Markhor, and Champion-battling for victory.

CEO Iftikhar Liaquat Ali, addressing the gathering, explained that the Sports Gala aims to provide students with both mental and physical recreation, foster a healthy school environment, and bring students closer together. He emphasized that such activities help build self-confidence in students and prepare them for provincial and national level competitions. He also thanked the guests and participants for their presence and highlighted the purpose behind the event.

Cosmetics manufacturing unit sealed, owner held

PESHAWAR (APP): The District Administration on Saturday sealed a soap and cosmetics manufacturing unit in Musazai area and arrested its owner for producing sub-standard and potentially hazardous products.

According to an official statement, the factory was operating in a residential area without obtaining the required non-objection certificate (NOC) from the authorities.

Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, Samad Saleem, has called on the public to report instances of substandard products being sold, emphasizing that strict action will be taken against those involved in such activities.

KPCTA organizes KP Food Festival

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) Director General Tashfeen Haider has said that tangible steps are being taken to restore the lost glory of "City of flowers" - Peshawar.

"We welcome private sector initiatives for such activities and would provide all possible support," he said while inaugurating the three-day Khyber Food Festival at the Karnal Sher Khan Stadium here.

Director of Administration and Finance of the Tourism Authority Umar Arshad Khan, Event Tastic's Chief Executive Officer Shakir Ansari and

other officials were also present on the occasion.

The KPCTA, Event Tastic and the Bank of Khyber have jointly organized the food and music gala, where stalls showcasing cuisines and musical performances established.

Tashfeen Haider said that the beauty and grandeur of Peshawar, which was once famous as the "City of flowers", had dimmed, but they were now working to restore its liveliness and attractiveness. "We fully support the private sector's participation in such activities. This event provides a wonderful opportunity for families to come with their children and enjoy the festivities," he added.

The three-day Khyber Food Festival at Karnal Sher Khan Stadium features more than 25 stalls showcasing handicrafts and traditional cuisines.

Artisans are showcasing wheat straw art, handmade crafts by women from small industries, wax products, jewelry, clothing, and a variety of food options such as chapli kabab, painda, pulao, Turkish dishes, golgappas, Quetta tea, burgers, and much more.

The festival also includes a play area, magic shows, and various competitions for children. Live performances by artists, including Shahid Malang, Akbar Ali Khan and others, were also part of the gleeful gala.

ESEF, JICA launch KP's first-ever NFE Data Score Card

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Elementary and Secondary Education Foundation (ESEF) in collaboration with JICA, Advancing Quality Alternative Learning (AQAL-II) Project organized 3rd NFE/ALP Technical Committee meeting and launching of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa NFE Data Score Card, 2022-23. The meeting was jointly chaired by MD-ESEF Khawaja Faheem Sajjad and DG-PIE Shahid Soroya also attended by the representatives of E&SED, UNHCR, ALP-PIU, NCHD, IDEA, Relief International, WEO, SRSP and Khwendo Kor.



MD-ESEF emphasized on the importance of the forum and importance of data sharing and data analysis regarding "Out Of School Children (OOSC)" in informed decision-making by implementation of NFE programs. He also assured the support of ESEF in facilitating NFE stakeholders in efforts to reduce the number of OOSC in the province of KP. He also thanked Shahid Soroya, Director General, Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) for his professional contribution and honouring the forum as Chief Guest. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa NFE Data Score Card was formally launched.

Habib ur Rehman,

(Director Programs) ESEF, while sharing the objectives; emphasized on the NFE/ALP stakeholders to adopt all the material developed by ESEF in collaboration with JICA-AQAL and E&SED, in letter and spirit. Muhammad Asif Kasi, Provincial Coordinator JICA-AQAL gave a detailed presentation on NFE assessment and certification mechanism, which has been recently notified by E&SED.

Shahid Soroya, (DG-PIE) thanked MD-ESEF for organizing the event and shared his experience of "Zero Out Of School children Drive" of PIE in Islamabad and Quetta and urged all the participants to raise their voices in advo-

cating for resource mobilization to cater the educational need of OOSC in the province and in the country at large.

In his concluding

remarks, MD-ESEF thanked DG PIE and all the participants for the participation to address the challenges of "Out Of School Children" in KP.

Three held on carrying illegal arms, ammunitions

PESHAWAR (APP): Faqirabad police on Saturday arrested three suspects for carrying arms and ammunition without license and recovered weapons from their possessions.

Acting on a tip off regarding presence of three suspects on Charsadda Road, police team conducted the raid on identified location and arrested three suspects. Police also recovered three rifles and three pistols along with 500 cartridges.

The arrested were identified as Yousuf, Bakhtiar and Said Khan. A case has been registered and further investigation was in progress.

ANP Chief pays tributes to Shaheed Bashir Bilour

PESHAWAR (APP): Central President Awami National Party (ANP), Aimal Wali Khan here Saturday paid tribute to Shaheed Bashir Ahmad Bilour on his 12th anniversary and said that his sacrifice for Pashtun nation would always be remembered.

In a statement issued here, ANP President said that Bashir Ahmad Bilour is a symbol of pride for whole Pashtun nation adding he is still beacon of light for the whole nation due to his

valor, bravery and resolve against militancy.

He said that Shaheed Bashir Bilour proved that followers of Bacha Khan would never surrender to forces of oppression and terrorism. He said that vacuum created by the death of Shaheed Bashir would never be fulfilled and added that we must materialize the dream of lasting peace in the region keeping in view the sacrifices of our people.

Expressing concern over

the deteriorating law and order situation, he said that it is a matter of grave concern that militants and their facilitators are free and operating at their whim. He suggested that our leaders should prioritize establishment of peace rather targeting each other for political motives.

He said that ANP would never forget sacrifices of party workers for the motherland and make efforts in cohesion against menace of militancy.

Mob damages record

PESHAWAR (APP): PESCO authorities here Saturday said that Member National Assembly, Zulfiqar Ali leading a mob forced into Pabbi Grid Station and compelled staff to stop load management on Ajab Badg feeder where lines losses are about forty five percent.

According to the Pesco Spokesman that a huge amount 171 million rupees is outstanding as arrears against consumers of that area. He said that the mob that was led by MNA also thrashed staff and tore off the record.

He said that CCTV cameras were also damaged by the mob to avoid recording. He cleared that electricity supply is according to routine and there is no additional or unannounced load management on Ajab Bagh feeder. He said police has been requested to ensure safety of workers and grid station while authorities have been contacted to lodge report of the incident.

Pak Army hold free medical camp

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan Army organized a free medical camp at tehsil Spinwam of North Waziristan tribal district where over 291 people were examined and get free medicines on the advice of specialist doctors.

The teams of District

Health Officer and DHQ were comprised on specialist doctors, technicians, LHV and health workers. During the free medical camp, over 145 children were also benefited, says a statement.

The experts doctors of gynecology, medical and

children departments besides X-Rays, Ultrasound and laboratory test were conducted free of cost in free medical camp.

The area residents thanked Pakistan Army for the successful free medical camp and termed it a great blessing.

Research and promotion policy

Waseem Hassan

In Pakistan we have more than 220 universities. In majority of the universities ten articles (in the last 5 years) are obligatory for promotion to next cadre (from assistant professor to associate professor) etc. Despite the fact that reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analysis, brief reports, perspectives, opinions, letters, & notes etc., do not involve funding, infrastructure and resources. It can help in dragging national or global attention towards different issues and problems. But herein, the obligatory requirement for promotion in University is 10 research articles in the last 5 years (for the post of associate professor). But a researcher with 10 reviews, meta-analysis etc., in the world class journals with more

than 90 or 100 impact factor is not considered as "researcher" and he/she is deemed in-eligible.

Interestingly, many universities around the world consider both research articles and research reviews in their promotion policies for faculty members. For example, the University of Cambridge in the UK considers both research articles and research reviews in their promotion process. According to their guidelines, promotion decisions are based on a candidate's research output, which includes "papers and other research outputs (including books, reviews, etc.) of high quality, originality and significance". Similarly, the University of California, Berkeley in the US considers both research articles and research reviews in their promotion process. According to their guide-

lines, research articles and reviews are both considered as part of a candidate's "research contributions to the field", and the weight given to each will depend on the specific discipline and the candidate's research focus.

Similarly, patents are a form of intellectual property which can potentially lead to financial benefits through licensing or commercialization. It represents innovations with potential real-world applications. Patents can facilitate partnerships with industry, leading to research funding, collaborations, and technology transfer opportunities. This raises a serious question i.e. why not consider patents for promotions?

Moreover, when a researcher receives a grant from national or international sponsorship agencies, there is typically no

mention of their marks or grades (in promotion policy). This highlights the need for promotion systems to also focus on the substance and significance of a researcher's contributions.

It is also requested that proper marks or recognition be allocated for fellowships or memberships in professional bodies, as these reflect significant academic and professional achievements. Prestigious fellowships such as the Fulbright, British Council, JSPS, DAAD, TWAS, and Endeavour fellowships are among the most renowned globally. Faculty members who have availed these fellowships during their PhD or Postdoctoral studies have demonstrated exceptional academic merit and global recognition.

Higher Education Commission (HEC), is requested to consider above para-

meters and below suggestions in job hiring or promotion policies at national level. This will encourage the researchers to contribute at higher level.

Emphasis should be placed on the number and quality of research publications, especially those in peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. Citation metrics such as h-index, g-index, and total citations etc., provide a clear measure of academic impact, which deserves recognition (or marks allocation in promotion policy). Authorial roles, including first author, corresponding author, or single author, should also be recognized to ensure fair evaluation of individual contributions.

Curriculum development, course design, and participation in funded research projects should be

acknowledged for their role in improving education and securing resources. Additional certifications, diplomas, and professional qualifications should be valued to encourage continuous professional growth.

Participation in conferences, workshops, and seminars should be recognized for fostering knowledge sharing and networking. Faculty efforts in institutional development, such as launching new programs, and contributions to public knowledge dissemination through lectures and media, also merit acknowledgment. Collaboration with industries, external organizations, and international institutions fosters innovation and strengthens global academic networks.

Successful supervision of students at all levels reflects mentorship and the development of future

researchers, while interdisciplinary research and departmental collaborations promote diversity and innovation. By incorporating these parameters, the HEC and universities can establish a robust framework that recognizes academic productivity and broader contributions to institutional and societal progress.

Although it is undoubtedly challenging to allocate marks for the above suggestions, it is imperative that competent authorities, including the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and local universities, take steps to design or establish a system for assigning appropriate weightage to these parameters. By doing so, they can create a fair, transparent, and merit-based framework that recognizes diverse academic and professional contributions.

In fact before implementing such policies, feedback or open opinions can also be solicited from faculty members. This inclusive approach can provide valuable insights and help in designing comprehensive and balanced mark sheets that reflect the diverse contributions and achievements of academics. Engaging faculty in this process ensures transparency and fosters a sense of ownership and acceptance of the new framework.

Additionally, the policy can be rechecked or reanalyzed every three to five years to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. This periodic review would allow for modifications based on evolving academic standards, institutional needs, and feedback from stakeholders, ensuring the system remains fair and adaptable over time.



In brief

3 die in Buner road mishap F.P. Report

BUNER: Three passengers died and two others injured in a road mishap in Buner district due to overspeeding, police said Saturday. The tragic incident occurred at Adezai Tazagram area where a motorcar and motorcycle collided head on due to over speeding. As result, motorcyclist Azmat Ullah and Fahad Ali alongwith Umar Shah in the car expired on the spot. Driver of the car Yasin Khan alongwith other passenger sustained critical wounds and hospitalized.

Engineering festival held F.P. Report

LARKANA: The Department of Electrical Engineering, Larkana University, organized the Taftan Engineering Festival 2024 program, which was inaugurated by the Vice Chancellor of the university, Prof. Muhammad Usman Kerio. Moreover, Head of ZBEST, Dr. Zahid Abro, Dean Faculty, Dr. Zahid Abro. Dr. Samiullah Soho and others. On this occasion, the students were informed about their respective projects during the festival. At the event, Dr. Muhammad Usman Kerio and others highlighted the importance of academic excellence and its role in the development of the engineering sector. VC stressed to promote environment of mutual cooperation between students, faculty and industry experts and said that this festival provides an excellent opportunity for students to showcase their creative talents as well as try to solve their real-world problems. The project exhibition will showcase a wide range of student-led projects that tackle various challenging areas such as renewable energy. Arts Council presents reformist drama: Arts Council of Pakistan presented a Sindh reformist stage drama "Rooh Ja Rishta", this stage drama was the 15th drama of Larkana Theatre Festival under the direction of Muhammad Ali Bhutto, while the assistant director of this drama was Barkat Ali Gad, while actors Amjad Gul Soomro, Riaz Maheesar, Masrat Naz, Muhammad Ali Bhutto, Abida Gul Niaz Ghangro and others.

IG FC inspects Turbat hospital F.P. Report

TURBAT: The Inspector General Frontier Corps Balochistan South conducted an inspection of Turbat District Teaching Hospital, the largest public healthcare facility serving the Makran Division. During the visit, the Medical Superintendent provided a comprehensive briefing on hospital operations. Discussions focused on several key areas, including medication supply for the CCU, boundary wall construction, permanent faculty appointments, house officer stipends, and PCR laboratory resources. The IG toured various departments including the new ICU, CCU, operation theaters, radiology/MRI facilities, emergency ward, and outpatient departments. The inspection included interactions with patients and local community members. The facility serves as the primary healthcare center for the entire Makran Division, receiving patients from across the region. During the visit, hospital administration raised various operational matters for consideration. The IG assured support in addressing the hospital's requirements. The hospital staff discussed the institution's needs, including infrastructure development and resource allocation.



HYDERABAD: Sindh minster for culture & tourism Zulfiqar Ali Shah cutting ribbon for inauguration of 10th Ayaz Melo at Sindh museum.

Woman, sons arrested for murder

F.P. Report

BAHWALNAGAR: In a shocking incident in Fort Abbas, a city in Punjab's Bahawalnagar district, a woman, with the help of her two sons, murdered her husband and buried his body in their house's courtyard.

According to the police, the victim, Muhammad Iqbal, had been missing for over a month and a half. His body was eventually recovered from the courtyard after his mother raised suspicions and informed authorities. The woman and her two sons have been arrested in connection with the crime. Law enforcement officials have stated that further investigation into the murder is underway.

On December 19, another heartbreaking news occurred when a mother

brutally killed her two children by slitting their throats. The tragic event occurred in the jurisdiction of Airport Police Station, Nawabshah. According to reports, the mother, identified as Komal Sheikh, was taken into custody. During initial interrogation, the mother confessed to the crime, admitting that she had killed her children with a knife in separate rooms.

When questioned about her motive for committing the heinous act, the suspect remained silent and refused to provide any explanation. Police and rescue teams arrived at the scene after receiving information about the incident. The bodies of the children were shifted to the hospital for post-mortem examination.

Police recovered the murder weapon and are conducting further investigations into the matter.

Similarly on November 15, 2024, a seven-month pregnant woman was murdered by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law in Daska. The brutal murder of the pregnant woman has sent shock waves across the country.

As per details, the incident took place in Kotli Marlan village, where the mother of one and 7-month pregnant woman was murdered by her in-laws. The police said, the mother-in-law of the victim, Sugra Bibi along with her daughter Yasmeen killed Zehra and dismembered the body, packed it into bags, and dumped it into a canal to conceal the crime. The cruel women severed her limbs and burned her head to prevent identification. At night, Sugra transported the remains in bags to a canal, spreading rumors that Zehra had run away with someone.

Tribesmen demands release of former MNA

F.P. Report

WANA: A large public gathering was held in Wana, calling for the release of former Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Ali Wazir. The event was attended by a significant number of tribal elders, political leaders, religious scholars, and local residents. Prior to the gathering, a rally was held in Wana Bazaar, with participants carrying placards and banners demanding an end to Ali Wazir's detention and advocating for his immediate

release.

Speakers at the event described Ali Wazir as a prominent and courageous leader of the Pakhtun community. They highlighted his tenure as an elected representative of South Waziristan and his role as an advocate for oppressed communities across the country. The speakers also emphasized the sacrifices made by Ali Wazir's family, stating that several members had lost their lives for national unity, from the country's independence to the ongoing

fight against terrorism.

The speakers alleged that Ali Wazir was being unfairly prosecuted due to his vocal stance on justice and his criticism of certain policies. They argued that his political influence is crucial for stability in the Pakhtun region.

The gathering concluded with demands for Ali Wazir's immediate release, labeling the FIRs against him as politically motivated. The participants warned that if their demands were not met, they would expand their protests.

Commandant Khyber Rifle highlights importance of education

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Technical skills not only overcome the problem of unemployment but also play a vital role in the development of the country. This was stated by Commandant Khyber Rifle Col Asim Aziz Keyani during his visit to Khyber Institute of Technical Education (KITE) center, Landi Kotal last day.

It is to be stated here that KITE has been established by Shahid Afridi Foundation with assistance of Khyber Rifles on August 07, 2024. Highlighting the aims and purposes of the KITE, he said that in the present

era, technical skill was inevitable for the progress of the country. Take advantage of the opportunity and decorate themselves with technical education to become useful citizens of the country, he opined. He called upon the learners to avail technical skills and play a vital role in the progress of the country. Administrator KITE, Lieutenant Col Zainul Abdeen and other staff members were also present on the occasion.

Earlier, the Commandant Khyber Rifles met learners of various technical courses who apprised him of their problems and the visiting guest assured them of its

resolution. Technical skills have been provided to local youths (male-female) in the fields of computer operator, electrician, welding, motorcycle mechanic, dress making/embroidery in addition with soft skills including communication personality grooming, public speaking, speech skills, problem solving methodology, English languages skills etc. In the first batch a total of 84 students have completed their technical courses and have passed out while in the second batch 226 candidates are selected for the various courses in morning and evening classes.

From complaints to resolutions, a commitment to accountability

Muhammad Asim Imam

THE Right to Public Services Commission (RTPSC) has emerged as a pivotal institution aimed at enhancing the quality and accessibility of public services across various jurisdictions. Established to ensure that citizens receive timely and efficient services, the RTPSC operates under the umbrella of various governmental frameworks that prioritize transparency and accountability.

On September 5, 2022, two unmarried sisters filed a complaint with the RTPSC Commission regarding unresolved issues with the inheritance mutation and demarcation of their late father's property. Despite repeated appeals to various forums, no

action had been taken to address their concerns. Upon receiving the complaint, the Commission thoroughly reviewed the submitted documents and scheduled a personal hearing on September 15, 2022. The Tehsildar and Halqa Patwari attended the hearing in person, while the petitioners joined online from the DMO Office in Shangla. During the hearing, the Tehsildar explained that the sisters' rightful share had been calculated as 29 kanals and 11.5 marlas of land, and possession of the property had been handed over to them. The petitioners confirmed this information, stating that they had indeed received possession of the land. However, they also expressed concerns about their safety, as they had no male relatives to support them and were living in a

vulnerable situation. Taking their circumstances into account, the Commission directed the Deputy Commissioner of Shangla to appoint a trustworthy individual to assist the sisters in managing their inherited property and ensure their safety. The inheritance mutation and land demarcation process were finalized, and the rightful ownership of the land was transferred to the petitioners. Additionally, the Commission ordered the transfer of the Tehsildar to another division after identifying irregularities in his conduct during the proceedings. This step was taken to uphold transparency and accountability.

A resident of District Abbottabad filed a complaint about the non-registration of an FIR for his stolen Suzuki Mehran car, despite contacting the DPO,

DSP, and SHO. He presented his grievance through an online hearing from the DMO office in Abbottabad. The case was forwarded to the DPO Abbottabad with instructions to resolve the issue within the stipulated timeframe and investigate the SHO's negligence. When no action was taken, the Commission issued a show-cause notice to the DPO. Eventually, the FIR was registered by the SHO of Police Station Mirpur. However, due to delays, the Commission directed disciplinary action against the SHO and withheld the DPO's monthly salary under section 6(4) and section 21(2) for noncompliance. After corrective actions were taken, the withheld salary was released. This case highlights the Commission's commitment to accountability and timely deliv-

ery of public services.

On May 3, 2023, a citizen from District Nowshera filed a complaint regarding the delayed issuance of a Fard, a service required under the RTPS Act of 2014. He presented his case online from the DMO office in Nowshera. The case was forwarded to the Deputy Commissioner Nowshera with instructions to resolve it within 30 days as mandated by the Act. When no action was taken within the specified period, a show-cause notice was issued to the DC. Following this, the Fard was promptly issued by the concerned Patwari. To address the delay, the Patwari was fined Rs. 10,000, directly deducted from his monthly salary and the complainant is entitled to receive 70% of the imposed fine under section 13 of RTPS Act, 2014, if

the citizen apply for the compensation due to non-provision of said service timely.

As public expectations rise and demand for accountability grows, the RTPSC has become a vital mechanism for addressing grievances, ensuring adherence to service timelines, and fostering a culture of responsiveness among public servants. By implementing innovations such as digital service delivery platforms, citizen feedback systems, and performance monitoring frameworks, the commission has sought to create an environment where the right to public services is not just enshrined in policy but actively practiced.

The Author is a retired District and Session Judge, Currently working as Commissioner in the RTPSC.

Drive against encroachments, profiteers Task force initiates grand operation

F.P. Report

BANNU: The special task force under the chairmanship of Commissioner Bannu formally started the work. The decision to send the concerned shopkeeper to jail, the orders to seal the plazas for lack of parking in the urban areas, the illegal chingchi stands established in the city should be immediately eliminated and the related traffic system.

An announcement to take concrete measures to immediately correct the problem, a special task force headed by Commissioner Bannu Abid Khan Wazir in which

police traffic all line departments have decided on a plan of action for operations in the city and adjacent areas on a daily basis. Deputy Commissioner Bannu Abdul Hameed Khan, Assistant Commissioner Syed Abrar Ali Shah, Tehsil Municipal Administration Chief Land Inspector Malik Tariq Khan, Senior Land Inspector Malik Saleem Khan in charge of traffic.

TMO Bannu conducted an anti-encroachment operation in different areas including Subzi Mandi, Tanchi Bazaar, Marian Gate, Lucky Gate and other areas in the inner city

through a special task force in which the shops in the streets and markets were attacked.

In this regard, Tehsil Municipal Officer Bannu Muhammad Yusuf Khan told the media task force has started work for grand operation against encroachment and other illegal construction as well as against profiteers. The special task force includes all the government departments including TMA, WSSB to improve the traffic system in urban areas on a daily basis and provide better convenience to the people affected by the traffic system.

Commissioner inspects polio teams at filed

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat monitoring the ongoing polio campaign in the entire division. After the districts of Kohat, Karak and Hangu, Commissioner Kohat reached the villages located at the confluence of Orakzai and Hangu districts early in the morning where he, with the help of local elders and volunteers, along-with the polio teams, helped many refusing parents to give their children anti-polio drops.

Appreciating the best performing polio team members, security personnel and area in-charges, Motasim Billah announced giving them certificates of appreciation. Meanwhile, the district administration with the support of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Foundation Academy organized a one-day Free Orientation Seminar on "CSS/PMS as a Dynamic carrier" to give awareness and gaudiness to the local youth about CSS/PMS competitive exams.

Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram was the chief guest of the ceremony while ASP and AAC

were among the Speakers of the day. Former Principal of Government Girls Post Graduate College Kohat and Professor of Political Science Mrs. Jamila Khanum specially participated in the Seminar as a guest of honour. Assistant Commissioner Kohat Namra Owais performed the duties of the stage secretary.

A special questions and answers Session was also held on this occasion in which the speakers gave detailed and meaningful answers to the participants and satisfied them.

DPO directs redressal of public grievances

F.P. Report

TOKA TEK SINGH: District Police Officer (DPO) Toka Tek Singh committed for establishment of strong connection with the citizens. DPO held a 'Kuli Katchen' court at Jamia Masjid Talab Wali Mochi Road Gujra area.

A large number of local people attended the open court. DPO heard the problems of Silen and issued instructions on the spot for their immediate resolution. On this occasion, DPO Ibadat Nisar said that the purpose of the open court is to establish direct contact with the public. An open court will improve the communication between the police and the public.

After listening to the problems of the people in the open courtroom, effective steps are taken to solve them and providing justice to the people at their doorstep is the

Protests held in Quetta F.P. Report

QUETTA: Protests held in different parts of Quetta, as residents of Abdullah Town and Takhtani Bypass took to the streets to against ongoing gas load shedding and low gas pressure in their areas.

In Abdullah Town, a large group of residents, including women and children, staged a peaceful sit-in outside the office of Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGCL) on Samungli Road. The protesters, who have been grappling with poor gas supply, gathered to demand immediate action to address the issue. The sit-in continued for two hours, with the protesters dispersing peacefully after SSGCL authorities assured them that the matter would be looked into.

first priority.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Naem Sindhu paid a surprise visit to the revenue branches. A detailed review of the arrangements and quality of services in the offices was carried out. Deputy Commissioner said that the taut mafia has no place in the revenue offices. Strict legal action will be

taken against the presence of taut mafia. He issued instructions to revenue officers to ensure transparency.

DC urged to solve public problems immediately while inspected cleanliness and staff attendance in the offices. Strict action will be taken against defaulting staff. Easy and prompt provision of services to the public should be ensured.



HYDERABAD: A vendor loading vegetable in vehicle for selling purpose.



GAZA: Palestinians in Gaza have access to only a few litres of water a day in many areas, far below the 15-litre threshold for survival.

US, Chinese ships at Cambodia bases

CAMBODIA (AFP): When a US warship docked in Cambodia this week, it moored just a few kilometres from a base where China has built an extended new pier and two of Beijing's own vessels have been berthed for about a year.

The United States has said the Ream naval base could grant China a strategic position in the Gulf of Thailand, near the disputed South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety. Washington is now looking to bolster its relationship with Cambodia, after Phnom Penh scrapped joint military exercises in 2017. Cambodia has long been one of China's staunchest allies in Southeast Asia, and Beijing has extended its influence over Phnom Penh in recent years.

China's sway has taken its most concrete form at the Ream base -- once partly funded by the United States -- where the new jetty extends 363 metres (1,191 feet) into the Gulf of Thailand. The two Type-056A Chinese anti-submarine corvettes -- number 630, the Aba, and 631, the Tianmen -- have been stationed alongside it for about 12 months, despite Cambodian leaders' insistence that the base is not for use by any foreign power. The jetty and the ships symbolise Beijing's interests in Cambodia, which analysts say Washington is looking to counter with the port call by the USS Savannah.

Under President Xi Jinping, the world's second-largest economy has

hugely strengthened its military depth and reach. The Gulf of Thailand lies between the South China Sea -- where Beijing has built artificial islands with military facilities -- and the Indian Ocean, where it has struck multiple infrastructure deals as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. A Chinese firm acquired a 99-year lease on the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota, and Beijing has other agreements with countries including Pakistan, the Maldives, Bangladesh and Djibouti, where it has a military base.

Even if Cambodia's Ream does not become a formal Chinese base, Beijing's warships could gain preferential access to its facilities for exercises and resupply, said Timothy Heath, a senior international defence researcher at the US-based Rand Corporation think tank. It is far from the key trade and oil transit route of the Malacca Strait, he noted. But "China could find value in establishing an intelligence collection post at Ream, which they may well seek." US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Cambodia in June, and the combat ship USS Savannah docked at the southern port city of Sihanoukville, about 30 kilometres from the Ream base and the 1,500-tonne grey Chinese corvettes.

Ali Wyne, a researcher and adviser from International Crisis Group, told AFP the US visit "is part of Washington's effort to repair defence ties with Phnom Penh". Analysts say Cambodia is now looking to reduce

its reliance on China and develop other relationships. In the wake of the USS Savannah's arrival, the head of the US Indo-Pacific Command Admiral Samuel Paparo visited Cambodia -- the most senior US officer to do so in five years -- and met Prime Minister Hun Manet in Phnom Penh.

The US was taking a "wait-and-see" approach to Ream, he told reporters on the quayside in Sihanoukville, adding Washington "respects" China's relationship with Cambodia. "With regard to our visit and our activities with Cambodia, it's not to counter anyone," he said. The US warship's port call could be a "smart strategic move" by Phnom Penh as it sought to "shift global perception from seeing Cambodia as China's little puppet," political analyst Ou Virak told AFP. China is Cambodia's biggest creditor and has poured billions of dollars into infrastructure investments under former leader Hun Sen.

His son, Hun Manet -- a graduate of the US military academy West Point -- has led Cambodia since 2023, although Hun Sen has retained an influential role in government after nearly four decades of rule. Cambodia's Chinese-funded projects include a \$2 billion expressway between Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville, and the \$1.1 billion Siem Reap Angkor International Airport, which opened last year. They have "helped elevate economic growth", according to Phnom Penh.

Syrians in Moscow share concerns after fall of Assad

MOSCOW (AFP): Georgina Deiratani, a Syrian Christian who has lived in Moscow for over two decades, says she is still in shock at the ouster of president Bashar al-Assad and his escape to Russia. "Everybody is saying 'congratulations'," said the 37-year-old, one of several thousand Syrians estimated to be living in the Russian capital.

"But for me this is the end of Syria." She remembers growing up in a country where different communities lived in harmony, but makes no mention of the brutality of the half-century dictatorship of Assad and his father before him. "We lived well together," said Deiratani, a doctor who moved to Moscow with her Russian mother after the death of her father.

"I would wish my friends a happy Ramadan and they would wish me a happy Christmas." Deiratani said the collapse of the dictatorship in just a few days was also a shock for her because Islamist rebels are now in charge. The Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and allied rebels ousted Assad earlier this month. The radical Sunni Islamist group has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation by Western governments including the United States and Britain.

It has recently sought to moderate its rhetoric and assure the international community that religious and other minorities will be protected. But Deiratani was not convinced. "A terrorist is still a terrorist whatever their organisation," she said. She was "very afraid" for the fate of fellow Christians in Syria, she added. Russia has strong ties with Syria going back to the Soviet era. The Syrian community in Russia numbered around 7,000 people in 2017, including 2,000 who requested asylum, according to the latest available official data.

Ali, a 33-year-old engineer who has been living in Moscow for two years, said he was also concerned. "Those who are now in power in Syria are on a terrorist list and there is a big danger for Syrian minorities," he said. Originally from Latakia, the heartland of the Assad family in western Syria, Ali belongs to the toppled president's Alawite minority -- an offshoot of Shiite Islam. Ali said he did not want to give his full name for fear of repercussions for his parents, who still live in Syria. "Everybody is afraid in Latakia," he said.

"They've taken down the statues of Bashar al-Assad's father Hafez and destroyed his tomb. They are trying to scare people and saying that they will not stop there," Ali said. Ali said he understood the anger against Assad, who has not been seen since he fled to Moscow as the rebels entered Damascus. "We are not trying to hide the crimes of the old regime... It was a machine to extort money from the population," he said.

the Senate, eight years as vice president and four years as president. His openness about his grief and coping with it, and his ability to empathize with others who have experienced loss, have become one of the hallmarks of his long political career.

Biden married Jill Jacobs in 1977 and she helped raise Beau and Hunter as if they were her own. Later, she and Biden added daughter Ashley. Decades after that fatal car crash, Biden, as vice president, navigated through personal loss again when Beau Biden died of brain cancer in 2015 at 46. Beau Biden is also buried in the church cemetery.

put on the call for me said - I said, 'How are they?' They said, 'Uh, uh, um, she's dead. Your daughter is dead. And I'm not sure your two sons will make it.'" Biden, who had been elected to the Senate just weeks before the crash, talks about how he almost walked away from his congressional career before it even started. But he took the advice of other senators, was sworn in to office at his sons' hospital bedside and made a daily commute between Delaware and Washington on Amtrak.

Next month, Biden will close the book on a nearly 50-year career in elected politics and public service that includes 36 years in

Catholic Church near Biden's home in Delaware. After the service, the family, with Jill Biden holding hands with Hunter's young son, Beau, walked to the cemetery behind the church where the gravesites are located. Biden speaks often about the personal loss, sharing the story as recently as last week. He told of being in Washington with then-Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., when he got a phone call.

"I got a phone call from my local fire department, telling me there had been an accident," he said at a White House dinner attended by members of Kennedy's family. "And the poor firewoman they

Biden honors memory of his first wife and baby daughter

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP): President Joe Biden honored the memory of his first wife and baby daughter 52 years after they were killed in a car crash in Delaware. Biden's wife, Neilia, 30, had taken their kids - 1-year-old daughter Naomi and sons Beau and Hunter - out Christmas tree shopping when the car she was driving was broadsided by a tractor-trailer. Neilia and Naomi were killed. Beau, 3, and Hunter, 2, were gravely injured.

The president, his current wife, Jill, son Hunter and other members of the family attended a private memorial Mass early at St. Joseph on the Brandywine Roman

put on the call for me said - I said, 'How are they?' They said, 'Uh, uh, um, she's dead. Your daughter is dead. And I'm not sure your two sons will make it.'" Biden, who had been elected to the Senate just weeks before the crash, talks about how he almost walked away from his congressional career before it even started. But he took the advice of other senators, was sworn in to office at his sons' hospital bedside and made a daily commute between Delaware and Washington on Amtrak.

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US govt tells officials to ditch regular calls, texts

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The US government is urging senior government officials and politicians to ditch phone calls and text messages following intrusions at major American telecommunications companies blamed on Chinese hackers.

Right now. In written guidance released, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency said "individuals who are in senior government or senior political positions" should "immediately review and apply" a series of best practices around the use of mobile devices. The first recommendation: "Use only end-to-end encrypted communications."

End-to-end encryption - a data protection technique which aims to make data unreadable by anyone except its sender and its recipient - is baked into various chat apps, including Meta Platforms' WhatsApp, Apple's iMessage, and the privacy-focused app Signal. Corporate offerings which allow end-to-end encryption also include Microsoft's Teams and Zoom Communications' online meetings. Neither regular phone calls nor text messages are end-to-end encrypted, which means they can be monitored, either by the telephone companies, law enforcement, or - potentially - hackers who've broken into

the phone companies' infrastructure.

That's what happened in the case of the cyber spies dubbed "Salt Typhoon," a group that US officials have said is being run by the Chinese government. Beijing routinely denies allegations of cyberespionage.

Speaking earlier this month, a senior US official said that "at least" eight telecommunications and telecom infrastructure firms in the United States were compromised by the Salt Typhoon hackers and that "a large number of Americans' metadata" had been stolen in the surveillance sweep. Last week, Democratic Senator Ben Ray Lujan said the wave of intrusions "likely represents the largest telecommunications hack in our nation's history" and it's not clear that American officials have figured out how to defeat the hackers' spy campaign.

Jeff Greene, CISA's executive assistant director for cybersecurity, told reporters that the investigation remains ongoing and various targeted agencies and people are at different stages of their response. The Salt Typhoon compromise "is part of a broader pattern of PRC activity directed at critical infrastructure," Greene said, referring to Chinese-linked cyber operations focused on utilities and other sensitive networks and tracked

under the nickname "Volt Typhoon."

"This is ongoing PRC activity that we need to both prepare for and defend against for the long term," Greene said.

Communicating only via end-to-end encryption has long been a recommendation pushed by digital safety experts like those at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, whose senior staff technologist Cooper Quintin welcomed the guidance. Still, he said the idea that the government was steering its own officials away from the regular phone network was worrying.

"It is a huge indictment of the telecoms that run the nation's infrastructure," he said. Other recommendations include avoiding text messages based on one-time passwords - like the kind often sent by US banks to verify logins - and using hardware keys, which help protect against a password-stealing technique known as phishing. Tom Hegel, a threat researcher at cybersecurity company SentinelOne, echoed Cooper's endorsement of the CISA guidelines, saying that "Chinese actors aren't the only ones continuing to collect unsecured communications." A wide variety of spies and hackers "all stand to lose valuable access if their targets adopt these security measures," he said.

SK to set roadmap in case Trump reopens NK N-talks

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korea's foreign minister said he was devising a roadmap to prepare for US President-elect Donald Trump's potential reopening of nuclear talks with North Korea, conceding Seoul's political turmoil had disrupted ties with Trump's team.

At a rare joint news conference for foreign media, Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok sought to reassure Seoul's allies and calm market jitters since President Yoon Suk Yeol's Dec. 3 martial law attempt that triggered the nation's biggest political crisis in decades. Cho said Seoul had built a network and communication channels with Trump's campaign that were "stronger than those of any other country", but the martial law order caused disruptions and weakened political momentum between the two sides.

Cho's team has been crafting a roadmap for a possible restart of talks between Washington and Pyongyang, he said, pointing to Trump's pick of his former intelligence chief as envoy for special missions including North Korea policy. "We take that appointment as evidence that President-elect Trump is

not neglecting the North Korea nuclear issue, and I think we need to respond more proactively," he said.

"Our communication with North Korea has been cut off as they have refused dialogue and negotiations, but we are open to all opportunities to talk to North Korea, including on the nuclear issue, if there are any." Pyongyang has ignored four years of outreach by US President Joe Biden to resume dialogue with no preconditions, but Trump's team was pursuing direct talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, hoping to reduce risks of an armed clash. As South Korea struggles to contain the fallout from the turmoil across financial and foreign exchange markets, Seoul must navigate an uncertain future with its ally the United States under Trump.

Yoon was impeached and the Constitutional Court will decide whether to remove him from office or restore his power. He has been of suspended from presidential duties, which means if the court takes months to decide his fate he will be unable to deal with Trump after his Jan. 20 inauguration. After the martial law attempt, Washington had issued unusually blunt criticism,

with US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell calling Yoon's decision "badly misjudged". US national security adviser Jake Sullivan said he had not predicted the martial law attempt but likened it to the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol by Trump supporters.

"I think it's important for us to recognise that dramatic events happen even in highly advanced, consolidated democracies," Sullivan said at an event. "The real test is, can the democratic institutions hold at the end of the day, even if they bend." Finance Minister Choi said the government would utilise all available resources to manage the economy as stably as possible and actively respond to excessive volatility in foreign exchange. Cho and Choi were among cabinet ministers who had openly opposed Yoon's plan for martial law at a late-night meeting convened shortly before his declaration.

Cho, testifying at parliament last week, said he had warned it was serious enough to "destroy all the achievements the country has made over the last 70 years", but added that Yoon ignored his repeated plea to reconsider.

United Front: China's 'magic weapon' caught in a spy controversy

BEIJING (BBC): The People's Republic of China has a "magic weapon", according to its founding leader Mao Zedong and its current president Xi Jinping. It is called the United Front Work Department - and it is raising as much alarm in the West as Beijing's growing military arsenal.

Yang Tengbo, a prominent businessman who has been linked to Prince Andrew, is the latest overseas Chinese citizen to be scrutinised - and sanctioned - for his links to the UFWD. The existence of the department is far from a secret. A decades-old and well-documented arm of the Chinese Communist Party, it has been mired in controversy before. Investigators from the US to Australia have cited the UFWD in multiple espionage cases, often accusing Beijing of using it for foreign interference.

Beijing has denied all espionage allegations, calling them ludicrous. So what is the UFWD and what does it do? The United Front - originally referring to a broad communist alliance - was once hailed by Mao as the key to the Communist Party's triumph in the decades-long Chinese Civil War.

After the war ended in 1949 and the party began ruling China, United Front activities took a backseat to other priorities. But in the last decade under Xi, the United Front has seen a renaissance of sorts. Xi's version of the United Front is broadly consistent with earlier incarnations: to "build the broadest possible coalition with all

social forces that are relevant", according to Mareike Ohlberg, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund. On the face of it, the UFWD is not shadowy - it even has a website and reports many of its activities on it. But the extent of its work - and its reach - is less clear.

While a large part of that work is domestic, Dr Ohlberg said, "a key target that has been defined for United Front work is overseas Chinese". Today, the UFWD seeks to influence public discussions about sensitive issues ranging from Taiwan - which China claims as its territory - to the suppression of ethnic minorities in Tibet and Xinjiang. It also tries to shape narratives about China in foreign media, target Chinese government critics abroad and co-opt influential overseas Chinese figures.

"United Front work can include espionage but [it] is broader than espionage," Audrye Wong, assistant professor of politics at the University of Southern California, tells the BBC. "Beyond the act of acquiring covert information from a foreign government, United Front activities centre on the broader mobilisation of overseas Chinese," she said, adding that China is "unique in the scale and scope" of such influence activities. China has always had the ambition for such influence, but its rise in recent decades has given Beijing the ability to exercise it.

Since Xi became president in 2012, he has been especially proactive in

crafting China's message to the world, enouraging a confrontational "wolf warrior" approach to diplomacy and urging his country's diaspora to "tell China's story well". The UFWD operates through various overseas Chinese community organisations, which have vigorously defended the Communist Party beyond its shores. They have censored anti-CCP artwork and protested at the activities of Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. The UFWD has also been linked to threats against members of persecuted minorities abroad, such as Tibetans and Uyghurs.

But much of the UFWD's work overlaps with other party agencies, operating under what observers have described as "plausible deniability". It is this murkiness that is causing so much suspicion and apprehension about the UFWD. When Yang appealed against his ban, judges agreed with the then secretary of state's report that Yang "represented a risk to national security" - citing the fact that he downplayed his ties with the UFWD as one of the reasons that led them to that conclusion.

Yang, however, maintains that he has not done anything unlawful and that the spy allegations are "entirely untrue". Cases like Yang's are becoming increasingly common. In 2022, British Chinese lawyer Christine Lee was accused by the MI5 of acting through the UFWD to cultivate relationships with influential people in the UK. The following year, Liang Litang,

a US citizen who ran a Chinese restaurant in Boston, was indicted for providing information about Chinese dissidents in the area to his contacts in the UFWD.

And in September, Linda Sun, a former aide in the New York governor's office, was charged with using her position to serve Chinese government interests - receiving benefits, including travel, in return. According to Chinese state media reports, she had met a top UFWD official in 2017, who told her to "be an ambassador of Sino-American friendship". It is not uncommon for prominent and successful Chinese people to be associated with the party, whose approval they often need, especially in the business world. But where is the line between peddling influence and espionage?

"The boundary between influence and espionage is blurry" when it comes to Beijing's operations, said Ho-fung Hung, a politics professor at Johns Hopkins University. This ambiguity has intensified after China passed a law in 2017 mandating Chinese nationals and companies to co-operate with intelligence probes, including sharing information with the Chinese government - a move that Dr Hung said "effectively turns everyone into potential spies". The Ministry of State Security has released dramatic propaganda videos warning the public that foreign spies are everywhere and "they are cunning and sneaky".

Some students who were sent on special trips abroad were told by their

universities to limit contact with foreigners and were asked for a report of their activities on their return. And yet Xi is keen to promote China to the world. So he has tasked a trusted arm of the party to project strength abroad. And that is becoming a challenge for Western powers - how do they balance doing business with the world's second-largest economy alongside serious security concerns?

Genuine fears over China's overseas influence are playing into more hawkish sentiments in the West, often leaving governments in a dilemma. Some, like Australia, have tried to protect themselves with fresh foreign interference laws that criminalise individuals deemed to be meddling in domestic affairs. In 2020, the US imposed visa restrictions on people seen as active in UFWD activities.

An irked Beijing has warned that such laws - and the prosecutions they have spurred - hinder bilateral relations. "The so-called allegations of Chinese espionage are utterly absurd," a foreign ministry spokesperson told reporters in response to a question about Yang. "The development of China-UK relations serves the common interests of both countries."

Some experts say that the long arm of China's United Front is indeed concerning. "Western governments now need to be less naive about China's United Front work and take it as a serious threat not only to national security but also to the safety and freedom of many ethnic Chinese citizens," Dr

Hung says. But, he adds, "governments also need to be vigilant against anti-Chinese racism and work hard to build trust and co-operation with ethnic Chinese communities in countering the threat together."

Last December, Di Sanh Duong, a Vietnam-born ethnic Chinese community leader in Australia, was convicted of planning foreign interference for trying to cosy up to an Australian minister. Prosecutors argued that he was an "ideal target" for the UFWD because he had run for office in the 1990s and boasted ties with Chinese officials. Duong's trial had centred around what he meant when he said the inclusion of the minister at a charity event would be beneficial to "us Chinese" - did he mean the Chinese community in Australia, or mainland China?

In the end, Duong's conviction - and a prison sentence - raised serious concerns that such broad anti-espionage laws and prosecutions can easily become weapons for targeting ethnic Chinese people. "It's important to remember that not everyone who is ethnically Chinese is a supporter of the Chinese Communist Party. And not everyone who is involved in these diaspora organisations is driven by fervent loyalty to China," Dr Wong says. "Overly aggressive policies based on racial profiling will only legitimise the Chinese government's propaganda that ethnic Chinese are not welcome and end up pushing diaspora communities further into Beijing's arms."

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Assad regime and ICC?

AT first glance, the prospect of prosecuting the Assad regime at the International Criminal Court (ICC) might appear impossible. Syria is not a party to the Rome Statute, the treaty establishing the ICC. This limitation restricts the court's jurisdiction to crimes committed by citizens of state parties or within their territories. Additionally, some may assume that the prosecution of Syria's Bashar Assad and his associates would require a UN Security Council referral, as seen in the cases of Sudan and Libya.

However, such a scenario is unlikely, as Russia would almost certainly veto any resolution referring Assad to the court. Assad has sought refuge under Moscow's protection, shielded by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is himself wanted by the ICC. Yet, there is still a pathway for the ICC to act against Assad and other leaders of his regime who stand accused of grave crimes against humanity, widespread war crimes, and potentially genocide.

Under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute, any state, even one that is not an ICC member, may grant the court jurisdiction by referring the situation to the ICC. This referral can apply retroactively to crimes committed on or after July 1, 2002, or another specified date thereafter. The transitional Syrian government could, therefore, accept ICC jurisdiction, at a time it deems appropriate. Precedents for such declarations already exist. Ukraine, despite not being a state party to the Rome Statute, accepted ICC jurisdiction retroactively as of Nov. 21, 2013. Similarly, Palestine acceded to the statute in 2015 and granted the ICC power to prosecute crimes committed since June 13, 2014, the start of Israel's war on Gaza that year. In both cases, the ICC acted on these declarations, issuing arrest warrants against prominent figures, including Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. There is no reason why Assad's case would not be handled similarly.

The process for a Syrian declaration would be straightforward. The current transitional authorities in Damascus could submit a brief letter to the ICC Registrar, specifying the date from which the court's authority for Syria would begin. This step allows the ICC to investigate and prosecute individuals responsible for atrocities committed during Syria's long conflict. While ICC prosecution could be an essential step, it would not preclude other avenues of justice. National courts or even a dedicated special tribunal could address the crimes committed by Assad's regime. Syria could also establish truth and reconciliation commissions to uncover abuses, deliver justice to victims, and hold key perpetrators accountable through transitional justice mechanisms. While the path to prosecuting the Assad regime at the ICC is complex, it is not insurmountable. A declaration by the transitional Syrian government under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute could serve as a vital first step, ensuring justice for the victims of the devastating conflict in Syria.

Starmer-flavoured stock

WHAT is Keir Starmer's idea of a nightmare before Christmas? A by-election? Getting stuck in a lift with a farmer, a pensioner and a Chagossian? Quite near the top of the list for our scrutiny-phobic squealer-in-chief is probably being made to answer loads of questions. In a rare taste of the medicine he's inflicting on the country, Sir Keir's nightmares became a reality with a grilling by the Liaison Committee. Dame Meg Hillier began proceedings by asking the £22 billion question: when would people actually see all this economic growth that he'd promised? Cue squirming and a squeal about his "plan for change".

Hillier concluded her questioning by asking if the PM had any regrets about how his first months in office had gone. Like a totally normal, non-psychopathic person, he just answered "no". Liam Byrne gave the "plan for change" - fast becoming the PM's albatross - a further roasting. How was he so sure he could beat literally every forecast and deliver the best growth in the G7? The plan for change would turn targets into "milestones", apparently. Imagine if you got that as a riddle in your Christmas cracker. You'd think someone had spiked the bread sauce with LSD.

Tellingly, both Byrne and Hillier are from Sir Keir's own party. Clearly, Labour committee heads weren't going to go soft on the PM. Toby Perkins put him in hot water about brownfield sites. Florence Eshalomi grilled him about why on earth he expected local councils to report to him on their targets when he refused to report on his. The PM - or whoever it is that programmes him - turned on the voice he uses to patronise women and proceeded to explain the concept of targets to her by way of an answer.

As if to compound this, Emily Thornberry had to remind him to include women on his list of things he wanted to protect under the new regime in Syria. The biggest exception to this fast-emerging rule, and runaway winner of "suck-up of the week", was the oleaginous Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, chairman of the defence select committee. He began by thanking the PM for "his service to the nation" as if he were a bomb disposal dog, or a Chindit or one of those people who delivered soup during the Captain Tom times. Dhesi's question was scarcely audible; by this point, he was so far up Oinky's bottom that he could see Hamish Falconer's feet. Labour did a pretty good job of filleting the PM but they were veritable chefs de partie compared to Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee chairman Alistair Carmichael. The Lib Dem fixed Oinky with a look of pure contempt and began, in his sonorous Scottish bass-baritone, "in the long run we're all dead" - the PM looked as if he wished he were - "so I'd like to talk about inheritance tax".

It was like watching someone make a Starmer-flavoured stock, every question reducing the PM further down to the little man he actually is: "Who were the targets of these changes?", "Was the Prime Minister happy with the super-rich continuing to shield money in land?", "Would he encourage the Chancellor to meet with the farming unions?" Each one met a wobble of the cheeks, a stammer and a lie. Finally, as Sir Keir tried to crack a joke about managing Rachel Reeves's diary, Mr Carmichael caught him absolutely in his sights and reminded him, with a grimace, that a lot of people didn't find this funny. Reduced down to his protoplasmic jelly, Sir Keir stopped smiling.

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Iran and Europe; A new beginning

Bahram Qassemi

THE government led by President Raisi did not believe in continuing talks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and argued that the issue was a done deal and non-negotiable. If talks were to take place, they should solely focus on lifting sanctions, making any mention of the JCPOA meaningless and unwelcome. In fact, the word JCPOA seemed to be a "taboo" term in domestic discourse.

The insistence on this approach was extremely serious. During the then-Iranian political deputy's trip to the capitals of three European countries after a lengthy hiatus (apparently initiated by the French side and coordinated with the other two capitals), a concerted effort was made to steer clear of mentioning the JCPOA, instead focusing solely on lifting sanctions, and nothing else.

The world is increasingly interconnected and complex, with momentous, rapid, and decisive developments that challenge countries and render their priorities obsolete for an extended period. The world is a realm of moments and opportunities.

With the previous government's shift in approach and the unfolding events, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine (which is seen as an attack on Europe by a European citizen and official) and the release of news about Iran's alleged military aid to Russia, which dominated Russian and European media headlines, Europe has become increasingly disillusioned and pessimistic about engaging with Iran.

The lack of any direct contact and face-to-face dialogue, coupled with other unresolved issues, as well as the absence of any economic ties, cooperation, and exchange which resulted in a lack of economic benefits, incentives, and efforts in the relationship, caused Iran's regional stances to go off the rails and its external relations to lose balance, rolling back the Iran-Europe relationship.

Undoubtedly, in a historical assessment of Iran-Europe relations since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the current state of relations has never been as chilly, tense, and fragile as it is today, despite the numerous ups and downs.

Since 2022, all bonds that could have provided a semblance of dynamism and vitality to the relationship have been cut off. All aspects of the relationship, including cultural, academ-

ic, artistic, oil and energy, banking, investment, and academic exchanges between researchers, have been dismantled, leaving no tangible attraction for the continuation of relations.

The heinous and distressing events in the Middle East, the humanitarian crimes and genocide perpetrated by the occupying regime of Israel, and Iran's distinct and divergent regional policies, have, coupled with policies European leaders who claim to advocate human rights and numerous other unthoughtful and ill-informed events, driven Europe, replete with pride and prejudice, to take hostile actions, such as imposing sanctions on several Iranian airlines and, subsequently, Iran's shipping industry.

The EU's ill-advised and malignant stance, marked by a new and misguided approach, has further complicated these already fraught relations, as exemplified by their unjustifiable position on Iranian islands at the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and EU meeting, and, in a recent ill-timed move, their resolution against Iran at the recent Board of Governors meeting, adding to the complexities of these enchanted relations.

A review of recent years shows that, as a nation that has long suffered under numerous sanctions, we must not waver in our effective presence on the global stage, not even for a moment. We must not get bogged down in trivial protocols. What is crucial is leveraging all tools at our disposal, at every moment, to counter adversity and protect national interests.

In the early days of the previous government, and in a regional conference that Iran had previously viewed negatively and one-sidedly, France took the initiative to host a summit of regional leaders in Baghdad, which Iran attended at the foreign minister level. On the sidelines of this summit, the French president invited Iran's foreign minister to visit Paris, an invitation repeated by France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. However, Iran did not respond, as if a faction or school of thought in Tehran had concluded that relations with these countries might not be in Iran's best interest. This entire story could have unfolded differently, particularly in light of the Iranian foreign policy priorities announced by this govern-

ment, which, despite using different words, always conveyed the same message.

The priorities began with neighboring countries, followed by Russia, China, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and, finally, Europe. Even it was emphasized that Europe will seek to increase tensions with Iran to gain leverage in future negotiations.

Europe is not pleased with Trump's return, and their irresponsible, hostile, and aggressive actions toward Iran, which have intensified in recent months, are in line with their concerns and needs. Europe may even be worried about potential contacts and openings in the communication between Iran and Trump's America. Therefore, the upcoming negotiations with Europe, although belated, are a commendable and necessary step. If we consider the long-standing debate on the nuclear issue and the JCPOA, which is a crucial and decisive topic, and the limited time available to preserve the JCPOA, we must be diligent in managing the process and timing with them. We must convey to them a clear understanding of Iran's stance on the Russia-Ukraine issue. Neither the Russians nor the Europeans have the right to use Iran as a means in their own war, whether to gain an ally or to create a pretext for exerting pressure and exploiting the results in another context.

Now, both sides are gearing up for another round of talks to tackle a host of challenging issues. The significance lies not in the outcome, but in the fact that the meeting will take place, and perspectives will be shared.

Every meeting, no matter how difficult, will not be in vain. Negotiations may drag on longer than either side would like, but that should never be used as an excuse to call off the talks. What matters is that face-to-face, eye-to-eye negotiations can yield breakthroughs that would not be achieved through phone calls, tweets, or other means of communication.

Although the upcoming meeting between Iran and the three European countries is long overdue, we should have brought them to the negotiating table from the outset of the new government in Iran, whether overtly or covertly.

Nevertheless, there is still an opportunity to make amends. Iranian officials are right in saying that they have never walked away from the negotiating table, but this is only one aspect of the issue at hand. The forthcoming meeting, which comes after the adoption of their resolution at the Board of Governors, presents a different face of Iran, although it was reportedly agreed upon on the sidelines of the General Assembly in September. Perhaps the meeting could have been scheduled earlier or rescheduled to take place before the

Board of Governors meeting. However, in diplomacy, timing and circumstances are not always in sync. In other words, with the return of Mr. Trump and the potential escalation of European and American challenges, there is a high likelihood that Europe will seek to increase tensions with Iran to gain leverage in future negotiations.

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Despite all these troublesome stories of one-sidedness, simplism, and Europe's excessive demands, both sides must acknowledge that Iran's relations with that continent have been historical and multifaceted, characterized by cooperation in various fields. The stability and security of the region and even the world depend on mutual respect and non-interference in each other's affairs. What is crucial for us today is to move beyond the stagnant bilateral relations and revive meetings, discussions, and negotiations to reach a level of understanding on the nuclear issue and Resolution 2231, considering the limited time remaining. This is a daunting and challenging task, and we hope that this meeting will not be the drop that overflows the already full glass, which would be unwarranted. History has taught us that in our absence from the international, regional, and global arenas, our rivals and adversaries will take advantage of the situation and spare no effort to undermine us.

France should stick with US through thick and thin

Khaled Abou Zahr

Iremember watching Dominique de Villepin's speech at the UN in 2003. De Villepin, who was then France's minister of foreign affairs under Jacques Chirac's presidency, expressed Paris' opposition to the war in Iraq. It was delivered during a tense meeting of the UN Security Council, in which the US and the UK were seeking international support for military action. His performance reminded me of Frank Capra's movie "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" - specifically, the filibuster scene where James Stewart talks nonstop in the Senate for 25 hours to postpone a bill.

Despite holding several offices under Chirac, De Villepin's last was prime minister from 2005 to 2007. But since the beginning of the Gaza war, he has reappeared with a clear opposition to Israel's actions and he has gained visibility in France and beyond. This might not be a total surprise, as there are points of concordance between the war in Gaza and the war in Iraq. Both came as a reaction to a terrorist attack. The 9/11 attacks on the US were similar to the Oct. 7 attacks on Israel. The magnitude of the response too. De Villepin's reaction is also consistent with his UN speech, as he stands once against a French ally.

This renewed media interest has offered De Villepin a platform, which he has also used to sharply criticize what he perceives as the inconsistency in France's foreign policy under Emmanuel Macron, particularly its tendency to "flip-flop" on major international issues. De Villepin has argued that this lack of coherence undermines France's credibility and influence on the global stage. Regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict, he criticized Macron's initial overtures to Vladimir Putin, followed by his sudden alignment with NATO's hardline stance, only to later suggest the need to "not humiliate Russia," which created confusion among France's allies.

Additionally, De Villepin criticized France's changing position on the Gaza conflict, calling its reaction to the humanitarian catastrophe insufficient and inconsistent, while charging it with violating international law. He has also criticized France's withdrawal from Africa, especially Mali, as a sign of a larger inability to uphold a cogent postcolonial strategy. According to De Villepin, such hesitancy and conflicting behavior run the risk of undermining France's longstanding position as an independent and morally upright diplomatic force.

Today and maybe also in 2003, the main center of his thoughts reveals concerns over France's alignment with the US, particularly regarding its foreign policy.

He argues that such alignment undermines Paris' traditional role as an independent global actor and diminishes its capacity to mediate in international conflicts. In his speeches, he advocates for what he describes as a more balanced approach. I would

describe it as a call to jump ship.

Indeed, his conviction is that it is the end of Pax Americana and he has clearly stated that "the balance of power is not in Washington's favor" in its confrontation with China. He hence suggests that France should strengthen its diplomatic and economic ties with Eastern nations to promote a multipolar world order. Pragmatically, this view translates to closer attachment with China at the expense of the US.

On paper, what he says sounds nice. In reality, just like De Villepin failed to understand the 2003 geopolitical shift, he today fails to understand that, no matter how many times France jumps ship, there is not a single scenario in which an end of Pax Americana allows Paris to keep its capacity to project power. If we move towards a Pax Sinica, then France will lose it all. No compass reset will change that.

There has been flip-flopping in French policies. This has come from the "Macronian" initiatives facing the realities of the world and hence Macron being unable to execute them. I strongly believe that the mistake Macron and De Villepin both make is thinking that the end of Pax Americana will bring a multipolar world, an end to injustice, and peace. Their cherry on top is that France will once again become a cornerstone of this new order through its deep culture and impartiality. This is wishful thinking. China does not need them. It is as simple as that. The Pax Sinica will be a dragon for Europe.

The hard truth is that France should seek full alignment with the US and offer an absolute commitment to the transatlantic alliance. De Villepin's heavy criticism of the US is misplaced and, despite his eloquence in speech, is vulgar. It is too easy to criticize the man in the arena from the outside. Moreover, you cannot and should not benefit from the protection of a friend and then pick and choose when to support him. You stick with your friends through thick and thin. Italy today has a much more honorable stance.

He is nevertheless right that there needs to be a reinvention of the West and a renewed commitment to the values it upholds. I believe the next Trump administration will deliver this. And so, simply looking at the US and the transatlantic alliance through the lens of criticism and justifying other countries' violence makes no sense.

I used Capra's movie as an example as he was, just like De Villepin, a conservative. Yet, De Villepin has been less of a conservative in recent years and he looks more and more aligned with the global left. Ultimately, I would say that the reality of his reappearance is linked to the next presidential election in 2027 and that is an opportunity for him. Indeed, at a time when the current presidency has blurred the lines between center-right and left, his courting of the global left makes sense. Yet, my humble bet is that, in his pursuit of power, he will only boost the far left's chances. Time will tell.

Pressure on Putin is ratcheting up

Olga Chyzh

THE assassination on Tuesday of the Russian general and conspiracy theorist Igor Kirillov in downtown Moscow is yet another operation in a string of small, morale-boosting actions by Ukraine and its sympathisers. Last month, Valery Trankovsky, a senior naval officer, was killed in a car-bombing in Crimea. Sergei Yevsyukov, the former chief of the Russian-operated Olenivka prison that Russian forces blew up in 2022, killing many Ukrainian prisoners of war, died in a similar attack this month in Donetsk. All three men had been accused by Ukraine of war crimes.

These killings are more than acts of retribution; they are part of a calculated effort to signal Ukraine's resolve in the face of Russian aggression. They serve as a warning to Moscow's military establishment and offer a modicum of justice to a Ukrainian public enraged by the atrocities committed by Russian forces. Yet the effectiveness of such assassinations is less clear. In authoritarian regimes that lack mechanisms for orderly power transitions, the elimination of high-ranking officials can destabilise leadership structures. A sudden vacuum at the top risks igniting infighting among elites and undermining the regime's cohesion.

Granted, this doesn't seem to be such a problem at the mid level of generals and officers. Among these ranks, succession is often straightforward, because replacements are typically ready to step into the void. Military men like Kirillov rise to prominence because of loyalty rather than merit, making them largely interchangeable and, in terms of battlefield success, expendable. Though any minor success calls for celebration, Russia will probably shed few tears for men like Kirillov.

Even so, the timing of these assassinations is important. Faced with the reality of

an impending power shift in the United States, from a supportive if indecisive Biden administration to an openly pro-Russian Trump presidency, Ukraine seems to be scrambling to secure any last-minute advantages.

Meanwhile, Russia is holding its breath. Its economy is faltering under the combined strain of the war and western sanctions. War-driven salary increases for the military personnel and adjacent defence industries, which together employ 5 million people, have triggered a vicious cycle of inflation and subsequent interest-rate hikes. The country also has a chronic shortage of workers, thanks to its ageing population and the exodus of some 700,000 working-age individuals at the start of the war.

A combination of higher wages and rising interest rates has led to stagflation, stifling domestic investment and leaving businesses in a

perilous situation where they're unable to meet their own payment obligations or collect money from their debtors. Data suggests these trends are creating a domino effect of defaults and bankruptcies. Russia's economic elites are increasingly aggrieved by the situation, and have resorted to making sexist critiques of the governor of the central bank, Elvira Nabiullina. She is hardly responsible for these economic woes - and in fact, many credit her with Russia's surprising economic resilience thus far. So why don't the Russian business elites direct the blame where it belongs - to their leader, Vladimir Putin?

The answer lies in the deliberate structure of Putin's government. Under his system, economic elites act as trustees who oversee the daily operations of various industries in the Russian economy. They serve at

Putin's discretion and have no influence over his political decisions. Their position in Russia's society depends entirely on their relationship with the president. Should they lose his favour, there are plenty of replacements eager to take their place. And Trump's presidency offers them a glimmer of hope that relief from their struggles may be on the horizon. For now, they need only keep their heads low and wait out the next few weeks until his inauguration.

Trump's re-election is likely to be a watershed event in the war - one that many expect not to favour Ukraine. The incoming president is an isolationist with close ties to Putin. He has already signalled his intent to reverse Biden's authorisation of the use of US weapons to strike inside Russia. But Trump is also known to prove disappointing. His peace plan, like many of his policies, lacks detail, and ignores the fact that both sides would prefer

to fight than resort to an unenforceable peace. Meanwhile, the depletion of US weapons stockpiles limits his leverage. He cannot withhold supplies that were not being provided in the first place, and his threats to force Putin's hand by miraculously giving Ukraine "more [weapons] than they ever got" are similarly empty.

That said, Ukraine has many reasons to be concerned. While assassinations of Russian war criminals serve as a distraction for anxious citizens, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, knows that the time before Trump's inauguration is critical. Ukraine must focus on securing stronger commitments from European allies, who may need to fill the void left by a retreating US administration. Ultimately, Ukraine's best hope is to bet on itself. Investing in domestic weapons production and leveraging Russia's economic instability are its most viable strategies for survival.

The Guardian

Jerome Powell just showed Donald Trump who’s boss

Elisabeth Buchwald & David Goldman

PRESIDENT-ELECT Donald Trump's favorite barometer of his success - the stock market - had been humming since his reelection. Business-friendly promises of deregulation and tax cuts got investors excited with anticipation of unlocked profit and easy money. And then reality set in this week. But Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell in a press conference Wednesday reminded markets who's boss: The Fed said inflation will remain higher than expected next year, and that it is now pricing in just two rate cuts in 2025, rather than the four it had expected during its previous projection in September.

Stocks plunged on the news, with the broad-based S&P 500 tumbling 3%. The Dow lost more than 1,100 points, falling for the 10th straight session - the longest such losing streak since 1974.

The market's strong reaction shows that the Fed, ultimately, could weigh more heavily on markets than Trump's policymaking going forward. The Fed's projections on rates and inflation were like a "punch in the face to the market," said Art Hogan, managing director and chief market strategist at B. Riley Investments.

"That got everyone spooked," he added. And just like that, the post-election stock market rally has been almost entirely erased. The Dow, which had risen nearly 2,800 points since Election Day before its epic slide started, ended Wednesday with a total gain of just 100 points since Trump was reelected.

Although the Fed on Wednesday delivered the much-anticipated quarter-point cut investors were banking on, traders were left shell-shocked by central bankers' 2025 forecast. For markets, fewer rate cuts could mean lower-than-expected earnings, less hiring and a weaker-than-expected economy. But wait - wasn't Trump's win sup-

posed to be the Holy Grail igniting Wall Street for the next four years

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For markets, fewer rate cuts could mean lower-than-expected earnings, less hiring and a weaker-than-expected economy. But wait - wasn't Trump's win supposed to be the Holy Grail igniting Wall Street for the next four years with tax cuts and deregulation galore? Not so fast. "Powell just reminded us that nothing in life comes easy," Callie Cox, chief market strategist at Ritholtz Wealth Management, told CNN, referring to recent gains the stock market has seen. "It was always hard to completely trust the rally that we saw in markets post-Election Day," she said. "A lot of it seemed like investors threw a lot of context away, and they just took what they wanted from policy speculation." But lately, some of the euphoria around what Trump could deliver for investors "is wearing off a bit," she added. Now, some of the focus is shifting to the reality of how his policy proposals, including widespread tariffs, could negatively impact the economy and how the Fed will have to respond as a result. The new inflation forecasts show that "this last mile is going to take longer," Hogan said.

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ing to the reality of how his policy proposals, including widespread tariffs, could negatively impact the economy and how the Fed will have to respond as a result. The new inflation forecasts show that "this last mile is going to take longer," Hogan said. To be fair to investors, one part of the market predicted this very scenario - even before the Fed: the bond market. Treasury yields had been rising as bond prices fell in the weeks leading up to Trump's reelection. And yields have been higher ever since.

That's because Trump's tariff and mass deportation policies could drive inflation higher, bringing the Fed's rate-cutting campaign to a screeching halt. Yields also rose as Trump promised more tax cuts and deficit spending, which could flood the market with new Treasury bonds to help the incoming Trump administration borrow the money it needs to fund its initiatives. Of course, stock investors knew all this. They were just holding out hope that the stock rally would keep going as long as they could. "Instead of delaying selling until early in 2025, investors decided it might be best to start taking some profits now," said Sam Stovall, chief investment strategist at CFRA Research. "FOMO (the fear of missing out) usually ends up being a portfolio's worst enemy."

Stocks were set to bounce back somewhat Thursday. The epic losing streak may be coming to an end. But investor sentiment appears to have just come back down to earth. Going forward, they'll probably be paying closer attention to the Fed than Trump. "The Fed wields power to move markets unlike any other institution in America," said Rob Haworth, senior investment strategist at US Bank Wealth Management. It's as if Powell on Wednesday was saying to Trump: I am in charge.

Several African govts unaware of young workers in Russian drone factories

Matthew Kupfer & Salem Solomon

THEY were promised a chance to earn money, get an education abroad, and gain work experience. Instead, they found themselves assembling military drones in Russia and, in one case, subjected to a Ukrainian drone strike. A series of investigative reports has shed light on a Russian labor recruitment program that has allegedly lured young African women to work at an industrial park in provincial Russia with false promises and coerced them into contributing to the Kremlin's war effort in Ukraine.

The reported victims of the program, which attracts recruits largely through online job advertisements, includes women from Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria.

Media reports from The Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and others have exposed the operation, entitled Alabuga Start, but VOA reporting has found that African countries have largely failed to intervene or give an official response. Some even appear to be building ties with the Russian entity behind the program. That entity called the Alabuga Special Economic Zone, has been intensifying its outreach across the African continent, according to David Albright, founder of the Institute for Science and International Security and the researcher behind a report exposing the program that exploited the young women. "In some of the initial investigations of this, the recruiters in Africa

were oblivious when they were asked where these women were going," Albright said, adding that some are now aware and that he hopes there will be "pushback from these governments about what exactly [Alabuga is] recruiting these women to do."

Albright said representatives from Alabuga recently visited Sierra Leone, Zambia and Madagascar, signing memorandums of cooperation with local organizations, despite the reports of misleading recruitment practices and questionable labor actions. Albright said the young women are forced to handle toxic materials, which he says is forbidden in Russian labor law. But African and other governments have also been willing to send their citizens off to Alabuga Start. VOA discovered a series of documents online indicating the government ministries had officially promoted the program. VOA reached out to authorities of Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Nigeria but several emails and phone calls went unanswered. VOA also requested comment from Alabuga and the Russian Embassy in Washington but received no response.

Located 1,000 kilometers to the east of Moscow in Russia's Tatarstan region, the city of Yelabuga, known as Alabuga in the local Tatar language, would hardly seem a desirable location for young people from Africa. But the nearby Alabuga Special Economic Zone has been casting a wide net on the African continent. In promotional materials, it paints an exciting, optimistic picture of life in the Alabuga Start program. In one recruitment video intended to appeal to potential recruits, an African woman arrives in Alabuga and begins work at a restaurant, where she waits on a young Russian man. At the end of the video, she returns to the restaurant as his pregnant wife.

Other promotional videos show participants working in construction, cleaning and warehouse operations, as well as studying and playing sports with their friends. Only one video features the women assembling drones, but no indication is given that the drones have a military purpose. According to the Russian independent news outlet Protokol, the program has specifically targeted young women because its organizers believe young men from Africa "could be too aggressive and dangerous." Researchers and reporters found that some of the program's internal documents, as reported by Albright and

others, often referred to the women as mulattos using an outdated racial term that is now widely considered offensive. Its appeal to African young people is not difficult to understand, says Maxim Matusevich, a Russia-Africa expert and a global history professor at Seton Hall University. "A lot of these nations have very high unemployment rates," he told VOA. Russia is "offering them attractively packaged and attractively sold job packages." Matusevich believes Alabuga Start aims to solve the problem of a shortfall of workers in Russia due to the heavy demand of the war in Ukraine.

Albright said that inaction has global ramifications: Alabuga Start is involving young Africans in Russian violence against Ukrainians. "It's been a very deceptive program in the sense that the applicants didn't know they'd be work-

ing in essentially a US-[and] European-sanctioned company making drones that are being used to devastating effect against Ukrainian civil targets, energy targets, electrical plants," he told VOA. "And so, in that sense, they're complicit in a crime, an international crime, given that the war against Ukraine is illegal. They're getting involved in making drones that are being used against civilian targets, not just military targets."

Alabuga didn't start out exploiting young African women. Before that, it used young Russians in drone production. Since 2019, the special economic zone has operated a program called Alabuga Polytech, which recruits Russian high school students. Unlike workers from the African continent and other countries, the Russian students take part in a four-year work-study program, receiving accredited technical education while doing industrial work.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, that program ramped up its activity. It hasn't been entirely smooth sailing. When the program pivoted to drone production, Alabuga had to lobby the Russian authorities to alter labor laws. According to a July report from the Institute for Science and International Security, that allowed Alabuga to hire children under the age of 18 to work with toxic chemicals. Parents soon began to complain about the poor work conditions: Participants were working 12-hour factory shifts and their movements were strictly controlled, Albright recounted. He said the program has since stopped recruiting people younger than 18. When the special economic zone launched Alabuga Start and began recruiting workers from abroad in 2022, the program was almost entirely focused on drone production.

According to estimates by Albright's organization, only a third of Polytech students work on drone production, while over 90% of Alabuga Start participants do. Despite that stark distinction, organizers appear to have frequently conflated the two programs, including by sometimes depicting Alabuga Start participants wearing school uniforms in promotional materials. Alabuga's recent outreach to African nations signals a potential expansion of its recruitment efforts.

VOA found that African and other governments have at times been willing partners. Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education shared on its website a document announcing open admissions to Alabuga Start in 2023. Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sport shared a similar announcement. In the document upload site Scribd, a digital document library, VOA found two files that appear to be official letters from the government ministries of Mali and Burkina Faso announcing that Alabuga Start had reserved spots for participants from those countries in 2023. VOA also found a document by Bangladesh's Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training announcing that applications were open for Alabuga Start in 2023.

A day later, Alabuga Start released a video featuring a Kenyan woman -- one of the program's public-facing participants -- who said she would be going to work in a cafe. The participant notably said she had come to work and study at Alabuga Polytech - and not Start. "Those who attacked our hostel today are real barbarians and they deserve serious condemnation," she said. "In my opinion, they wanted to intimidate us. But I want to tell you they did not succeed. You won't scare me, because Alabuga is a strong place and we will get through this."

It’s easier than you think to get measure of Kemi Badenoch - just ask around in Nigeria

THE Tory leader, Kemi Badenoch, recently went viral over her comments on the perfidy of sandwiches and "moist bread" in an interview with the Spectator. The comment was met with glee, quips and comedic clapbacks from political rivals. Yet a few lines down in the exact same interview, Badenoch made comments, less noticed, more inflammatory, that should be eye-wateringly beneath the holder of the office of Leader of His Majesty's Most Loyal Opposition.

"I find it interesting that everybody defines me as being Nigerian," she said. "I identify less with the country than with the specific ethnicity [Yoruba]. That's what I really am. I have nothing in common with the people from the north of the country, the Boko Haram where the Islamism is, those were our ethnic enemies and yet you end up being lumped in with those people."

As someone of British-Nigerian origins myself, I can ignore the blood, soil and pounded yam approach to Yoruba sectarianism (which is a long way from the Nigerians for Kemi campaign she desperately pulled together when running for a diverse London seat in 2010). I'll put aside the fact that she conveniently didn't mention who did that "lumping" at gunpoint (that is, Britain). But it does occur that this "ethnic enemies" rhetoric sits a bit too easily in Hutu v Tutsi territory, or Biafra (Nigerian civil war) territory. It is the exact sort of rhetoric that leads to major conflicts in fragile yet highly diverse nations such as Nigeria, whose maps were drawn by colonialists.

Nels Abbey

Making matters worse, it offers not even an iota of sympathy for the principal victims of Boko Haram's brutal reign of terrorism: northern Nigerians. Nigeria looms large for Badenoch, and not always in a good way.

"Do you trust the British police?" asked an American podcaster last month. A Booker prizewinner would struggle to craft a segue in which such a question would lead to a diatribe about policing in Nigeria (about 5,000 miles away from Britain) and the alleged theft of her brother's shoes. And then a swivel, deploying that alleged experience with Nigerian police to dismiss the concerns Britons (especially Black Britons) rightfully have about British police. "The police in Nigeria would rob us, she said. "So when people say I have this bad experience with the police because I'm black and they're white, I'm 'what the hell?'"

Nigerian policing presents serious issues. But from racism to theft, to assault and murder, so does British policing. Even Nigerian police might have thought twice about placing a gun in the hand of Wayne Couzens, the Met officer nicknamed "the rapist" by his colleagues, and who used his badge to facilitate heinous assault and murder.

From her "reparations are a scam" comment to a live GB News audience, through her appallingly dismissive attitudes at parliamentary Black History Month debates, to UN accusations of attempting to normalise white supremacy with the Sewell report, along with the

flagrant bullying of award-winning, groundbreaking Black journalists such as Nadine White, Rianna Croxford and Reni Eddo-Lodge, Badenoch has established a discernible and deeply worrying pattern of behaviour. She regularly seems to offer the concerns and lives of one minority or the other (especially Black and Brown people) as a sacrificial political gift at the altar of white supremacy. That plays one way here, but differently in Nigeria.

Keir Starmer and a good slice of our media class welcomed Badenoch's elevation to the party leadership as a "proud moment for our country". Nigerian media figures never speak with one voice, but for some the talk was of a person "desperately trying to please the conservative white establishment" and "subjugating her own people to make Britain look good in the face of white nationalism".

Her denigration of Nigeria (a brutally capitalist nation without as much as a hint of a welfare state; nevertheless derided by her as "socialist") forced the vice-president, Kashim Shettima, to publicly rebuke her. Rishi Sunak never "denigrated his nation of ancestry [India]", Shettima pointed out. If the association rankles, she could "remove the Kemi from her name", he said. His comments won applause from the audience.

Like Badenoch, I was born in Britain and eventually went to live in Nigeria for some of my formative years. Though she enjoyed a fantastically more privileged upbringing than me (she was pri-

vately educated and lived in one of the continent's wealthiest neighbourhoods), the events and circumstances that shaped the scars of Badenoch's youth in Nigeria also shaped mine. The democracy and security-crushing folly of dictators such as Ibrahim Babangida, who Margaret Thatcher likened to herself for "strong and independent views", and Sani Abacha led to economic collapse, plunging standards of living for average Nigerians and effectively helped Nigeria become a byword for corruption.

Yet for all Nigeria's flaws, Badenoch and I both received a better education there than we would probably have had as inner-city working-class Black children in the UK at the time. And it goes further than that: we were also gifted cultural awareness, language skills, knowledge of self, confidence in self, debating skills and consistent exposure to successful people who looked like us. Rocky as it was, this helps explain why so many Nigerians (and their offspring) are swiftly emerging at the top of western societies.

It's time for a truce. Badenoch could leave Nigeria alone (and Black and Brown people more broadly), and perhaps Nigeria could reciprocate, because the truth is, she has troubles enough. The Tory left thinks she's too rightwing, the Tory right thinks she is not rightwing enough - and Nigel Farage thinks she and her party, gobbled up by Reform UK, would make a lovely supper. They see through you in Nigeria, Kemi, so focus on the day job: you and Nigeria would be better for it.

Elon Musk flexes his political muscle, sending government on path to shutdown

Hadas Gold

DURING the Army-Navy football game over the weekend, Elon Musk posted a photo of the giant screen perched over the field showing four faces in focus. President-elect Donald Trump, Vice President-elect JD Vance, and Musk looking toward the camera. In the background, looking down, was House Speaker Mike Johnson.

The symbolism of such an image - and Musk posting it - is hard to miss. Musk stands directly behind Trump and Vance, more prominently than the speaker (who is third in line to the presidency). A few days later, Musk would make perhaps his most impactful flex of his newfound political power, helping to torpedo a spending bill put forth by Johnson with bipartisan support to fund the government and avoid a shutdown as soon as Friday evening.

While some conservatives were already skeptical of the continuing resolution even before it was officially published, Musk and his co-Department of Government Efficiency leader Vivek Ramaswamy suddenly began blasting the bill online Wednesday, riling up their tens of millions of supporters with posts stoking outrage about its contents.

"This bill should not pass," Musk wrote on X at 4:15 a.m. ET, kicking off what would become a blizzard of posts about the legislation. It was only a matter of time before the bill died. But Musk's unprecedented online influence seemed to fully torpedo the spending bill in a way no Republican lawmaker could have done from inside Capitol Hill.

Those familiar with Washington know that such massive spending bills are often chock-full of add-ons in addition to necessary spending to keep the government open. Punchbowl called it "overstuffed," others have likened it to a "Christmas tree" full of ornaments. But Musk has always prided himself on doing things differently, ignoring the rules (written or not) and breaking the mold - for better or for worse. In more than 100 posts on X, Musk railed against elements of the bill - though some of his complaints were outright false and often amplifications of anonymous X accounts with seemingly no fact checks. Musk also used his platform to push for a government shutdown, arguing it would not hurt "critical functions." While that is partially true, shutdowns cost the economy billions of

dollars. And there are millions of federal employees who would not be paid while the government is shuttered during the holidays.

Since Musk began showing up by Trump's side, memes of a "President Musk" have been flourishing online, and furious Democrats are starting to question whether Musk is a "shadow president." "It's clear who's in charge, and it's not President-elect Donald Trump," Democratic Rep. Pramila Jayapal wrote. "Shadow President Elon Musk spent all day railing against Republicans' CR, succeeded in killing the bill, and then Trump decided to follow his lead."

Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent, echoed her sentiment. "Democrats and Republicans spent months negotiating a bipartisan agreement to fund our government. The richest man on Earth, President Elon Musk, doesn't like it."

Musk, the tech billionaire who has never been elected to office, has said it's not the Republicans who are giving him power, it's the "people." "All I can do is bring things to the attention of the people, so they may voice their support if they so choose," Musk wrote on X on Wednesday. But

CNN



777 planes can land at Faisalabad airport after expansion, says Manager

FAISALABAD (APP): About 777 planes could land at Faisalabad International Airport after the expansion of its runway and a state-of-the-art cargo complex would also be established after completing due formalities and permission, said Airport Manager Ms. Tasneem Akhtar Jameel.

Addressing the business community at the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI), she requested exporters to provide the data of cargo load so that the process could be expedited. She said that many airlines had suspended their operation from Faisalabad but hopefully, they would return very soon.

She said that all new airlines would be allotted slots according to their demand as there was no hurdle to its

allotment. “Contrary to Lahore, 100% baggage of passengers is being scanned at Faisalabad,” she added.

She also claimed that Faisalabad had been declared the most secured and safe airport of the country.

Earlier, President FCCI Mr. Rehman Naseem Bharara said that Faisalabad had emerged on the global map of aviation when international flights started from this city in 2014-15 due to the efforts of the FCCI.

“At that time there were 120 weekly flights which reduced to 80 during Covid-19”, he said and added that now there were only 32 domestic and international flights. He requested former executive member FCCI Kashif Zia to prepare a comprehensive report on available cargo load in Faisalabad so that the issue could be resolved

without further delay.

Former President FCCI Mian Javed Iqbal said that CAA should contact the managements of Fly Dubai, Fly Jinnah, Air Blue, Air Sial and other airlines to start their operation from Faisalabad to capitalize on its huge untapped potential. He said that currently local cargo was being routed through Lahore and Sialkot airports as they had no scanner at Faisalabad. “There are two options for us. First to fully exploit the potential of the existing airport and secondly to start spade work on the new airport. We must prepare a commercial feasibility so that efforts could be made in the right direction,” he added.

He also requested the airport manager to work on the possibility of launching a flying club at Faisalabad

airport.

He said that the FCCI should also request officers concerned of the customs, FIA and ANF to visit the FCCI to resolve issues of the business community.

Later, President Rehman Naseem Bharara along with Mian Javed Iqbal and Nadeem Iqbal presented an FCCI shield to Airport Manager Ms. Tasneem Akhtar Jameel. She also reciprocated and presented a memento of CAA to President FCCI Mr. Rehman Naseem Bharara.

Senior Vice President (SVP) FCCI Mr. Qaisar Shams Guccha, former presidents Muzammil Sultan, Mian Aftab and Shabbir Hussain Chawala were also present in the meeting in addition to the Executive Member FCCI Muhammad Ali, Hamid Gillani and Naveed Gulzar.



ISLAMABAD: Women purchasing Christmas related stuff in G-7.

CDNS attains Rs600b mark in annual savings target

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) has accomplished a target of Rs 600 billion in fresh bonds and achieved 36.36 percent of the annual target for the current fiscal year, from July 1 to December 20th.

The CDNS has set an annual target of Rs 1650 billion for the current Fiscal Year, 2024-25, which will promote the saving culture in the country, the senior official of CDNS told APP on Saturday.

Similarly, the CDNS has set a target of Rs 170 billion in investment in Islamic finance for the Current Fiscal Year, which will lead to the growth of the Islamic economy in the country.

Replying to a question, he said that the CDNS has realized a target of Rs1.742 trillion in fresh bonds and exceeded 100 percent of the annual target in the last fiscal year 2023-24, from July 1 to June 30.

National Savings has set an annual target of Rs 1.7 trillion for the year 2023-24; it is encouraging that this year, “We surpassed the 100 percent of the annual target.”

The CDNS surpassed the annual target and achieved the target of Rs 1.6 trillion in fresh bonds in the previous fiscal year 2022-23, he said.

He said it was an Rs 200 billion additional annual target than the target of Rs 1300 billion for the previous financial year 2021-22.

The CDNS has set a reviewed saving target of Rs 1.4 trillion for the financial year (2021-22) which will promote a savings culture in the country, he said, adding that given the current market trend in the country, the ambitious target had been set to further improve the savings culture.

The official said that work was being done on institutional reforms in CDNS and new reforms and innovations were being introduced. At this time Automated Teller Machine (ATM) has also been introduced in CDNS which will provide enough facilities to the users,” he added.

The official said that the directorate had set a target of Rs 75 billion for the new financial year 2023-24 for Islamic finance bonds.

Replying to a question; he said the CDNS aimed to introduce new dimensions in the Islamic finance sector.

Islamic finance has a very important role in the global financial sector at this time and a large part of the economy of many major countries currently includes Islamic finance,” he added.

Ghee, cooking oil prices see massive hike

ISLAMABAD (INP): Amid inflationary pressures, the prices of ghee and cooking oil in Pakistan have witnessed a significant hike, with some branded products seeing an increase of up to Rs100 per litre.

Retailers confirmed that branded cooking oil and ghee prices now stand at Rs570 per litre, following an average rise of Rs80 per kg/litre. The country, which imports 90% of its palm oil requirements from Indonesia and 10% from Malaysia, consumes approximately 5 million tons of ghee and cooking oil annually. Of this, around 3.5 million tons of palm oil are imported

to meet local demand.

Data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics indicates that during the first five months of the fiscal year 2024, the country imported 1.319 million tons of palm oil worth \$1.26 billion. This marks an increase from the 1.248 million tons valued at \$1.17 billion imported during the same period last year. The average price per ton has risen marginally to \$954, compared to \$941 in the previous year.

Sheikh Umer Rehman, Chairman of the Pakistan Vanaspati Manufacturers Association (PVMA), attributed the price hike to

fluctuations in international markets. “Global palm oil prices had surged to \$1,285 per ton before settling at \$1,185. This also led to a reduction in the open market price of palm oil from Rs19,000 to Rs16,500 per mound,” he said.

Despite these adjustments, smaller and medium-sized manufacturers, who dominate the market, have already reduced prices by Rs40 per kg/liter. However, larger brands—which account for 5% of the market share—have been slower to implement price cuts due to their extensive marketing and distribution networks.

FRIA wants special incentives for cash-strapped small industry

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) has asked the government to announce soft financing with very low interest rate and without any collateral for SMEs.

The FRIA Chairman Shahbaz Aslam, in a meeting of industry representatives, stated that the constant increase in power tariffs on the pretext of fuel adjustment had increased electricity prices and added to the already high cost of trade and industry. Seeking comparable energy tariffs for domestic industries in order to capture the global market, he stated that due to high electricity rates, power theft became rampant as the tariff was unaffordable to consumers.

The meeting forwarded several recommendations so that the small industry could deal with the challenges posed by the present

economic crisis, saying mere statements would not work unless solid measures are taken by the government, including a sizable reduction in fuel prices, bringing down key policy rate to single digit, regionally competitive energy rates and substantial cut in duties and taxes.

Shahbaz Aslam said that it is unfortunate that the State Bank has several times introduced a financing scheme for Small and Medium Enterprises, enabling them to get loans without collateral but it was never implemented in its true spirit.

The scheme was launched to improve the SMEs’ access to finances in collaboration with the government and aimed at enabling businesses that cannot offer security or collateral to access bank finance.

The FRIA Chairman urged the central bank to announce a soft loan with a

minimum markup rate, especially for SMEs to bail out their struggling businesses.

He called for significant cuts in import duties and waiver of sales tax, income tax, and additional income taxes, which are still being charged in this time of grave crisis.

Shahbaz Aslam asked the government to take concrete steps to keep the industrial wheels running especially for SMEs, to save the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small industries.

He said that to save the economy from the impacts of the slow growth, the government should announce special incentives for a cash-strapped small and medium industry, which represents more than 90% of around 3.2 million business enterprises in Pakistan, contributing 40% to GDP, employing more than 80% of non-agricultural workforce, and generating 25% of export earnings.

Trinasolar technology gains momentum

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Trinasolar, a global leader in smart photovoltaic and energy storage solutions, is offering Pakistan’s industrial sectors advanced, efficient, and cost-effective solar modules with its n-type i-TOPCon technology. As energy demand grows and industries look to control rising costs, TOPCon technology is increasingly recognized as a key driver in Pakistan’s shift to advanced renewable solutions.

According to Yifeng Chen, Vice President of Trinasolar, “TOPCon solar module technology will continue to be the trendsetter in the photovoltaic industry over the next five years.” Supported by insights from InfoLink and other PV industry leaders, Chen’s view reflects the industry-wide consensus that TOPCon has become the mainstream technology and the preferred choice of leading manufacturers.

With TOPCon’s market share expected to reach 80% of module shipments next year, this technology is cemented as the PV industry’s top choice due to its high efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and

scalability.

Compared to other photovoltaic technologies, TOPCon stands out for its high industrialization rate, superior manufacturing efficiency, and low production costs. Trinasolar’s n-type i-TOPCon Vertex N modules can achieve up to 1% higher cell efficiency and deliver 30W+ additional power output, providing a higher energy yield and greater return on investment for end users. This is particularly valuable in high-temperature areas like Pakistan’s Punjab region, where high-performance modules are beneficial.

Trinasolar is one of the first module manufacturers to mass-produce TOPCon modules and also the first company to manufacture TOPCon modules with power exceeding 700W, meeting Pakistan’s growing demand for high-output solar panels. These high-power, high-efficiency modules enable greater electricity generation per square foot, allowing users to generate more power with fewer panels and thus achieve a lower Levelized Cost of Energy. For instance, in a typical 500kW commercial and industrial solar installation,

switching from p-type 670W modules with 21.6% efficiency to n-type 720W modules with 23.2% efficiency results in an additional 37kW of capacity.

Court Notice

In The Court of Nazia Parveen, Civil Judge-VIII/JFC-I, Abbottabad, Suit No. 45/FC, Next Date of hearing: 17.01.2025, Nature of Suit: Family Suit, Mst. Shehnaz etc, VERSUS, Ahmed Ali, 1.Ahmad Ali son of Bashir Ahmad resident of House No. TC-18/6, Nawanshahr, Town committee, Tehsil & District Abbottabad presently residing at amin Khouri Building, Muhammad Bin Zaid City, United Arab Emirates. Whereas in the above-mentioned case it has been proved to the satisfaction of the court that the above-mentioned defendant cannot be served in ordinary way. It is, therefore, proclaimed Under order-5, Rule 20 CPC that if the said defendant will/ shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in Court on 17.01.2025 at 08:30 A.M. the proceeding will be taken ax-parte. No arguments of any nature shall be entertained thereafter.

Call to establish long-term and sustainable policies

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The government needs to establish long-term and sustainable policies in consultation with the real stakeholders to enhance exports, increasing foreign exchange earnings for the country. Presently, the high cost of doing business has proved to be dangerous for the export-oriented apparel industry, as the ever-increasing energy, gas and power tariffs are the real threat to the economy amidst high markup rate and continuous fluctuations exchange rate. This was stated in a meeting jointly organized by Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association here on Sunday. The participants of the meeting asked the government to take prompt measures to bring down the production costs for the export industry to enable them to compete in the international market.

PHMA North Zone Chairman Abdul Hameed said that the export industry is currently having difficulty to compete the global market because of rapid increase in production costs. He said that the high cost of production is not good for our exports.

Abdul Hameed said that high energy tariffs, growing rates of taxes, and lack of skilled labor are the main reasons behind the increase in the cost of production. Manufacturing and production industries have the potential to significantly impact economic growth by reducing unemployment in the country.

“We are the biggest employment generators and largest exporters, contributing two-third of textile exports and one-third of country’s total exports. The apparel sector has an immense potential to create jobs with comparatively low investment and less energy needs, as it generates four times the employment at one-fourth of the energy consumption

compared to other textile sectors.”

The chairman said that Pakistan’s industry is struggling in the international market due to challenges such as high inflation, political instability, increased power tariff, rising fuel costs, energy shortages, and lack of R&D.

An effective strategy is needed to improve the performance of the industrial sector. The government should facilitate exporters by providing a level playing field to them in terms of business costs, particularly in utility pricing, he suggested. He said Pakistan’s economy, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), is struggling to cope with the current economic crunch, and needs support.

Rather than providing subsidies or waivers, the industries are being burdened through rising production cost. The burden of surging oil prices in the international market is immediately transferred to consumers by the govern-

ment, but the process of reducing prices is always very slow, he noted.

The meeting was attended by PHMA North Zone Chairman Abdul Hameed, Dr. Khurram Anwar Khawaja, Shahzad Saleem Asghar, Ashar Khurram, Shahid Butt, Dr. Khurram Tariq from PHMA and Ijaz Khokhar, Sohail Sheikh, Dr Ayyazuddin, Sajid Saleem Minhas and Mubashar Naseer Butt from PRGMEA, besides the apparel industry’s representatives from Lahore, Faisalabad and Sialkot.

He asked the government to work on a fast track plan to address expansive energy issue and priority should be given to the value-added textile industry in this regard.

The chairman urged for increasing ease of doing business, lowering cost of production, paying early refunds to solve liquidity crunch, relaxing import policy for industrial raw material, and equalizing the energy tariff across the country.

‘Value-added textile export industry be top priority of govt’

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The value-added export-oriented textile industry should be given the top priority of the government, providing them maximum facilitation to meet their exports requirements. The government needs to establish long-term and sustainable policies in consultation with the real stakeholders to enhance exports, increasing foreign exchange earnings for the country. Presently, the high cost of doing business has proved to be dangerous for the export-oriented apparel industry, as the ever-increasing energy, gas and power tariffs are the real threat to the economy amidst high markup rate and continuous fluctuations exchange rate.

These views were expressed in an interactive session jointly organized by Pakistan Hosiery Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PHMA) and the Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association

(PRGMEA) here at a local hotel to review the challenges faced by the exporters.

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Wall Street climbs as markets brace for possible govt shutdown

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Wall Street stocks bounced higher Friday following a pullback in US Treasury yields as markets braced for a looming US government shutdown. Data showed the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index rose 2.4 percent in the 12 months to November, up from 2.3% in October, the Commerce Department said in a statement.

But the reading came in lower than expected, prompting a pullback in US Treasury bond yields that had risen after Federal

Reserve policy makers signaled earlier this week they expect fewer interest rate cuts in 2025. Stocks fell sharply on Wednesday after the Fed decision.

But on Friday, the broad-based S&P 500 finished at 5,930.85, up 1.1 percent for the day but down about two percent for the week.

“We have seen a nice rebound from what was, in our view, an overreaction to the Fed’s outlook on Wednesday,” said Angelo Kourkafas of Edward Jones, pointing to Friday’s inflation data as a support-

ive factor for equities.

Treasury yields pulled back following comments from Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago President Austan Goolsbee, who expressed confidence that the PCE data showed that inflation was returning to the Fed’s target of two percent.

“Over the next 12 to 18 months, rates can still go down a fair amount,” Goolsbee told CNBC.

Investors were also keeping watch on developments in Capitol Hill. US lawmakers raced to stave off a government shutdown

set to bite within hours after Donald Trump and Elon Musk sabotaged a bipartisan agreement that would have averted a shutdown.

If no deal is struck, the government will cease to be funded at midnight, and non-essential operations will start to grind to halt, with up to 875,000 workers furloughed and 1.4 million more required to work without pay.

European stocks finished the day lower although they cut their losses as Wall Street rebounded, with data showing tepid retail sales in



In brief

Pak aims for clean sweep against SA

JOHANNESBURG (Web Desk): The final ODI between Pakistan and South Africa will be played tomorrow (Sunday). The Pakistan cricket team has arrived in Johannesburg for the third and final match of the series, determined to secure a clean sweep against the Proteas. Meanwhile, South Africa will be striving to claim a consolation win. The national team will participate in a practice session in Johannesburg today. South African fast bowler Bartman has been ruled out of the squad due to a knee injury. Pakistan currently leads the three-match series 2-0, with the final game scheduled to start at 5 PM Pakistan Standard Time on December 22.

Allen beats O'Sullivan & Breccel

RIYADH (Agencies): Mark Allen beat Luca Breccel to win the Riyadh Season Snooker Championship and claim his first title of the season. Northern Ireland's Allen beat defending champion Ronnie O'Sullivan 4-2 in the semi-final before outplaying Belgium's Breccel in the final later on Friday in a 5-1 victory. "I was very nervous in the last few balls. I am happy to get over the line," Allen said. "You are never there until you're there. I played some good stuff all week." Breccel, the 2022 world champion who beat Mark Williams 4-2 in his semi-final, won the opening frame of the final but Allen levelled with a 104 clearance. A break of 109 in the fourth put Allen 3-1 up and he took the next two after the interval to win and take the £250,000 prize pot. Allen's semi-final against O'Sullivan was more competitive - with a break of 134 sealing victory. Having taken the first frame, O'Sullivan missed a red in the second, which sparked a turnaround for Allen, who took a 3-1 lead. O'Sullivan cut his deficit by winning the fifth but Allen's clearance ended the seven-time world champion's run.

Heavyweight foes Usyk, Fury set for titanic rematch

RIYADH (AFP): Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury reprise their heavyweight "fight of the century" on Saturday with multiple titles and both fighters' place in history on the line. Usyk edged a split decision at Riyadh's Kingdom Arena in May, handing Fury his sole defeat and becoming the first undisputed champion of the four-belt era. The unbeaten Ukrainian has exuded his trademark calm before the rematch while the newly bearded Fury, aching for revenge, has veered between moody silence and venomous threats. Usyk, 37, and his 36-year-old rival were locked in an incredible 11-minute face-off on Thursday that ended with the sweating Fury cursing and hurling insults. Much like their absorbing duel seven months ago, the first heavyweight unification bout in 25 years, Saturday's return to the 22,000-seat venue is difficult to call. Usyk, formerly an outstanding amateur and an Olympic champion, is 22-0 including 14 knock-outs and was undisputed cruiserweight champion before uniting the heavyweight belts within six fights. The intelligent, mobile southpaw throws his array of shots with unerring accuracy, while supreme fitness makes him notoriously dangerous in the closing rounds. Although the scoring was tight in May, he had Fury in serious trouble in the ninth when the buckling Briton took a standing eight count before being saved by the bell.

Stallions cruise into final, Markhors to face Lions in Qualifier

RAWALPINDI (APP): ABL Stallions skipper Mohammad Harris knocked an unbeaten half century while pacer Mohammad Ali grabbed four wickets to guide their team into the final with a thumping six-wicket win over Engro Dolphins on the last day of the double-league games in the Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup at Rawalpindi Stadium on Saturday.

Ali grabbed 4-15 and Hussain Talat 3-16 to bulldoze Dolphins to 131 all out before Harris cracked a 30-ball 52 not out with eight boundaries and a six to see his team overhaul the chase in 14 overs.

ABL Stallions finished with 12 points from eight games, as many as UMT Markhors got in their eight, but with a superior net run-rate Stallions qualified for the 25 December final. Markhors, who earlier in the day thumped Lake City Panthers by six wickets will play the Qualifier against Nurpur Lions on Monday. Lions finished with five wins in their quota of eight games, securing ten points.

Lake City Panthers scored six points while Engro Dolphins failed to win any of their eight games.

Once Ali and Hussain rocked Dolphins with their devastating bowling the writing was on the wall for

Dolphins. Qasim Akram hit 34-ball 40 with two sixes and as many boundaries while skipper Faheem Ashraf scored 23-ball 26 with five hits to the rope. Abbas Afridi chipped in with 11-ball 21 with three sixes.

Yasir Khan with 32 off 26 balls with six boundaries and Maaz Sadaqat with 15-ball 28 inclusive of four boundaries and a six gave Stallions an ideal start of 58 by 5.4 overs. Harris then built on that with a brisk knock, hitting the winning boundary.

In the first match of the day, sent into bat, Lake City Panthers managed 155-6 in their 20 overs with Umar Siddiq top-scoring with a 34-ball 41. He cracked three fours and two sixes. Arafat Minhas 24-ball 34 (three fours and a six) and Abdul Wahid Bangalzai 25-ball 24 with four boundaries were the others who contributed well. Left-arm pacer Mohammad Imran Jnr was the best bowler for Markhors with 3-35.

UMT Markhors overhauled the target in 13.3 overs for the loss of four wickets. Muhammad Imran hit a 34-ball 69 not out with five maximums and six boundaries. He added a quick 81 for the third wicket with Fakhar Zaman whose 28-ball 49 had seven boundaries and

two sixes. Abdul Samad showed his six hitting prowess with five hits over the boundary in his blistering 34 not out which came off just nine balls.

Scores in brief: Match 19 - UMT Markhors beat Lake City Panthers by six wickets at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium

Lake City Panthers 155-6, 20 overs (Umar Siddiq 41, Arafat Minhas 34, Abdul Wahid Bangalzai 24; Mohammad Imran Jnr 3-35)

UMT Markhors 160-4, 13.3 overs (Muhammad Imran 69 not out, Fakhar Zaman 49, Abdul Samad 34 not out; Mohammad Ibtisam 2-41)

Player of the match - Muhammad Imran (UMT Markhors) Match 20 - ABL Stallions beat Engro Dolphins by six wickets at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium

Engro Dolphins 131 all out, 20 overs (Qasim Akram 40, Faheem Ashraf 26, Mohammad Abbas Afridi 21; Mohammad Ali 4-15, Hussain Talat 3-16, Zaman Khan 2-41)

ABL Stallions 133-4, 14 overs (Muhammad Harris 52 not out, Yasir Khan 32, Maaz Sadaqat 28; Mohammad Rameez Jnr 2-29)

Player of the match - Mohammad Ali (ABL Stallions).

'Best ever' Odermatt soars to Val Gardena downhill win



VAL GARDENA (AFP): Marco Odermatt soared to victory in the World Cup downhill race at Val Gardena on Saturday, one of the few classics missing from the Swiss skier's collection.

The 27-year-old, who finished third in Friday's super-G in the Italian Dolomites, finally mastered the tricky Saslong piste which had previously eluded him. "It was one of my best downhill," said Odermatt, who celebrated wildly at the finish line after beating compatriot Franjo von Allmen by 0.45 seconds with American Ryan Cochran-Siegle just one hundredth of a second further back. "If you want to win a downhill you need a perfect run," said Odermatt.

"Today, already on the top, which is not really my section, I could ski really well. Finally I also jumped well, and then it was really perfect, I'm really happy."

It was a 40th World Cup victory and the third of the winter for the defending downhill and overall champion after his successes in the super-G at Beaver Creek, Colorado and the giant slalom at Val d'Isere, France. He matched the record of compatriot Pirmin Zurbriggen but is still far behind Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark's men's record of 86 World Cup wins in the 1970s and 1980s.

Odermatt's closest rivals could not match his speed with France's Cyprien Sarrazin and Austrian Vincent Kriechmayr having poor starts and Italian Mattia Casse, winner of Friday's super-G, labouring on key sections.

"I am very happy with it. I was not expecting such a good race," said 23-year-old Von Allmen whose only other World Cup podium came last year when he took third in the super-G at

Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

"We have an amazing team, a very young team but already so fast," added Odermatt of Von Allmen. "We are doing well and the young guns are coming, that's cool to see."

Cochran-Siegle claimed his third podium, all in Italy, after winning the super-G in Bormio in December 2020, and finishing third in the Val Gardena downhill the same season.

Odermatt moves to the top of the overall World Cup standings with 440 points - 50 points ahead of Norwegian Henrik Kristoffersen. He leads fellow Swiss racers Justin Murisier and Von Allmen in the discipline standings after the second downhill race of the season.

Kristoffersen, a specialist in technical disciplines, will be competing in the giant slalom and slalom races on Sunday and Monday respectively in Alta Badia, also in Italy.

Cavaliers cruise past Bucks, Embiid shines in Sixers win

LOS ANGELES (AFP): The Cleveland Cavaliers delivered a reality check to newly crowned NBA Cup champions Milwaukee on Friday, dominating the Bucks 124-101 to push their league-best record to 24-4.

Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points and Darius Garland added 16 for the Cavs, who led by as many as 36 points as the Bucks struggled in the absence of injured guard Damian Lillard.

Giannis Antetokounmpo, who led the Bucks to victory in the NBA Cup final against the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday, scored 33 points with 14 rebounds and three steals.

Khris Middleton, back from illness, scored 14 points off the bench for Milwaukee, but starting guards Andre Jackson Jr and AJ Green were a combined 0-for-9 from the field, neither contributing a point.

The Cavaliers, winners of

seven of their last eight, improved to 15-1 at home and got good news with the season debut of Max Strus - who had been sidelined with hip and ankle injuries.

Strus scored nine points in 19:07 minutes off the bench for Cleveland and drilled three of their 20 three-pointers. "We did it on both ends of the floor," Mitchell said. "We set the tone, offensively, defensively. Knowing they had a long trip back (we were) trying to get going early, push the pace, and we did it for 48 minutes."

Bucks coach Doc Rivers, who had called it "weird" to pick up regular-season action after playing the semi-finals and final of the in-season tournament in Las Vegas, said the game was not a good gauge of where the Bucks are. "We were flat, tired, whatever you want to call it," Rivers said. "There's no read on tonight's game... give them all the credit."

Embiid fuels Sixers In Philadelphia, the 76ers' star center Joel Embiid wore a protective mask as he returned after missing one game because of a sinus fracture to score 34 points in a 108-98 victory over the Charlotte Hornets. Embiid, who had been expected to sit out at least through Saturday after taking an inadvertent blow to the face last week, added five rebounds, nine assists, two steals and two blocked shots.

Tyrese Maxey scored 23 points and Kelly Oubre Jr. added 22 for Philadelphia, who notched their fourth win in five games as they try to climb into the race for a play-in berth. Embiid has been largely absent from the Sixers' stuttering season. The 2023 NBA Most Valuable Player was appearing in just his seventh game of the campaign after his troublesome left knee delayed his season debut.



BIRMINGHAM: Morgan Rogers of Aston Villa scores his side's second goal during the Premier League match between Aston Villa FC and Manchester City FC at Villa Park.

ICC Champions Trophy to start from February 9

LAHORE (APP): The possible schedule of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 has been revealed, according to PCB sources, the mega event will be played from February 19 to March 9.

The opening match of the ICC Champions Trophy will be held on February 19 between Pakistan and New Zealand, the sources said that the high-voltage Pak-India clash will be played on February 23 at the Dubai Stadium. After this event, the national team will play its third match against Bangladesh on February 27, while the first semi-final will be played on March 3 and the second on March 4.

According to the schedule, the final of the Champions Trophy will be held on March 9, along with another reserve day. On the other hand, all stakeholders, including the host Pakistan and the Indian Cricket Board, have reached an agreement on the issue of a neutral venue for the Champions Trophy 2025.

Muhammad Hassan Usmani wins titles in Saudi Arabia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Young Pakistani Tennis Star, Muhammad Hassan Usmani delivered a stellar performance at the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) U14 Tournament in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, clinching both singles and doubles titles in a remarkable display of skill.



According to information made available here by Pakistani Tennis Federation, Muhammad Hassan Usmani defeated top-seeded Suleyman Hudayberdiyev of Turkmenistan 6-3, 6-1 in the singles final, demonstrating exceptional technique and composure.

In a surprising twist, he then partnered with his singles opponent to win the doubles title, defeating Saudi players Anas Alzahrany and Souhail El-Taji El-Farouki in a nail-biting 7-5, 4-6, 10-8 match.

The tournament's highlight was the presence of tennis legend Rafael Nadal, who personally presented the trophies to the young champions. "It's an incredible honor to receive these trophies from Rafael Nadal, who has been my inspiration," Usmani said, visibly elated.

Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) leadership celebrated the achievement. PTF President Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi praised Usmani's performance as a significant milestone for Pakistani tennis, while Secretary General Col. Zia-ud-din Tufail congratulated the young athlete and his family. The victory underscores Pakistan's emerging talent in international junior tennis.

Villa beat Man City to deepen Guardiola's pain

BIRMINGHAM (AFP): Aston Villa beat crisis-hit Manchester City 2-1 on Saturday to heap more misery on floundering manager Pep Guardiola, who has now suffered nine defeats in his past 12 matches.

Jhon Duran finished off a fine team move to give the home side an early lead and Morgan Rogers doubled Villa's advantage in the 65th minute. Phil Foden scored his first Premier League goal of the season in stoppage time to pull one back but it proved to be too little too late.

Guardiola, in the worst run of his glittering career, said Friday that "sooner or later" things will turn around but City's fear factor has vanished and they have just one win in their past 12 games in all competitions.

City have now lost six Premier League games in the current campaign, twice as many as they suffered during the whole of last season, when they were crowned champions for a fourth straight season.

They have dropped to sixth in the Premier League, nine points behind leaders Liverpool having played two games more, while Villa leapfrogged them into fifth.

Guardiola said he trusted his players despite their shocking form. "It depends on us," he told the BBC. "The solution is bring the players back. We have just one central defender fit,

that is difficult."

"We have to think positive and I have incredible trust in the guys," he added. "Some of them have incredible pride and desire to do it. We have to find a way, step by step, sooner or later to find a way back."

Guardiola made six changes to the team side that lost last week's Manchester derby, bringing in goalkeeper Stefan Ortega and reshaping his defence with Rico Lewis, John Stones and Manuel Akanji.

Mateo Kovacic and Jack Grealish also returned.

But the defending champions started the match in chaotic fashion and could have been behind with just 15 seconds on the clock.

Untidy work from Josko Gvardiol allowed John McGinn to steal the ball and he fed Duran, whose shot from outside the box was pushed behind by Ortega. Villa were millimetres away from taking the lead from the resulting corner, with Ortega, in for injured first-choice goalkeeper Ederson, producing a superb save to deny Pau Torres. City then settled and their possession numbers topped 75 percent but they created little.

Duran strikes again Instead it was Villa who took the lead in the 16th minute through Duran after a superb team move. Youri Tielemans delivered a wonderful defence-splitting pass to Rogers, who burst

through City's backline with ease before squaring for Duran and the Colombian international finished crisply for his seventh Premier League goal of the season.

Foden tested Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez in the 35th minute after an incisive move involving Lewis. And Gvardiol squandered a glorious chance moments before half-time, heading a Grealish cross over the bar.

Guardiola brought on Kyle Walker for Stones at the break but Villa again took control, this time enjoying much more of the ball. Minutes into the second half Matty Cash lashed an attempt into the side netting after a speedy attack before Duran had a strike ruled out for offside.

Rogers, formerly of Manchester City, hit the foot of the post just before the hour mark after an intricate team move down the left. But Emery's men doubled their lead 20 minutes into the second half, with Rogers finishing unerringly from a McGinn pass.

City created little as they searched for a way back into the game until Foden pounced for a late consolation goal. Emery told TNT Sports that Villa were "feeling strong". "We played the first half very well," he said. "In the second half we kept possession more and getting in the box to score the second goal, we imposed and dominated more."

Afghanistan beat Zimbabwe in 3rd ODI, claim series win

HARARE (Agencies): Sean Williams slog-swept Rashid Khan in the 24th over of Zimbabwe's innings, but the ball ballooned off the top edge for Hashmatullah Shahidi at midwicket. Shahidi looked to catch it with a reverse cup, but dropped the ball - possibly because of the sun in his eyes - and invited the loudest cheers until then from the sparse crowd at Harare Sports Club.

They didn't have much going for them, really, since Zimbabwe were 89 for 8 at that stage. Williams, on 33 at the time, went on to score 60 at just under a run a ball, and dragged his side to 127 in 30.1 overs. Afghanistan wiped out the target of 128 with eight wickets and 23 overs in the bank.

Sediqullah Atal followed up a knock of 104 from the second ODI with 52 off 50 balls in the third, hitting four fours and two sixes on the way, and Afghanistan completed a 2-0 series win over Zimbabwe after the first ODI was washed out.

That gave Afghanistan their sixth successive ODI series win over Zimbabwe, who are yet to beat them in a bilateral series in seven attempts - the first one, back in July 2014, was shared 2-2. The chase began with just 15 runs from the first six overs, as Zimbabwe kept it tight. But Atal drove and got a top edge for four off Richard Ngarava in the seventh over, and that got Afghanistan going. Although Abdul Malik, the other opener, took his time, Atal attacked from the other end to raise the fifty

stand in the 11th over. The partnership ended at 83 when Ngarava had Malik chopping on for 29, before Brian Bennett took a blinder running and diving to his left to send Atal back. Shahidi and Rahmat Shah, however, didn't have any bothers finishing the job.

But Afghanistan's win on Saturday was set up by 18-year-old offspinner AM Ghazanfar. He bowled his quota of ten overs unchanged starting from the seventh, and finished with 5 for 33, his second ODI five-for in just 11 games. Shahidi chose to bowl first after winning the toss, and his bowlers proved the decision right. Afghanistan's seamers were getting appreciable swing even after the powerplay, while their spinners almost magically turned the ball both ways.

Eight of the ten wickets went to Ghazanfar and Rashid, who got 3 for 38. That, though, was a result of both batters not reading them well, and the on-field umpires making debatable calls - perhaps not reading the bowlers well either. In a series where the teams don't have DRS to turn to, Craig Ervine and Ben Curran walked back unhappy. Even Sikandar Raza shook his head on being given out lbw off Rashid, but whether he did that because he was disappointed with the umpire or with himself... who can tell.

Zimbabwe's innings featured a mini-collapse as well as a big crumble. But before either of those, Afghanistan's new-ball bowlers Fareed Ahmed and

Azmatullah Omarzai kept a tight leash on opening batters Curran and Joylord Gumbie. Twenty-two of the first 28 balls were dots; there were four more to start the seventh over, after which Zimbabwe lost three wickets for five runs in next to no time.

It started with Gumbie top-edging an attempted sweep off Ghazanfar to short fine-leg. Next over, Omarzai got one to seam away from Ervine, who was squared up as the ball went past. Ervine was given out caught behind, but there was no visible nick. Ghazanfar then got his second when he trapped Curran in front for 12 in the ninth over, although the first impression was that the ball was heading down the leg side.

Senior hands Raza and Williams briefly rebuilt thereafter. Williams had 21 runs off his first 22 balls, including three fours and a six, after 14 overs. But come the 16th, Raza's wicket triggered a period where Zimbabwe lost five wickets for 29 runs. He was hit on the back leg by one which turned in from Rashid, and was adjudged lbw for 13. In his next over, Rashid had Bennett well as a googly as well, as Bennett played down the wrong line.

Ghazanfar then got two more back to back, almost in identical fashion. He cleaned up both left-hand batters Tadiwanashe Marumani and Wellington Masakadza in the one over, the 19th of the innings, and each time, going around the wicket, the carrom ball fi the trick.



In brief

Christmas brings a message of peace

RAWALPINDI (APP): Christians' spiritual leader and twin cities' Archbishop Dr. Joseph Arshad has said that the festival of Christmas brings a message of love, peace, harmony and security. This day teaches us how to build a peaceful society. Lauding the steps taken by the government towards the welfare of minorities, he said, "We appreciate the government's initiatives for the welfare and protection of the rights of the minorities, particularly the Christian community". The archbishop expressed these views during a get-together in a local hotel here on Saturday. He said that the Christian community was striving for the development and progress of the beloved homeland. "The Christian community is playing its role in promoting interfaith harmony in a good way, while in this regard, the efforts of Muslim scholars as well as leaders of other religions are also commendable", he said while appreciating the role of various religious factions in maintaining interfaith harmony in the country. In his address, Hafiz Iqbal Rizvi called for the promotion of interfaith harmony through collective efforts. He also appreciated the efforts of the Christian community in this regard. Senator Khalil Tahir Sindhu, Sardar Ranjit Singh, Allama Zahid Hussain Kazmi, Pir Azmatullah, Reverend Father Sarfaraz Simon, Father Azam Siddique, Babu Sajid Amin Khokhar, Faryad Francis, Father Asif John and others were present at the ceremony.

ANF recovers 2089 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country managed to recover 2089 kg drugs worth over Rs 140 million and arrested three suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Saturday. He informed that 1270 kg hashish was recovered from an uninhabited area of Qilla Abdullah in Balochistan. In second operation, 800 kg hashish was recovered from a deserted area of Jiwan Gwadar in Balochistan. 10.8 kg hashish was recovered from a parcel sent to Rahim Yar Khan through courier office in Peshawar. 6 kg hashish hidden in a vehicle near M-1 Islamabad was recovered and an accused was arrested during the operation. In 5th operation, 2.4 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of an accused rounded up near Sher Shah Toll Plaza, Multan. In 6th operation, 370 grams hashish was recovered from accused arrested near Pindi Road, Kohat. Cases have been registered against arrested accused under Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Operation conducted against encroachments

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi, Beenish Fatima, spearheaded a major operation to eliminate illegal encroachments in key areas of the city to maintain traffic flow here Saturday. The operation was carried out including Fawara Chowk, City Sadar Road, Kashmiri Bazaar, Istbal Road, Ganjmandi Road, Dangi Khoi Road, Namak Mandi, and Gandam Mandi. CTO Beenish Fatima personally supervised the operation, ensuring immediate removal of encroachments with her team on ground. "Illegal encroachments not only black spot of the city's beauty but also create significant hurdles in traffic flow," said CTO Beenish Fatima. She emphasized that such operations must be intensified to wipe out double parking and unauthorized setups that disrupt daily commutes.

Govt committed to resolve opposition issues: Aqeel Malik

ISLAMABAD (APP): Adviser to the Prime Minister on Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel Malik Saturday reaffirmed the government's commitment to addressing opposition issues through constructive dialogue, emphasizing the importance of finding mutually acceptable solutions.

In an interview with a private news channel, Aqeel reassured that the government is taking all issues with the opposition seriously and reiterated the government's pledge to fulfil its commitments with Maulana Fazlur Rehman, underscoring the administration's willingness to engage in meaningful negotiations.

He mentioned that by adopting this conciliatory approach, the government aims to create a conducive environment for resolving outstanding issues and promoting

national stability.

Barrister Aqeel Malik stated that the matter related to Madaris will be examined within the framework of four parameters, ensuring that it is addressed in accordance with the law and the Constitution.

He added that the government is now ready to address the pending matters with Maulana Fazlur Rehman, as Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has returned to Pakistan after successfully attending the D8 summit.

With the PM back in the country, the government is expected to move forward with resolving the outstanding issues with Maulana Sahib, indicating a positive development in their dialogue.

"We are committed to finding solutions through dialogue and are taking all matters seriously, including negotiations with the opposition PTI

party", he mentioned.

A committee will be constituted with senior leadership from PML-N and allied parties to utilize the platform offered by the National Assembly Speaker and work towards resolving outstanding issues," Aqeel Ahmad added.

Responding to a query, Aqeel Malik advised PTI to adopt a serious approach and refrain from using force or blackmail through civil disobedience, adding, instead, he urged them to come forward for negotiations if they are genuinely committed to finding a solution.

Aqeel Malik also expressed admiration for the National Assembly Speaker for proposing a platform for dialogue between the government and opposition parties, paving the way for negotiations and a peaceful resolution of issues.



ISLAMABAD: A view of Christmas decoration and related stuff displaying outside shop ahead of start Christmas celebration on 25 December.

IRI holds seminar on current state of teaching in Islamic Studies

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamic Research Institute (IRI) of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) hosted an International Seminar on the Current State of Teaching and Research in Islamic Studies and Its Allied Disciplines at the Allama Iqbal Auditorium, Islamic Research Institute (IRI) International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) Faisal Masjid Campus, Islamabad.

The seminar was organized in connection with the Visit and Short-Term Exchange Student Mobility Program of the Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya (UM), Malaysia.

The event brought together distinguished dignitaries, academics, and policymakers from Pakistan and Malaysia.

Key attendees included Prof. Dr. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, Director-General

of IRI; H.E. Amb. Dato' Mohammad Azhar Mazlan, Malaysian High Commissioner to Pakistan; Allama Raghib Naeemi, Chairman, Council of Islamic Ideology; and Prof. Dr. Mohd Fauzi bin Hamat, Dean, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Khadher bin Ahmad, Deputy Dean (Student Affairs); Dr. Mohamad Azrien bin Mohamed Adnan, Deputy Dean (Undergraduate Studies); Mrs. Maimunah binti Kamaruddin, Senior Assistant Registrar; and Mrs. Nur Jannah binti Md Akhir, Project Officer. Joining them were senior faculty members from Faculty of Usuluddin (Islamic Studies) of IIUI including the Dean, Prof. Dr. Taj Afsar, Deputy Dean/HoD (Department of Study of Religions) Prof. Dr. Muhammad Akram, and representatives from UM. The semi-

nar also welcomed Post-Doctoral fellows, and faculty members of IIUI.

The seminar featured thought-provoking discussions on the evolving trends in teaching and research within Islamic Studies and its allied disciplines.

Speakers emphasized the importance of fostering global academic collaborations, enhancing interdisciplinary research, and integrating innovative pedagogical approaches.

The event highlighted the vital role of exchange programs in broadening academic horizons and building strong bilateral ties between academic institutions.

The collaboration between IIUI and the Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, marks a significant step toward strengthening academic partnerships and promoting excellence in Islamic education and research.

IWMB defends its role amid controversy over Margallah Hills National Park

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) has countered claims regarding the alleged removal of its current board, asserting that the Islamabad Nature and Wildlife Management Act 2024 has, in fact, bolstered the institution and the Margallah Hills National Park's (MHN) protection.

The Board, in a news release, clarified that the Act, which repealed the Islamabad Wildlife Ordinance 1979, does not invalidate prior notifications under the ordinance, including those related to the national park, the Board, and its employees.

Independent legal opinion, the IWMB stated, confirms that the Board remains intact with a three-year tenure, which any interference would violate.

The IWMB highlighted the importance of MHN, established to safeguard

Islamabad's natural environment. While Daman-e-Koh remains a popular getaway for middle-class families, commercial enterprises such as the now-demolished Monal Restaurant had turned the park into a playground for elites, leading to environmental degradation.

Following a Supreme Court order, the Monal Restaurant was demolished in October 2024. The IWMB estimates that this has reduced traffic to Pir Sohawa by 60%, benefiting local communities who can now travel to Islamabad more easily, particularly during emergencies.

The IWMB underscored the environmental damage caused by Monal and similar ventures like La Montana and Gloria Jeans. These businesses were developed without Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) or

compliance with environmental regulations. Monal, for instance, disposed of solid waste and wastewater directly into the environment, contaminating streams and disrupting wildlife with heavy traffic and nighttime illumination.

The Supreme Court upheld earlier rulings, ordering the demolition of such establishments and the reintegration of the land into the national park.

The IWMB is now focusing on rewilding the former Monal site into a public viewpoint and finalizing a scientific management plan for MHN.

The Board advocates sustainable development that involves local communities, emphasizing regulated kiosks for basic visitor needs, as directed by the Supreme Court.

Addressing misconceptions, the IWMB pointed out that MHN contributes significantly to the econo-



ISLAMABAD: Lord Qurban Hussain, a British Pakistani political leader of Kashmiri origin called on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar at Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

NDMA predicts light rainfall in federal capital on Mon-Tue

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on Saturday forecasted cloudy weather with chances of light rain in the Potohar region, including Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Attock, and northeastern parts of Punjab, on December 23-24 (Monday-Tuesday).

According to NDMA's National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC) weather projection for December 21-26, cold and dry conditions are expected across most parts of Punjab. Smog and fog will likely persist in the plains through December 26, 2024, potentially reducing visibility and impacting travel.

In Balochistan and Sindh, cold and dry weather is predicted throughout the forecast period, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is expected to experience cold conditions with isolated rainfall in various areas. Snowfall is likely over the province's hilly regions.

Similarly, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir are forecasted to see mainly cold weather, with isolated rain and snowfall over the hills.

The NDMA has advised local authorities, emergency responders, and the public to remain vigilant and take necessary precautions during this period.

Residents of northern and hilly areas are urged to exercise caution while traveling due to the risk of slippery roads and reduced visibility.

Meanwhile, people in smog-affected regions should limit outdoor exposure and adopt protective measures in low-visibility conditions.

The NDMA recommended using the Pak NDMA Disaster Alert App for updates on alerts, safety guidelines, and weather-related information.

Police enhances security measures for diplomats and foreign nationals

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police Security Division introduced comprehensive reforms in 2024 to enhance the safety of foreign diplomats, embassies and international institutions in the capital.

To fortify the security of foreign embassies, diplomats and institutions, a protective wall was constructed around all four sides of the Diplomatic Enclave, complete with an electric fence, an official told APP on Saturday.

He said that to ensure effective surveillance, a Safe City control room was established with modern cameras. He added that the welfare of individuals into the Diplomatic Enclave is now recorded through advanced high-tech tablets, while body-worn cameras and iron gates have been installed in high-security zones.

A Cascade Service Center was also set up within the Diplomatic Enclave to provide global-standard facilities under one roof,

offering 24/7 services to applicants, including all police-related services for diplomats, he added.

Additionally, a Special Protection Unit (SPU) was formed to ensure the security of Chinese nationals, with 415 young police officers assigned to safeguard them. A dedicated control room was also established to address the security-related issues faced by Chinese citizens in a timely manner, he said.

The ICT Police also launched innovative initiatives, including a community horse-riding school for diplomats and citizens and a Diplomatic Diagnostic Center for the welfare of police officers, where medical services are available at discounted rates, he said.

In 2024, the ICT Police Security Division ensured top-notch security during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) conference for international delegations, maintaining order in high-security zones and ensuring law

and order, he told APP. He added that throughout the year, the division ensured foolproof security for 31 National Assembly sessions, 17 Senate sessions, four joint sessions, in-camera briefings and 903 other national and international conferences and events.

Moreover, police officers provided excellent security during the arrival and departure of 15 VIP international delegations in the federal capital.

DIG Security Jawad Tariq said that the responsibilities entrusted to the ICT Police Security Division are of utmost importance, including the security of foreign diplomats, judges and all embassies, as well as the government and private offices located in high-security zones. DIG further stated that the ICT Police is carrying out its duties professionally and effectively, using all available resources to ensure the security of foreign guests and maintain the country's dignity and identity.

Efforts underway to ensure an uninterrupted gas supply

RAWALPINDI (APP): The General Manager of Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) Rawalpindi, Umar Hayat has stated that earnest efforts are underway to ensure an uninterrupted supply of natural gas during the winter season.

Speaking about the situation, Hayat emphasized that gas is being distributed judiciously to ensure all consumers have access, even as demand typically surges during colder months.

He also highlighted the company's commitment to addressing challenges and ensuring households receive the energy they need to stay warm.

The General Manager said that despite awareness campaigns, unfortunate incidents still occur due to

negligence. "We must promote a culture of safe gas use," he said, adding that families and staff in institutions should be educated about necessary precautions.

He urged consumers to adopt precautionary measures to prevent accidents caused by carelessness.

He advised that safety instructions, especially for using gas heaters, should be displayed in hotels and guest houses. Consumers should always use quality-branded gas appliances and regularly inspect house pipelines for potential leaks, he added.

"If you smell gas, check for leaks using soap water and never use a match.

Only hire certified plumbers to fix leaks," he stressed. He warned against using electrical

switches or fans in case of a gas leak, as sparks could ignite a fire or explosion. Instead, he recommended closing the main valve, opening windows and doors for ventilation, and seeking professional help.

Hayat also discouraged using rubber pipes with gas heaters and stressed ensuring proper airflow in rooms with heaters.

Before going to bed, he advised consumers to turn off all gas appliances and close the main supply valve. For emergencies, consumers can contact the SNGPL helpline at 1199 or visit their nearest complaint center, available 24/7.

The General Manager concluded by urging everyone to prioritize safety to prevent accidents during the winter months.



ISLAMABAD: A beautiful sight of metro buses traversing through the twin cities. —APP Photo

IEA to set up special courts
KABUL (Ariana News): Mawlawi Hebatullah Akhundzada, the supreme leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), has issued a decree to establish special courts to address pensions, Bakhtar news agency reported on Saturday. According to the decree, the courts must confirm and process pensions in accordance with Sharia and law. Pensioners have repeatedly voiced concern over delay in payment, saying that their financial challenges are growing.

Court acquits Afghan citizen
KABUL (Khaama Press): Haroon Hakimi, an Afghan citizen accused of sexual assault, was officially declared innocent by a court in Virginia, USA. The trial took place on Friday, December 20, in the state of Virginia, where a 12-member jury found Hakimi not guilty of the sexual assault charges brought against him. Hakimi had been accused of sexual assault by a 27-year-old woman residing in Virginia in late February last year.

14 deaths from gas poisoning in Kabul in two months

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Kabul Police Command told TOLOnews that 14 people have died in the past two months due to gas poisoning in the capital. Khalid Zadrán, the spokesperson for the Kabul Police Command, said that among the deceased were women and children. “As a result of these incidents, nearly 14 of our compatriots have lost their lives, including women, youth, and children,” Zadrán said. At the same time, some residents of Kabul said that due to the high price of firewood and the lack of electricity, they often use gas heaters to warm their homes, which sometimes causes gas poisoning and the death of individuals. Fayaz, a Kabul resident, said: “Due to the current issues, poverty, hardship, and lack of electricity, many people use gas heaters, which has resulted in significant casualties.” Sulaiman, another resident of Kabul, said: “Recently, several incidents caused by improper use of gas have occurred, resulting in the death of many people, especially women. These accidents are due to negligence on one hand and carelessness on the other. Efforts must be made to ensure safer usage of gas.” Abdul Basir Uchqon, a physician, commented on the matter: “With the arrival of winter and cold weather, many of our compatriots use gas, oil, and even animal dung for heating. Incomplete combustion of these materials produces toxic carbon monoxide gas. While minimal use is not problematic, excessive exposure can lead to poisoning.” With the onset of winter, many Kabul residents, especially those living in apartments, rely on gas heaters to heat their homes due to the lack of electricity.

‘Others can learn from Ahmed al-Sharaa’



FARAH (TOLOnews): Zalmay Khalilzad, the former US special envoy for Afghan peace, referred to the US removal of the bounty on Ahmed al-Sharaa, the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), and asked: “Are the Taliban paying attention?” Without pointing to any specific country or individual, he said that others in similar circumstances can learn from Ahmed al-Sharaa about how to integrate into the mainstream international system. “Others in similar circumstances can learn from Ahmed al-Sharaa how to join the mainstream international system,” Khalilzad wrote on X. Earlier, Reuters reported that the US had decided to cancel the \$10 million reward for the capture of Ahmed al-Sharaa. Barbara Leaf, a senior US diplomat for Middle Eastern affairs, raised this issue after a US diplomatic delegation met with the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Damascus. She said that this decision was made based on Ahmed al-Sharaa’s commitment that “terrorist groups cannot pose a threat.” The US had previously set the reward for information leading to the capture of Ahmed al-Sharaa, the leader of HTS. This was the first visit by senior US State Department officials to Syria in more than a decade. The visit was part of the resumption of US diplomatic engagement with the transitional government in Syria following the fall of Bashar al-Assad.

Crackdown on spurious medicine demanded

ZARANJ (Pajhwok): Some residents of Nimroz complain about sales of low-quality and expired medicine in Zaranj, the capital of northwestern province, urging the government to crack down on the sales of such drugs. However, the Public Health Department promised a solution to the problem, saying all possible measures will be taken to curb the practice. Hashmatullah Noori, an inhabitant of Chahar Burjak district who brought his ailing mother to the provincial hospital in Zaranj, grumbled about the presence of spurious and expired medicine in the market. He said: “My mother is suffering from heart issues, diabetes and blood pressure. Whenever I purchase medicines from pharmacies, they lack efficacy due to their inferior quality.” He urged the government to take stringent measures to prevent the sale of low-quality drugs in the country in the interest of public health. Mohammad Karim, a resident of Zaranj, also expressed his concern at the existence of poor-quality medicines at the city pharmacies. He recalled: “Last week, I purchased medicine from a pharmacy in the city for my daughter, who had a cold. But her condition further worsened after she took the medicine. When I brought her to the doctor, he checked the sell-by date. He found the medicine had expired.” He also urged the department concerned to prevent the sale of specious medicines. Halima, another resident of Zaranj who is suffering from psychological stress, also suggested: “The pharmacies that put people’s lives at risk should be closed and wholesalers and importers of low-quality medicines should be arrested.” Meanwhile, Public Health Director Maulvi Abdul Rahman Abdullah told Pajhwok Afghan News his department had taken serious monitoring measures to provide adequate health services to the people. He pointed out public health supervision teams had monitored 77 pharmacies in Zaranj this year and 12 of them had been closed due to non-professionals activities, non-compliance with health standards and existence of expired medicines in the current year. Operations of five pharmacies have been suspended. The teams also monitored grocery stores, bakeries, restaurants, laboratories and health centres in the provincial capital, he added. Abdullah revealed that eight tonnes of low-quality and expired medicines and food had also been torched. He explained out of 15 laboratories, one had been sealed due to non-professional activities. Three dental clinics were also sealed in compliance-with sanitary principles. The process of monitoring of pharmacies would continue and legal action would be taken against those selling expired and poor quality drugs, the official concluded.

Turkey arrests, deports 60 Afghan refugees

Following a surge in arrests and deportations of Afghan refugees in Turkey, officials have reported that 60 Afghan refugees were detained in the cities of Izmir and Bitlis, with 21 of them deported. NTV television reported that these refugees were detained over the past week due to “lack of legal residency documents” and subsequently deported. Turkish authorities have also arrested three individuals on charges of human trafficking and handed them over to judicial and legal bodies. The report mentioned that 39 of these refugees were detained in the tourist district of Cesme in Izmir, with the deportation process for them already underway. This comes amid a growing trend of arrests and deportations of Afghan refugees in recent months from Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. Earlier, the Turkish Coast Guard reported the detention of 60 Afghan refugees, including 27 children, as part of their operations. According to official statistics, over 300,000 Afghan refugees live in Turkey, many of whom face serious challenges, including arrests, residency restrictions, and forced deportations. Turkey has intensified its operations targeting Afghan refugees, with officials repeatedly emphasizing their commitment to returning these individuals to their home country. The plight of Afghan refugees being deported to Afghanistan amid the harsh winter conditions adds another layer of suffering to their already difficult lives. Many return to a country grappling with economic collapse, food insecurity, and political instability, leaving them vulnerable to severe hardship. International organizations and neighboring countries must urgently address this humanitarian crisis by ensuring that deported refugees receive adequate shelter, food, and medical assistance upon their return to Afghanistan. Collaborative efforts are essential to uphold the dignity and rights of these vulnerable individuals.

Mother of five disabled children struggling with challenges

KABUL (Pajhwok): Tahira, a mother of five disabled children lives in a hut in Kabul’s Chihildukhtaran area and has been grappling with extreme poverty and hunger. This mother expects a helping hand from charitable organizations and individuals. A Pajhwok Afghan News reporter met this mother who leads a life full of miseries. She said she married a man 28 years ago in western Ghor province and had a lovely and happy life at the beginning. She said her husband owned a cart and would work during day time to support his family. The happy life of Tahira did not last longer because her first child was born with a physical and mental disability. Her son could not talk and did not understand what other people told him. Her son (Qurban Ali) is now 26 years old and his head abnormally grew bigger but can talk as other children and did his chores by himself. Tahira added with the passage of time, her problems doubled and tripled because her second and third children also suffered from both mental and physical disabilities. The disability of Tahira’s children worried her and she knocked at many doors seeking their treatment, but all of her attempts had no favourable result because doctors told her that this was an incurable congenital health problem. “My disabled children need serious attention, their condition is worsening day by day while I have never neglected my motherliness responsibility towards my children,” she said. She said: “I mostly lose patience, but I have never been ungrateful to Allah, because it is not good to be... I tell myself that of course it is my destiny and fate, I still thank Allah no matter what.” With all her patience, she had never experienced any failure in serving her disabled children. Her fourth child Abu Zar 14 is healthy, he is in Iran and her fifth child Fatima 12 is also healthy. “With all hardships and problems in my life, my last two healthy children give me a hope of a brighter future. Unfortunately her sixth and seventh children Rahman 10 and Mukhtar 6 also suffer from both physical and mental issues”, she said. The birth of Tahira’s last two children with disabilities prompted her husband to break up with her and marry another woman, the sourest memory of Tahira’s life. Tahira, after separation of her husband, has been solely looking after her children and feeding them besides struggling with other problems of life which dragged her to Kabul city. As tears rolled down her cheeks, Tahira said she was worried about the future of her five disabled children. “As they grow day by day, they are not able to go somewhere alone, they cannot distinguish between good and bad. I am trying to serve them the best way until I am alive, after I die, I don’t know who will take care of them.” To win the bread for her children, Tahira has sent her daughter to a carpet weaving factory and her son Abu Zar to Iran to work there besides she expects charities.

‘Afghan men must stand with women to support viable future of country’

KABUL (Ariana News): Afghan men, inside and outside the country, must stand with their wives, daughters, and sisters to support a hopeful and viable future for the country, Rina Amiri, US Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls and Human Rights, said on Saturday. The statement comes as the world next week marks two years since the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) banned Afghan women and girls from universities and women from working for nongovernmental organizations. Amiri said an open letter on X that through these and more than 80 gender discriminatory policies, “the Taliban (IEA) have stripped women and girls of their agency, mobility, education, livelihood, voice, and access to life-saving medical institutes.” She called on the international community to continue prioritizing human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, in any engagement with the IEA. “Progress in improving diplomatic and economic ties must be meaningfully linked to concrete measures to reverse extreme policies targeting women and girls.” Amiri also called on states, donors, academic institutions, and the private sector to match the resilience and creativity of Afghan women and girls with concrete support equipping them with resources, technology, education, employment tools, and economic opportunities. “Afghanistan will remain in darkness so long as the dreams of Afghan women and girls are dimmed,” Amiri said. “The road ahead will be long, but hopelessness and resignation are not an option.” “The world is being tested. If we fail Afghan women and girls, we fail women and girls everywhere and set a dangerous precedent that will be replicated elsewhere, far beyond Afghanistan.” This comes as the Islamic Emirate has repeatedly said that the rights of women and girls are ensured in Afghanistan according to Sharia.



G7+ countries concerned over ban on medical studies in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Special Representatives for Afghanistan of Canada, EU, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Türkiye, the UK, and the US expressed concern over the ban on medical education for girls in Afghanistan and said that the decision will have devastating consequences for all Afghans. The ban has neither been officially confirmed nor denied by the Islamic Emirate, but girls in private medical institutions across the country have been told not to attend the classes until further notice. In the joint statement, the envoys also expressed concerns about recent security incidents in Afghanistan and asked the Islamic Emirate to continue working against terrorist attacks. They also urged inclusive national dialogue to achieve lasting stability in Afghanistan while calling for implementation of UNSC Resolution 2721 (2023). “The envoys highlighted the necessity to continue helping Afghans who are suffering in the ongoing humanitarian crisis with appropriate consideration for vulnerable populations,” reads the joint statement. The special representatives for Afghanistan also reaffirmed that international NGOs are important to humanitarian work in the country. In the joint statement, the envoys said: “Look forward to deepening engagement with neighboring countries and other countries of the region on a joint response to the developing situation in Afghanistan, including countering potential threats such as terrorism and illegal migration to regional security and stability emanating from Afghanistan.” They also commended the efforts by the Islamic countries and the OIC for engaging with the Islamic Emirate on the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. The meeting, which was also attended by the deputy head of UNAMA, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights, and representatives of the World Bank and the OIC, was held in Geneva on December 16.

Swan oil ineffective, harmful for health, says physicians

KABUL (Pajhwok): Some people in the capital Kabul sell swan oil for bone pain relief, but physicians said the lubricant was not a remedy for bone pain but it could cause skin and other health issues. But spokesman for the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) called the use of swan oil as a “traditional method” among the people for some problems adding the officials of the MoPH were trying to curb sub-standard and low quality medicines in the cities. **Swan oil sold in Kabul** The Swan oil is sold in many parts of the capital city of Kabul and its sellers attract buyers using their loudspeakers for their marketing and vehicles. Swan oil seller Maula Dad told Pajhwok Afghan News they purchased swans in western Herat province, and then extracted its oil after slaughtering using some machines. He said: “Each of the swans produced around one or two kilograms of oil and then they mixed it with olive and kharatin (Zarareeh) oil and sold to their customers.” According to Maula Dad, the suppliers purchased each of the swans for up to 20,000 Afs. After selling its oil, every bird earned them 5,000 Afs profit through which they supported their life. Maula Dad said the oil of swan was good for those people who suffered from joints and bone pains. Shahzada, 60, from Dehsabz district of Kabul said he had used the swan oil: “I bought this oil in Karabagh district and reduced my legs pains for a long time. However I did not visit any doctors seeking my treatment, but the oil was very beneficial in reducing the pains. Shahzada thought that the use of this oil was a cheaper remedy for such health issues, he said he would purchase it again. But Dermatologist Dr. Zalmay Khan Ahmadzai said the swan oil had no benefit in reducing such pains but caused many other skin and health issues. Ahmadzai said the oil was produced from low quality items and its use for longer time could cause allergies, inflammation and other serious health problems for people. He said: “If swan oil or any other similar oil is consumed by humans, it would harm their liver and cause hepatitis which then can lead to the damage of liver.” He emphasized on the application of other natural and scientific remedies for curing such health issues. However, spokesman for the MoPH Dr. Sharafat Zaman considered the use of swan oil for pain as a “traditional method” among some people and said the government officials were trying to curb sub-standard and low quality medicines in the cities. He said the people of this country lived in traditional community adding fighting such customs needed more time, he has also asked from the people to prevent the use of unapproved methods and sub-standard medicines. It is pertinent to mention that people in Afghanistan turned to the use of cheap swan-oil for their health issues due to their economic problems.



60% of first phase of Bakhshabad Dam completed

FARAH (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Energy and Water has announced that nearly 60% of the construction work on the first phase of the Bakhshabad Dam in Farah province has been completed. Matuallah Abid, the spokesperson for the ministry, told TOLOnews that the dam has the capacity to irrigate more than 68,000 acres of land and will generate 27 megawatts of electricity once completed. Abid stated: “The Bakhshabad Dam, located in Farah province, is one of the key projects of the Ministry of Energy and Water. Currently, approximately 60% of the first phase has been completed. In this phase, there are two tunnels, each 500 meters long. Fortunately, the excavation of these tunnels has been completed, and concrete work is now underway.” Meanwhile, the Chamber of Commerce and Investment considers the construction of water dams very beneficial for water resource management and energy production. Mirzaman Popal, acting Head of Administration and Finance at the Chamber of Commerce and Investment, said: “The water resources of Afghanistan, which are currently flowing freely, such as the Kunar River, the Helmand River, and other major rivers like the Kokcha River, have the potential to support the construction of large dams. These dams can fulfill Afghanistan’s electricity needs and even allow for the export of electricity to other countries.” Some experts argue that for years, Afghanistan’s water has flowed abundantly into neighboring countries, and the Islamic Emirate must take necessary measures to manage these resources. Selab Samandar, an economic analyst, said: “Managing the country’s water not only strengthens and develops agriculture but also creates job opportunities for people through the construction of such dams and helps recharge underground water resources.” Previously, the Ministry of Energy and Water stated that the construction of the Bakhshabad Dam requires a budget of \$430 million, and the caretaker government is seeking financial support from the public to fund this project.



PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi shaking hands with Qaumi Watan Party Chairman, Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao.

JI warns of nationwide protest over electricity prices

F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer, Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman, has announced that if the government does not reduce electricity prices, his party will initiate a nationwide protest. Speaking to the media after addressing party members in Faisalabad, he urged the public to be prepared for the call to action. He emphasized that Jamaat-e-Islami has no choice but to take a stand for the people's rights if no relief is provided.

During the meeting, Naeem-ur-Rehman mentioned that Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi had visited the Jamaat-e-Islami headquarters in Mansoura to brief the leadership on the progress of the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) agreements. He reiterated that if the government fails to provide any relief to the masses, Jamaat-e-Islami would not hesitate to launch a protest movement.

Jamaat-e-Islami leaders, including Punjab Central Ameer Javed Kasuri and District Ameer Mehboob-uz-Rahman Butt, were also present during the gathering. Naeem-ur-Rehman further stressed that his party was forming public committees nationwide, with plans to launch a full-scale

struggle for the rights of the people. However, he urged the government to act quickly and reduce electricity tariffs before the situation escalates. He also criticized the government for its lack of sensitivity toward the public's hardships, citing a recent decision by the Punjab Assembly to increase the salaries of its members by 1,000 percent on the same day that a 25 percent increase in gas prices was announced.

Naeem-ur-Rehman condemned the ruling elite for continuing to enrich itself while ordinary citizens are burdened with rising costs of living. He also pointed out that misleading statistics are being presented regarding the country's economic situation, and he called for taxes on landlords, relief for small farmers, and an end to the sugar mafia's exploitation of the sugarcane crop.

On the issue of madrasa registration, Naeem-ur-Rehman expressed his party's support for the 2019 agreement signed by madrasa organizations and reiterated that Jamaat-e-Islami is in favor of registering madrasas according to this agreement. He also stressed that those wishing to register under the Madrasa Societies Act should not be obstructed. He stated that this issue should not be tied to the controversial 26th

Amendment, which he claimed weakened the judiciary and further entrenched the elite. Addressing political issues, Naeem-ur-Rehman criticized the current Prime Minister, calling him a product of "Form 47" and claiming that the current government came to power without popular support. He also referenced the political struggles of Nawaz Sharif, accusing him of accepting fraudulent election victories and continuing to support family members in power.

The Jamaat-e-Islami leader also made a strong statement regarding anti-national propaganda, asserting that anyone involved in such activities, regardless of their political affiliation, should not be tolerated. He emphasized the importance of protecting the country's ideological foundation and called on people to voice their grievances through democratic means and public support.

Concluding his address, Naeem-ur-Rehman reaffirmed Jamaat-e-Islami's commitment to changing the outdated system and fighting for the supremacy of the people, the constitution, and the rule of law. He called on workers to spread the party's message, mobilize the youth, and prepare for a major movement aimed at challenging the existing political and social order.

Pakistan Navy ships visits Kuwait and Iraq

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: During an overseas deployment to the Arabian Gulf, Pakistan Navy Ships RASADGAR and AZMAT visited Port Al Shuwaikh, Kuwait, while PMSS DASHT visited Port Umm Qasr, Iraq. The PN flotilla was led by Commander 14th Destroyer Squadron, Commodore Muhammad Umair.

Upon arrival at the host ports, the Pakistan Navy ships were warmly received by representatives of Pakistan embassies and officials from the host navies. The Mission Commander, along with the Commanding Officers, held meetings with the naval leadership of both countries. During these interactions, matters of mutual interest, Navy-to-Navy engagements, and cooperation in maritime security were discussed. The Mission Commander conveyed well wishes from Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naved Ashraf, to the people and navies of host countries.

Following the port calls, both PN and PMSA ships conducted Passage Exercises with Kuwaiti and Iraqi naval vessels. These exercises and maneuvers at sea aimed to enhance interoperability between the navies and promote shared learning through coordinated activities. The visits of the PN flotilla to Kuwait and Iraq are expected to further strengthen the existing diplomatic ties and cordial relations with these friendly nations.

US State Dept gives nod to arms sales for Egypt

WASHINGTON: The United States State Department has approved the potential sale of more than \$5bn in arms for Egypt. The State Department informed Congress on Friday that it had approved the sale of \$4.69bn worth of equipment for 555 US-made M1A1 Abrams tanks operated by Egypt, along with \$630m in Hellfire air-to-surface missiles and \$30m in precision-guided munitions.

In a statement issued that day, it said the sale would support US "foreign policy and national security" by helping to improve the security of a "major" non-NATO ally that had acted as an important strategic partner in the Middle East. Egypt and the US have worked increasingly closely since the outbreak of the war in Gaza in October 2023, with Cairo playing a role in negotiating a ceasefire.

The deals come despite ongoing concern in Washington over the Egyptian government's poor human rights record under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Rights group Amnesty estimates that Egypt currently holds about 60,000 political prisoners, including British-Egyptian activist Alaa Abd El-Fattah, jailed for "spreading false news" after sharing a Facebook post about alleged police brutality.

Egypt has in the last two years pardoned hundreds of political prisoners. But rights groups have said at least three times that many have been arrested over the same period. US President Joe Biden took office in 2021 pledging a harder line on Egypt over human rights concerns, but his administration has approved several arms deals. In 2022, his administration approved the sale to Egypt of 12 Super Hercules C-130 transport aircraft and air defence radar systems totalling an estimated \$2.5bn.

The State Department's notification of the latest potential sale to Congress did not indicate that a contract has been signed or that negotiations have concluded. The proposed sale would "not alter the basic military balance in the region", said the statement, adding that transactions related to the Abrams tanks would take up to a decade to implement. The US Congress can still block the sales, but such attempts are usually unsuccessful. Cairo is one of the largest recipients of US security aid since its peace treaty with Israel in 1979. The largest recipient is Israel. — Aljazeera

Bushra Bibi granted interim bail in 32 terrorism cases

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Rawalpindi on Saturday approved interim bail of Bushra Bibi, the wife of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, in 32 cases till January 13, her counsel said.

According to details, Bushra Bibi appeared before the ATC along with her counsel and sought bail in total of 32 cases, including 23 pertaining to May 9 violence. The former first lady has been granted interim bail in 32 cases registered in Rawalpindi, Attock and Chakwal.

She appeared in court at the hearing and provided the necessary surety bonds to obtain interim bail. Bushra Bibi left the court premises after the bail was granted, and her next court appearance is set for mid-January.

Her counsel, Faisal Malik argued that the cases registered against Bushra Bibi are 'politically motivated and aimed at vengeance'. Speaking to the media, Faisal Malik said that Bushra Bibi has surrendered herself to the ATC, adding that she was nominated in 23 cases in Rawalpindi alone. Earlier, an accountability court in Rawalpindi suspended non-bailable arrest warrants issued against Bushra Bibi in ₹190 million case.

The accountability court in Rawalpindi, presided over by Judge Nasir Javed Rana, had suspended the non-bailable arrest warrants and adjourned the hearing until December 12. During the hearing, Imran Khan informed the court that he intended to present witnesses in his defense, while Bushra Bibi stated that she does not wish to present any witnesses.

Earlier on December 13, Bushra Bibi, Imran Khan and others had been named in an FIR filed over the deaths of three Rangers personnel during the party's protest in Islamabad on November 26. According to the FIR, registered at Ramna Police Station, Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi, along with other party leaders, are accused of murder, terrorism, and other charges. The FIR states that the plan to attack the Rangers personnel was hatched in Adiala Jail, where Imran Khan had met with his party leaders. The plan was executed by Bushra Bibi and other party workers, who incited the protesters to attack the Rangers personnel.

The FIR also named other PTI leaders, including Omar Ayub, Sheikh Waqas Akram, Salman Akram Raja, Ali Amin Gandapur, Murad Saeed, Zulfi Bukhari, Raof Hassan and Hammad Azhar, who allegedly conspired to attack the Rangers personnel.

ATC extend cop remand in Police Lines bombing

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Peshawar has extended the physical remand of policeman named Wali Muhammad alleged facilitator of Police Lines blast by 14days, Saturday.

The court granted the extension after the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) requested more time to investigate the suspect. The CTD officer told the court that Wali Muhammad was allegedly involved in facilitating the suicide bomber who carried out the attack on the Police Lines in Peshawar.

The CTD also alleged that Wali Muhammad had links with a banned organization, received training in Afghanistan and was involved in other illegal activities. ATC had initially granted a 10-day physical remand of Wali Muhammad, which was expired yesterday.

However, the CTD requested an extension, stating that they needed more time to investigate the suspect.

The court accepted the CTD's request and extended Wali Muhammad's physical remand by 14 more days. It is worth noting that on 30th January 2023, a blast at the Police Lines in Peshawar killed over 80 police personnel and injured other 245 persons.

Special Model Court acquits three culprits: The Special Model Court Peshawar has acquitted three accused named Babar Ali, Muzammil and Mehr Ali in a case involving the smuggling of 21 kilograms of hashish due to lack of evidence.

According to the prosecution, Chamkani police station received information that the accused were planning to smuggle a large quantity of narcotics into Punjab. Acting on this information, the police conducted a raid on a vacant

plot in Chamkani and recovered 21 kilograms of hashish and two kilograms of heroin. Two of the accused, Babar Ali and Muzammil were arrested on the spot, while Mehr Ali managed to escape.

The counsel Imad u Din Chamkani advocate argued that the charges against the accused were baseless and that there was no evidence to support the prosecution's claims. He also pointed out that the plot where the raid was conducted did not belong to the accused, and that there were no witnesses or evidence to support the police's story.

The court, after hearing the arguments, acquitted the accused due to a lack of evidence. The court's decision was based on the fact that the prosecution failed to provide any concrete evidence against the accused, and that the police's story was not supported by any witnesses or evidence.

Syria's new rulers name foreign minister

DAMASCUS (Reuters): Syria's new rulers have appointed a foreign minister, the official Syrian news agency (Sana) said on Saturday, as they seek to build international relations two weeks after ex-president Bashar al-Assad was ousted. The ruling General Command named Asaad Hassan al-Shibani as foreign minister, Sana said.

A source in the new administration told Reuters that this step "comes in response to the aspirations of the Syrian people to establish international relations that bring peace and stability". No details were immediately available about Shibani. Syria's de facto ruler, Ahmed al-Sharaa, has actively engaged with foreign delegations since assuming power, including hosting the UN's Syria envoy and senior US diplomats.

Sharaa has signalled a willingness to engage diplomatically with international envoys, saying his primary focus is on reconstruction and achieving economic development. He has said he is not interested in engaging in any new conflicts. The United States, other Western powers and many Syrians were glad to see rebel groups led by Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) topple Assad, but it is not clear whether the Islamist group will impose strict sharia law or show flexibility and move towards democracy.

HTS was part of Al Qaeda until Sharaa broke ties with it in 2016. Syrian rebels seized control of Damascus on December 8, forcing Assad to flee after more than 13 years of civil war and ending his family's decades-long rule. Forces under the command of Sharaa — better known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani — installed a three-month caretaker government that had been ruling a rebel enclave in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib.

Washington designated Sharaa a terrorist in 2013, saying Al Qaeda in Iraq had tasked him with overthrowing Assad's rule and establishing sharia law in Syria. US officials said on Friday that Washington would remove a \$10 million bounty on his head. The war killed hundreds of thousands of people, caused one of the biggest refugee crises of modern times and left cities bombed to rubble and the economy hollowed out by global sanctions.

Israel kills 7 children in air strike on Gaza

GAZA (AFP): An Israeli air strike has killed 12 members of a family, including seven children, in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Civil Defence rescue agency has reported. A video posted by the agency on its Telegram channel on Friday evening showed its staff retrieving victims from under the rubble of the Khallah family home in Jabalia.

"All of the martyrs are from the same family, including seven children, the oldest aged six," civil defence spokesman Mahmoud Basal told the AFP news agency. Basal added that the air raid injured 15 other people.

The Israeli army told AFP it had struck "several terrorists who were operating in a military structure belonging to the Hamas terrorist organisation and posed a threat to IDF troops operating in the area". "According to an initial examination, the reported number of casualties resulting from the strike does not align with the information held by the IDF," it added. Pope Francis on Saturday condemned the bombing of children in Gaza as "cruelty". "Yesterday children were bombed. This is cruelty, this is not war," he said. "I want to say it because it touches my heart." Israel continued its attacks across the Gaza Strip on Friday, more than 14 months into its assault on Gaza.

At least eight people were killed by a drone missile that hit a residential building in the market street of Nuseirat refugee camp,

according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. Four people were also killed in an air raid on Beit Hanoun, Al Jazeera correspondents said. The victims were two girls and their parents. The bodies of three brothers were also retrieved from the rubble of a bombed home near Kamal Adwan Hospital.

Gaza has become a "graveyard" as heavy winter rains, hunger, dire living conditions and ongoing hostilities continue to endanger lives, UNRWA (the United Nations' Palestinian refugee agency) Senior Emergency Officer Louise Wateridge warned on Friday. "An entire society here is now a graveyard ... Over two million people are trapped," she said, speaking from the Nuseirat camp.

"It's impossible for families to shelter in these conditions," she said. "Most people are living under fabric, they don't even have waterproof structures and 69 percent of the buildings here have been damaged or destroyed. There's absolutely nowhere for people to shelter from these elements." UNRWA provides assistance to nearly six million Palestinian refugees across Gaza, the occupied West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Israeli politicians in October passed legislation to bar UNRWA from operating in Israel and occupied East Jerusalem while raising the prospect of similar measures against other aid agencies. Sweden on Friday

announced plans to stop funding UNRWA in response to Israel's ban but pledged to double its aid to Gaza via other groups.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said on X, formerly Twitter, that the Swedish government's decision was "disappointing" and came "at the worst time for Palestine refugees". In a resolution adopted on Friday, the UN General Assembly asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an advisory opinion clarifying what international law says about Israel's responsibility to allow the aid work of the UN, international organisations, and third countries in Palestinian territory.

Earlier this year, ICJ judges ordered Israel to halt its offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, withdraw from the enclave and provide safety and humanitarian access to the people of Gaza. Israel has not complied. These provisional measures were part of a case brought by South Africa — later joined by several other countries — accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military says it failed to intercept a missile from Yemen claimed by Houthis rebels that fell in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa area. The military reported the attack on its Telegram channel on Saturday, stating that "one projectile launched from Yemen" was identified after sirens went off in "central Israel" and that "unsuccessful interception attempts were made".

32 people killed as bus, truck collide in Brazil

BRASILIA: At least 32 people have been killed when a passenger bus and a truck collided on a highway in southeastern Brazil. The fire department in Minas Gerais state, which responded to the crash near the town of Lajinha early on Saturday, said "between 32 and 35 people" were killed.

It said earlier that 13 people were taken to hospitals near the city of Teofilo Otoni. The bus had reportedly departed from Sao Paulo and was carrying 45 passengers. Authorities said the bus blew a tyre, causing the driver to lose control and collide with the truck. A car also collided with the

bus, but all three of its passengers survived, according to the fire department.

All victims have been removed from the site, and an investigation is being conducted to determine the cause of the accident, authorities said. Governor Romeu Zema wrote on X that he ordered "full mobilisation" of the Minas Gerais government to assist survivors and families of the victims. "We are working to ensure that families of the victims are supported to face this tragedy in the most humane way possible, especially as it comes just before Christmas," Zema said.

According to Globo, a Brazilian media outlet, the

truck driver fled the scene and is being sought by police. According to the Federal Highway Police, the highway where the accident occurred was the deadliest in the country in 2023 with 559 deaths recorded, Globo reported. In 2024, more than 10,000 people died in traffic accidents in Brazil, according to the Ministry of Transportation.

In September, a bus carrying the Coritiba Crocodiles football team flipped on a road and killed three people. The team from the southern city of Curitiba was headed to a game in Rio de Janeiro, which was cancelled after the accident. — Aljazeera



ISLAMABAD: Commanding Officer PMSS Dasht exchanging souvenir to Iraqi Commander of Naval Force, Vice Admiral Mazin Abdul Wahid Al-Ameri Gubaian at Iraqi Naval Base Umm Qasr.

German Christmas market attack kills five

MAGDEBURG (Reuters): At least five people were killed in a car-ramming attack at a German Christmas market in the city of Magdeburg that also left more than 200 injured, officials said, and a Saudi man was arrested on suspicion of driving a car into the crowd.

The attack on market visitors gathered to celebrate the pre-Christmas season comes amid a fierce debate over security and migration during an election campaign in Germany, where the far right is polling strongly. "What a terrible act it is to injure and kill so many people there with such brutality," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in the central city, part of the former East Germany, where he laid a white rose at a church in honor of the victims.

"We have now learnt that over 200 people have been injured," he added. "Almost 40 are so seriously injured that we must be very worried about them." German authorities are investigating a 50-year-old Saudi doctor who has lived in Germany for almost two decades in connection with the car-ramming. Police searched his home overnight. The motive remained unclear and police have not yet named the sus-

pect. He has been named in German media as Taleb A.

A Saudi source told Reuters that Saudi Arabia had warned German authorities about the attacker after he posted extremist views on his personal X account that threatened peace and security. Der Spiegel reported that the suspect had sympathized with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. The magazine did not say where it got the information.

Germany's domestic intelligence agency declined to comment on the ongoing investigation. Germany's FAZ newspaper said it interviewed the suspect in 2019, describing him as an anti-Islam activist. "People like me, who have an Islamic background but are no longer believers, are met with neither understanding nor tolerance by Muslims here," he was quoted as saying. "I am history's most aggressive critic of Islam. If you don't believe me, ask the Arabs."

Andrea Reis, who had been at the market on Friday, returned on Saturday with her daughter Julia to lay a candle by the church overlooking the site. She said that had it not been for a matter of moments, they may have been in the car's

path. "I said, 'let's go and get a sausage', but my daughter said 'no let's keep walking around'. If we'd stayed where we were we'd have been in the car's path," she said.

Tears ran down her face as she described the scene. "Children screaming, crying for mama. You can't forget that," she said. Scholz's Social Democrats are trailing both the far-right AfD and the frontrunner conservative opposition in opinion polls ahead of snap elections set for Feb. 23. The AfD, which enjoys particularly strong support in the former East, has led calls for a crackdown on migration to the country.

Its chancellor candidate Alice Weidel and co-leader Tino Chrupalla issued a statement on Saturday condemning the attack. "The terrible attack on the Christmas market in Magdeburg in the middle of the peaceful pre-Christmas period has shaken us," they said. A leading Social Democrat lawmaker in the Bundestag parliament warned against jumping to conclusions and said it appeared the attacker did not have an Islamist motive. "Now we have to wait for the investigations.