

Cop martyred in Bannu
F.P. Report

BANNU: At least one cop was martyred in an attack carried out by militants in Bannu on Wednesday. As per details, the police officials stated that the militants opened firing in jurisdiction of Ahmedzai Sub-division Wazir police station leaving Head Constable Wazir Zada martyred. The police officials further said that the martyred police Head Constable was moved to DHQ for post mortem.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif cutting a cake to celebrate Christmas.

COAS pays tribute to founder of nation

— greets Christian community on Christmas

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), joined the Christian community in celebrating Christmas at St. Joseph's Catholic Cathedral Church, Rawalpindi, underscoring the spirit of inclusivity and harmony.

The congregation extended a warm welcome to the COAS, expressing gratitude for his presence and solidarity during this cherished occasion.

On this festive day, the COAS conveyed his heartfelt Christmas greetings to the Christian community across the nation. He emphasized that Christmas serves as a profound reminder of the universal values of compassion, generosity, and goodwill-principles that bind our diverse society together.

He further acknowledged the remarkable contributions of Minorities and Christian community to Pakistan's cultural, social, economic and national



progress, which remain a source of pride and strength for the nation.

During the occasion, General Asim Munir also paid a solemn tribute to the founder of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He highlighted that the Quaid's visionary leadership, unwavering determination, and steadfast adherence to the principles of Faith, Unity and Discipline not only paved the way for the creation of Pakistan but also provided a timeless blueprint for nation-building.

The COAS remarked that Quaid-e-Azam's

enduring commitment to the ideals of freedom, equality, and religion tolerance continues to inspire and guide the nation in addressing contemporary challenges, from safeguarding territorial integrity to fostering internal stability.

"As we commemorate this festive season, let us reaffirm our collective resolve to transform Pakistan into the peaceful, prosperous nation envisioned by the Quaid," the COAS concluded, urging all citizens to work tirelessly toward achieving this shared aspiration.

President stresses Quaid's vision

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari stressed that Jinnah's vision for a democratic and self-reliant Pakistan and called upon them to work harder by upholding the values of social justice, economic equity, and the rule of law.

"To achieve Quaid's vision, we must invest in the education of our youth, ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to lead Pakistan into a brighter future. We also need to work for the uplift of downtrodden segments of society. Jinnah's dream of a peaceful and moderate Pakistan obliges us to promote harmony within and beyond our borders," the president said in a message on the 148th birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, being celebrated on December 25.

Today, the president said, on his 148th birth anniversary, they paid tribute to the Founding Father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. "On this day, we honour the contributions of the Father of the Nation, who changed the course of history through a political struggle. Quaid-e-Azam's vision, determination, and unwavering resolve led to the creation of an independent homeland for Muslims of the subcontinent," President Secretariat Press Wing, in a press release, quoted the president as saying.

100 Children dead in Parachinar

PARACHINAR: More than 100 children have tragically died in Parachinar due to the unavailability of medical facilities caused by road blockades that have persisted for two and a half months.

The ongoing crisis has sparked protests as citizens demand urgent action to reopen access routes. They are protesting against the road blockade for the sixth day. The blockade, which has been going on for more than two months, has deprived residents of essential food and medical supplies.

Agha Muzamil, Chairman of Upper Kurram Tehsil, said: "Residents are unable to access basic needs like healthcare and food due to road closures. Over 100 children have succumbed to the lack of medical care." In response, Kurram's Deputy Commissioner announced that a Grand Jirga arrived in the district to initiate peace talks aimed at resolving the longstanding tribal conflict. The government hopes these negotiations will lead to stability and the reopening of roads.

Solidarity demonstrations have also taken place outside Karachi's Numaish Chowrang and Lahore Press Club, organised by Majlis Haidat-e-Muslimeen to highlight the plight of Parachinar residents. KP Chief Minister's Adviser on Information Barrister Saif said that a special police force has been approved to secure Parachinar Road. — Agencies

Security forces kill 13 khwarij in North Waziristan

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security forces of Pakistan killed 13 khwarij in an intelligence-based operation in North Waziristan, Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a press release.

"On 24-25 December 2024, Security Forces conducted an intelligence based operation in general area Sararogha, South Waziristan District on reported presence of khwarij," the ISPR said in a statement. It added that during the conduct of operation, the security forces effectively engaged khwarij location, as a result of which, 13 khwarij were killed.

According to the ISPR,

the killed khwarij remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as killing of innocent civilians. "Sanitisation operation is being carried out to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area, as security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe-out the menace of terrorism from the country."

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday paid tribute to the security forces for killing 13 terrorists during the operation in Sararogha area of South Waziristan. In separate statements, the president and prime minister appreciated the bravery of the

security forces for killing the Khawarij during a successful intelligence-based operation. Both the dignitaries reiterated their commitment to the complete elimination of terrorists from the country.

"Security forces are conducting operations to eliminate the scourge of terrorism. The entire nation is united against terrorism and actions against Fattana Al-Khawarij will continue until the complete end of terrorism," the president said. "The security forces will continue to crush the nefarious intentions of the enemies of humanity in the same way. The nation is proud of the fearless youth of the security forces," the prime minister said.

Trump's incoming envoy calls for Imran's release

WASHINGTON: Richard Grenell, who has been picked by United States (US) President-elect Donald Trump as presidential envoy for special missions, said he would like to see Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder and former Prime Minister Imran Khan out of jail.

Speaking to a US news outlet, Richard Grenell said, "There are a lot of the same allegations just like President Trump, where the ruling party put him in prison and created some sort of corruption allegations and false allegations." "I would like to see Imran Khan be released from jail," Richard Grenell told NEWSMAX.

The special envoy of President-elect Donald Trump was of the view that

the people of Pakistan should decide if Imran Khan wants to run for office. "[The US] had a much better relationship with Pakistan during the Trump administration when Imran Khan was the leader because [he] was an outsider. He [Imran Khan] was a former cricket player, he wasn't a politician and he spoke in very common sense language, and he and Donald Trump had a very good relationship."

Earlier in November, the US Congress members once again wrote a letter to President Joe Biden, expressing grave concern over the detention of Imran Khan and the human rights situation in Pakistan. At least 54 members of the US House of Representatives wrote outgoing US president

Joe Biden, asking him to advocate for the immediate release of incarcerated PTI founder.

While terming Imran Khan's arrest as "unlawful" the US Congress members called on the Biden administration to advocate for release of other political prisoners. "A focal point of our concern is the unlawful detention of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, widely perceived to be Pakistan's most popular political figure. We urgently call on the US government to advocate for the immediate release of former Prime Minister Khan and all political prisoners, and to ensure their safety in line with the findings of the UN Working Group report," the letter read. — Agencies

The Frontier Post

Two killed in Turbat blast

F.P. Report

QUETTA: At least two people were killed and four others were injured in a blast in Dasht area in Turbat on Wednesday. They said that the IED blast also damaged a vehicle. The bodies and the wounded were shifted to a hospital, the police added. Providing details of the incident, the law enforcers said that the remote-controlled explosion occurred when the victims were travelling inside a vehicle.

Protection of minorities' rights top priority: PM

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said the country's fundamental agenda of development and prosperity hinges upon the protection of the rights of Christian community and other minorities.

Addressing an event held in connection with Christmas celebrations here at the PM House, he extended cordial felicitations to the Christian community in the country and the world. PM Shehbaz Sharif underscored that the day demanded the nation to join its forces for the betterment of mankind. "The Holy Quran has a revered mention of Prophet Jesus Christ (PBUH) and Hazrat Maryam (PBUH). Today, the birthplace of Prophet Jesus Christ is tainted in bloodbath and thousands of Palestinians including children, youth, elderly and women have been killed. All Christians and Muslims should unite and join forces to stop this bloodshed and uphold the mission of peace of Jesus Christ in Palestine's holy land," the PM urged.

He acknowledged that the Christian community rendered indelible contributions in the independence, betterment of the nation's education, defence, and protection of the motherland in different wars that would be remembered in golden words, adding, "Cecil Chaudhary and Justice Cornelius are known to everyone." PM Shehbaz noted that he and his elder brother Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif had also graduated from missionary schools whose teachers played a critical role in grooming their personalities.

"We should promote unity, inter-faith harmony and tolerance in the society to ensure protection of the rights of the minorities and ensure that they consider themselves as a

respected member of the society. Pakistan belongs to all and we should celebrate this day as a more revered occasion as it is the birthday of Jesus Christ, and Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah as well," Shehbaz Sharif said.

The prime minister quoted Quaid-e-Azam's statement saying, "Protection and promotion of minorities rights has been our top priority. You all are the proud citizens of Pakistan. Your equal development and progress is the basic point of our fundamental agenda. I extend you the felicitations of Christmas and ensure that your protection, security and prosperity is not only dear to us but our responsibility."

He reiterated that he as prime minister ensured the Christian community to uphold that right with greater responsibility. Earlier, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar said he was representing 70,000 Christian constituents who supported him with great love and respect in his electoral effort including bishops of various churches. "Christians have great role in independence, nation building, and sacrifices for the motherland. PM Shehbaz Sharif during his tenure as chief minister Punjab awarded scholarships and laptops and endowment stipends to Christian students on merit without any discrimination," he said.

Christian athletes, the Sohail sisters had won 22 medals in different games whereas Brigadier Helen Merry Roberts the first female christian army officer were the recognition of their services for the motherland, he said. Members of Christian Community along with federal ministers and members of the National Assembly joined the prime minister to cut Christmas cake to commence the celebrations which was followed by a group photo with chorus singers

who rendered a colorful performance at the start of the event.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, paying tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on his 148th Birthday, said that Quaid-e-Azam was a leader of rare caliber who believed deeply in unity, justice and equality.

"Today, as we celebrate the 148th birth anniversary of our founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, we are reminded of his extraordinary vision, unwavering courage, and unparalleled determination. He achieved what many thought impossible and gifted us our homeland—Pakistan," the prime minister said in his message. PM Shehbaz Sharif highlighted that his life continued to inspire countless people as an enlightened teacher, visionary lawyer, principled statesman, steadfast politician, and charismatic leader. "His journey is a testament to the power of conviction and the realization of dreams through hard work and dedication."

The Quad once remarked, "Failure is a word unknown to me." True to his words, he pursued his vision with relentless resolve and succeeded in carving out a nation for the Muslims of the subcontinent. For him, titles and accolades were secondary to his ultimate goal — a brighter future for his people, the prime minister added. He said the Quaid dreamt of a Pakistan where every citizen could live with dignity, freedom, and equal opportunity, irrespective of faith or ethnicity. His vision for Pakistan was one of inclusivity, unity, and prosperity. "As we commemorate this special day, let us draw strength from Quaid-e-Azam's legacy and reaffirm our commitment to the values he stood for. It is our duty as Pakistanis to work tirelessly for the progress, prosperity, and unity of our nation, the prime minister remarked.

Tarar accuses PTI of fueling controversy

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage, and Culture, Attaullah Tarar, on Wednesday accused Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of making the military court issue controversial for political gain and fabricating baseless claims to obtain concessions.

Talking to the media, he clarified that military court sentences do not infringe upon the right to a fair trial, as individuals are granted access to a lawyer, family, and still have the opportunity to appeal twice, both within the military and the relevant high court. Tarar stated that international laws were followed in the trial of those involved in the May 9 tragedy, there were no human rights violations, and all the accused will be punished in accordance with the law.

He stated that PTI is falsely creating an anti-country narrative about the military courts, which operate legally under an Act of Parliament and in accordance with the orders of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Tarar emphasized that military court trials are held when there is an attack on defense installations, such as the incidents at Corps Commander House, Mardan, and Bala Hisar fort.

He stressed that when such a building is attacked and burned, it is the responsibility of the defense establishment to arrest the accused, much like the railway police would file an FIR for crimes committed on the railways. The Federal Information Minister stated that just as drug-related cases are tried in Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) courts, terrorism cases in Anti-Terrorism Courts (ATCs), and attacks on railway facilities are handled by the Railway Police, similarly, cases involving attacks on military installations are prosecuted in military courts.

These cases are prosecuted under the military Act, ensuring a fair trial, and there is irrefutable evidence against the culprits. The right to appeal the military court's decision is upheld, and PTI should utilize the legal remedies available to them. He also reminded that PTI's founding chairman had previously

praised the virtues of military courts, underscoring the undeniable evidence against those tried and the importance of upholding the rule of law. He pointed out that clips of these statements are still circulating on social media.

Tarar reaffirmed that Quaid-e-Azam's principle of the rule of law guides Pakistan's actions, with those responsible for the May 9 incidents to be held accountable in accordance with the law, ensuring the right to a fair trial. Earlier, Tarar shared that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif extended his greetings on the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam and Christmas to the Christian community, reaffirming his commitment to working together for a prosperous future for Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar said that the Christian community has rendered immense sacrifices and services for Pakistan. Delivering his speech at a special event organized on the occasion of Christmas here, he said the Christian community also played a prominent role in the Pakistan Movement.

The Christian community, he said was advancing the Prime Minister's vision of development and progress. Wishing Merry Christmas to Christian brothers and sisters, he said he was glad to represent 70 thousand Christians in his constituency.

"During the election campaign, I received immense love and affection from the Christian community in my constituency," he remarked. The minister said that the white colour in the national flag represented minorities and the Christian community has always kept the flag high. He said the body of a brave soldier Haroon William was draped in a national flag, who sacrificed his life in line of duty. He maintained that the Christian community has created eternal stories of sacrifices. Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif also gave laptops and scholarships to Christian students on merit, Attaullah Tarar said. Stressing the need for the promotion of interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence in the country, he said the government was trying hard to protect the rights of minorities.

President, PM condole loss of lives in Azeri airline crash

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday expressed deep sorrow on loss of precious human lives during the tragic crash of an Azerbaijani airline near Aktau, Kazakhstan.

In separate statements, the president and prime minister extended their heartfelt condolences to Azerbaijan in this hour of grief," President Ilham Aliyev, the government, and the people of Azerbaijan, sharing their grief.

The President also conveyed his sympathies to the bereaved families, emphasizing that Pakistan stands with them during this difficult time. "My heartfelt condolences to my dear brother President Ilham Aliyev and the people of Azerbaijan over the loss of precious lives in this incident. Our thoughts are with the families of the deceased and we wish a swift recovery to the injured. Pakistan stands with Azerbaijan in this hour of grief," the prime minister wrote on his official X handle.

Deputy Prime Minister and

Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar also expressed his condolences in a post written on his official X handle. "I am profoundly saddened to learn of the tragic crash involving an Azerbaijani airliner near Aktau, Kazakhstan. My sincerest condolences to my Brother Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and to the people of brotherly Azerbaijan for the loss of invaluable lives in this incident. Our thoughts are with the families of the departed. We wish a speedy recovery to those who are injured," he said.



LAHORE: A large number of Christian community members gather to perform religious rituals on the occasion of Christmas Day in Sacred Heart Cathedral Church. —APP Photo

Christmas cake-cutting ceremony held at Governor's House

LAHORE (APP): Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan Wednesday cut Christmas cake during a ceremony at the Governor's House here.

Former prime minister Raja Pervez Ashraf, senior leadership of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Christian community attended the ceremony. Governor Saleem Haider Khan congratulated the Christian community and said "we should share maximum love, affection and happiness with each other on this occasion of joy". He said that the Christian community had rendered valuable services for Pakistan.

The governor said that the Christian community played a positive role in

development of the country since the establishment of Pakistan. He said "Pakistan belongs to all of us, and we have to contribute to its development."

He said from Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto to President Asif Ali Zardari, the PPP leadership had always given respect to the Christian community and gave them key positions.

He said the Christian community living in Pakistan should highlight the soft image of Pakistan to the whole world that there was an atmosphere of religious tolerance and brotherhood here.

Saleem Haider said today is also the birth anniversary of the founder

of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He said "due to inspiring leadership of the Quaid-e-Azam, we are breathing in a free atmosphere today".

The governor said the best way to pay tribute to the Quaid-e-Azam was that all Pakistanis should create unity in their ranks and practically implement his guiding principles of faith, unity and discipline.

Former premier Raja Pervez Ashraf said the PPP had always talked about the rights of minorities. He congratulated the Christian community on Christmas and said that today is also the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam, and congratulated the entire nation.

Hailing the governor for

organising this beautiful ceremony at the Governor's House, he said the Christian community made many contributions in various fields for establishment of Pakistan and stability of the country. He said the Christian community was an important part of society.

The ceremony was attended by General Secretary PPP Central Punjab Hassan Murtaza, Vice President of PPP Punjab Minority Wing Edwin Sahutra, Information Secretary PPP Central Punjab Shahzad Saeed Cheema, senior PPP leaders Azizur Rehman Chan, Aslam Gill, Pastor Jamil Nasir, Bishop Ayub Khawar and the Christian community of the Governor's House.

CM vows to peaceful, inclusive Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif was the first Chief Minister of Punjab to visit Lahore's biggest church, House of Prayer to participate in the Christian community's Christmas celebrations, here on Wednesday.

She presented gifts of 10,000 cakes, and cheques of Christmas grant worth Rs.15,000 each among members of the Christian community.

She said, "We are establishing such a Punjab where no one should face any kind of fear, intimidation or threat. I am paying special attention to establishing a safe society for the Christian community. It is a matter of great

rejoice that such a Punjab is being established, where we also celebrate Eid, Christmas, Easter, Diwali and all other festivals. Guru Nanak's Birth Anniversary, Baisakhi and Holi are also celebrated in Punjab. For the first time in the history of Pakistan, a 'Minority Card' is being launched. The 'Minority Card' will provide financial assistance to the needy minority brothers and sisters every three months for living a decent life. The 'Minority Card' will be launched in the beginning of the year 2025."

Sindh PA speaker extends greetings on Christmas

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Assembly Speaker Syed Awais Qadir Shah has extended greetings to the Christian community on their joyous occasion of Christmas. In a message, Syed Awais Shah said this day reminds us of the values of love, peace, and brotherhood, which are essential for social harmony and unity in our society.

Shah said Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah made the rights of minorities a cornerstone of Pakistan's Constitution.

He repeatedly emphasized that every individual should have the freedom to practice their religion, celebrate their festivals, and perform their religious rituals without any hindrance.

He said Sindh province and the Provincial Assembly were committed to safeguarding the rights of all minorities in line with Quaid-e-Azam's vision. We strive to create a society where every citizen is free to celebrate their culture, religion, and festivals with joy and peace, he added.

Congratulating the Christian community, he said on this day, we must spread the message of love and harmony and work together for a stronger, united, and peaceful Pakistan.

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Arora visits Lahore Camp Jail

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora visited Lahore Camp Jail and distributed Christmas gifts among the prisoners to celebrate the festive occasion.

Chairman of All-Religious Boards Asim Makhdoom accompanied the minister. Jail Superintendent Zahid Ahmad Malik briefed the provincial minister about the jail's management and the condition of inmates.

The minister inquired about the prisoners' family visits and assured them of every possible support for their welfare. He said the Punjab government was taking all possible measures to protect rights and well-being of the minority community.

He stressed that by celebrating Christmas with the inmates, the government was ensuring that they too enjoy the festive joy. He said "societal justice principles must guide us to provide prisoners with opportunities to live with dignity and respect".

The minister not only gave gifts to the prisoners but also appreciated the jail administration's efforts in ensuring their participation in the celebrations. He committed to protecting the rights of both the minority community and all prisoners.

CM performs groundbreaking of new hospital

KARACHI (PPI) Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, along with Pakistani American doctors, performed the groundbreaking ceremony for the Hassan Suleman Memorial Hospital (HSMH) in Malir.

The ceremony was also attended by provincial ministers Sharjeel Memon, Sardar Shah, Jam Khan Shoro, Shahid Thahim, Riaz Shah Shirazi, and Advisor Najmi Alam.

Speaking at the ceremony, the chief minister said that the HSMH project was a collaborative effort between Pakistani American doctors and the

Sindh government which served as a powerful testament to philanthropy and international cooperation.

Shah praised the tireless efforts and generous contributions of the Pakistani diaspora in the United States, calling their dedication "truly inspiring."

The foundation stone for the hospital was laid in Ibrahim Hyderi, with the chief minister announcing the start of construction on a new hospital aimed at significantly improving healthcare access in one of the city's most underserved areas. This project is driven by the commitment of Pakistani

American doctors, who are generously supported by the Sindh government.

The 312-bed HSMH is expected to be completed within two years, with patient care set to commence in 2026. The hospital will offer a wide-range of services, including emergency care, cardiac surgeries, specialized treatments in cardiology, paediatrics, women's health, and trauma care.

Hassan Suleman Foundation Chairman Dr Javed Suleman, and its President Dr Iqbal Zafar, Professor Dr SM Tariq Rafi, the project's chairperson, also spoke on the occasion.

Hindu pilgrims conclude seven-day visit

LAHORE (APP): Hindu pilgrims left for India via Wagha border after completing their seven-day visit to perform religious rituals at Katas Raj Temple, Chakwal, which was managed by Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB).

Additional Secretary Shrine Saifulallah Khokhar presented special gifts, bouquets and sent them off with good wishes on behalf of Federal Minister Chaudhry Salik Hussain and Chairman

ETPB Syed Atta-ur-Rehman.

Earlier, the Hindu pilgrims were served a sumptuous breakfast at Gurdwara Dera Sahib. The pilgrims reached the Wagha border in special buses amid tight security.

Speaking at the Wagha border before leaving for India, party leader Vijay Kumar Sharma said, "We have received a lot of respect and love in Pakistan. We are grateful to the Chairman

ETPB Syed Atta-ur-Rehman for the protection and beautification of our worship places. I send a message to the Hindu community around the world to come to Pakistan and see their religious places of worship here."

Vivakar Pandey said that the construction of the residential complex had further enhanced the beauty of the Katas Raj Temple and further improved the accommodation facilities for the pilgrims.

Governor Tessori pays homage to Quaid-e-Azam

KARACHI (APP):Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori paid homage at the Mazar-e-Quaid on the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The Governor laid a wreath at the mausoleum and offered prayers for the country's progress and prosperity.

During his visit to the mausoleum of Quaid on Wednesday, Governor Kamran Tessori penned his thoughts in the visitor's book.

He also extended his congratulations to the

nation on Quaid-e-Azam's birthday, emphasizing that Pakistan's development is only possible by adhering to Jinnah's guiding principles.

Speaking to the media at the Mazar e Quaid, Governor Kamran Tessori said that he had come to pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam's services for the nation. He acknowledged that Pakistan is going through challenging times but urged the people not to lose hope, assuring that the country will move towards progress.

The Governor also high-

lighted the continued growth of the stock exchange and the positive cooperation from countries like Iran and Turkey. He praised the role of Pakistan's military, not only for safeguarding the borders but also for contributing to economic stability.

Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori commended the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Army Chief in the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), which he said is playing a crucial role in steering the country towards development.

Islamabad resident Hifsa Waheed appeals to authorities for justice

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Hifsa Waheed, a resident of the federal capital Islamabad, has appealed to higher authorities for justice and protection after detailing allegations of assault.

In her statement, Hifsa claimed that on November 13, Zohaib Hassan, an SDFO in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Forest Department, entered her residence and subjected her to physical violence. She described the attack as unexpected, leaving her not only physically injured but also deeply shaken emo-

tionally and with a diminished sense of safety. Hifsa further stated that she immediately filed an FIR and submitted all relevant evidence, including medical reports and photographs, to the police.

However, Zohaib Hassan fled the country to Morocco on the same day the FIR was registered.

Expressing her concerns, Hifsa said that the lack of action against Zohaib Hassan could endanger not only her life but also the lives of other women. She urged the authorities to bring Zohaib Hassan to justice and ensure her safety through

necessary measures.

Hifsa emphasized that the matter is not just about physical injuries but also about the emotional trauma and fear she continues to endure. "I am unable to sleep at night due to the constant fear that he might return," she said.

She appealed to provincial minister Musawir Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary, and other senior officials to take immediate notice of the incident, initiate strict action against Zohaib Hassan, and provide protection to her and her family.

Quaid-e-Azam envisioned of separate homeland for Muslims

LAHORE (APP): Vice Chairperson of the Overseas Pakistanis Commission (OPC) Punjab, Barrister Amjad Malik, expressed his heartfelt message on the occasion of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's birthday, said, "Today, on December 25, we celebrate the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam with devotion and respect. This day serves as a reminder of the great leader's sacrifices, determination, and courage".

Barrister Malik highlighted that Quaid-e-Azam envisioned a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. He added that Quaid-e-Azam taught us to follow the principles of unity, faith and discipline. Under his leadership, Pakistan became a free and sovereign homeland, where people could cherish their rights and freedom.

He further emphasised that "as Pakistanis, we must adopt Quaid's guidance and philosophy of life to move the country further along the path of progress. Quaid-e-Azam's message was not only political, but also provided with a moral and collective framework", he added.

On this significant day, Barrister Malik urged the nation to pledge to implement Quaid-e-Azam's vision through their actions. "We will make Pakistan a strong and prosperous country, as Quaid-e-Azam wished," he prayed.

No gas fields closed despite RLNG imports

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The recent claims regarding the closure of indigenous gas fields in favor of imported RLNG require clarification.

The gas was closed in some part of December when Power was not off taking RLNG per its demand. All the gas producing fields are OPEN and producing gas per optimum production. Power has started picking up RLNG per demand since last 4-5 days.

It is highlighted that SNGPL system can store up to a maximum of 2 days of unutilized RLNG supplies in the pipelines as there is no separate gas storage facility available in the country.

The total curtailment undertaken in last 4 months is less than 100 MMCFD while the figure of 329 MMCFD curtailment indicated in the The News today under the heading "Local Gas cuts cost U.S.\$ 194 million loss to the economy in 4 months" is

not correct.

The curtailment is only undertaken in the low demand / lean months of the years when the Power sector fails to pick up in accordance with firm demand given by it.

The gas fields operate optimally during the most parts of the year while the circular debt has also been addressed thru adjustment in gas prices. E&P companies are now getting regular payments for their gas supplies owing to GOP intervention in the matter.

Mashhood warns conspiracy theorists will face consequences

LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister's Youth Programme Chairman Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan has said those hatching conspiracies against the country will not be spared at all.

He said this while addressing the cake-cutting ceremony held in connection with Christmas and birth anniversaries of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and PML-N Quaid Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif here on Wednesday. He said that with the grace of the Allah Almighty, the next budget would be given without the support of International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Rana Mashhood said that electricity tariff would reduce besides inflation and every year hundreds and thousands of jobs would be created for youngsters. Collective efforts would be made to

ensure progress and prosperity in the country, he added.

He extended Christmas greetings to Christian community. He said, "White colour in Pakistan's national flag identifies minorities in the country."

He said that minorities in the country enjoyed equal rights and constitution guaranteed their protection and religious freedom. He said that Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah materialised the dream of Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal through his commitment and hard work.

"It is vital for all of us to implement Quaid's golden principles of faith, unity and discipline," he added. He said, "Today is birthday of PML-N Quaid Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and credit goes to him for making country's defence invincible by making it an

atomic power." He said that Nawaz Sharif had always given priority to country's stability and prosperity.

He said that Nawaz Sharif was ousted because he fought for the rights of people and did not take any dictation. He said that Nawaz Sharif had never compromised on country's integrity and prosperity. He further said, "It is country's atomic deterrence which not allows enemy to cross its limit." He said those who halted country's development process would meet their logical end. The youth programme chairman said that attack on state institutions was red line of Pakistani nation, adding that those crossing the red line would be held accountable.

Later, Christmas cake was cut besides birthday cake of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Mian Nawaz Sharif.



GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA
COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT
NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING

SINGLE STAGE SINGLE ENVELOPE
The C&W Building Division D.I.Khan Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites electronic bids from the eligible Firms/Contractors in accordance with KAPRA Procurement Rules 2014, amended upto 15.09.2021 on **SINGLE STAGE SINGLE ENVELOPE** procedure for the work:-

S #	Name of work	Required Category of PEC/ Code	Bid Security I/c Stamp Duty Rs	Tender Fee @0.03%	Period of Completion	Last date and time of submission of Financial Bids	Date & Time of Opening of Financial Bid
SINGLE STAGE SINGLE ENVELOPE							
1	M&R of Residential Building of DSJ D.I.Khan S/H: (i) Sessions House (ii) ADJ-I Banglow (iii) ADJ II Banglow Opposite DIG Office.	C-6	Rs.36000/-	Rs.500/-	As per work order	21-01-2025 At 12:00 pm	21-01-2025 At 12:30 pm
2	M&R of Residential Building of SCJ D.I.Khan S/H: (i) SCJ Judicial Residence (ii) JFC-II Residence	C-6	Rs.11250/-	Rs.150/-	As per work order	21-01-2025 At 12:00 pm	21-01-2025 At 12:30 pm
3	Implementation of Security Audit Observations - Security Enhancements for the vulnerable offices of the District Administration, D.I.Khan.	C-5	Rs.904100/-	Rs.13000/-	As per work order	21-01-2025 At 12:00 pm	21-01-2025 At 12:30 pm

1. Bid solicitation documents and instructions to Bidders can be obtained from the office on any working day or downloaded from C&W web site (www.cwd.gkp.pk) before the submission date / time.

2. The bidders should submit their E-bids as per KPRA Notification No. S.R.O (14)/Vol: 1-24/2021-22/6058-71 dated 10.05.2022 with following conditions.

1. The contractors quoting their bids upto a limit of 10% below Engineers Estimate shall submit bid security @2% only of Engineer Estimate. II. The contractors quoting their bids more than 10% below upto 20% below on Engineers Estimate shall submit alongwith their bids 8% Additional Security of Engineer's Estimated Cost in addition to 2% bid security. If the bid is not accompanied with the required amount of additional security then it will be considered as non-responsive and the 2% bid security shall be forfeited in favour of Government and the second lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly. III. [Similarly, a contractor quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit with his bid an additional security on Engineer's Estimated Cost equal to the differential amount of submitted bid and Engineers' Estimate alongwith detailed rate analysis]'. In case of more than 20% below bids, if the bid is not accompanied by the detailed rate analysis and / or required amount of additional security, then the said bid shall be considered as non-responsive. All the securities submitted alongwith such non-responsive bid shall be forfeited in favour of Government and the 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly. IV. In case detailed rate analysis submitted with the bids is in view of the Procuring Entity, not convincing, the Head of the Procuring Entity may declare such bid as non-responsive without any forfeiture of bid securities and record reasons thereof. V. the procuring entity may offer the contract to next lowest bidder after due diligence in the context of financial difference between such two bids or may advertise procurement opportunity afresh. VI. After commencements of work by the successful bidder, the procuring entity may replace the Additional Security with a bank guarantee of the same amount from the scheduled bank; if the already deposited security is not in the form of bank guarantee. VII. The Additional Security shall be released to the contractor in four installments i.e. 1st installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 25% of the project, 2nd installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 50% of the project, 3rd installment of 25% to be released upon completion of 75% of the project and the 4th installment of 25% to be released after 100% completion of the project.

3. Complete Detail of Bid Security in shape of CDR i.e. Bank Name, CDR Number(s) and Date(s) must be submitted electronically alongwith E-bid on the E-bidding System.

4. All bidders are required to be registered with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority under Finance Act, 2013 No. XXI of 2013.

5. Venue of Bids opening is office of the Executive Engineer C&W Building Division D.I.Khan.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, C&W Building Division D.I.KHAN
Phone # 0966-920236

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3494/24

Pakistan created after matchless democratic struggle: Muqam

Says civil disobedience call not in country’s interest

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Wednesday said that Pakistan has been created after a matchless democratic struggle by the Muslims of subcontinent led by father of the nation Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Addressing a function in connection of 148th birthday anniversary of Quaid e Azam at PMLN Secretariat here, Engr Amir Muqam said that Quaid e Azam had changed the world geography through a peaceful democratic struggle and had created Pakistan on August 14, 1947 on world map.

He said that those people, who remembers their past and leadership are successful in life.

Engr Amir Muqam said that it was day to make a firm pledge to work hard for achievement of all

those objectives for which Pakistan was created by our forefathers and address all the challenges.

He said that Pakistan was a powerful country of 141 million people with a strong professional army, an atomic power and no one would be allowed to keep an evil eye on it.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Prime Minister has all ways talked for Charter of Economy and his recent bold stance in support of the country's atomic and missile programs has reflected aspirations of the entire nation.

He said that no dictation from any country against atomic or missile program would be accepted.

Engr Amir Muqam reiterated that criticism against state institutions should be avoided, adding that civil disobedience call was not in the country's interest.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Pakistan is our first priority and consistent

efforts are required for strengthening of its economy and make it stronger.

He said that our security forces, police and civil society rendered great sacrifices for Pakistan and has kept the national flag high.

He said that armed forces of Pakistan had all ways come for the help of the nation whether it was war against terrorism, earthquake, floods or other disasters and made them out of troubles.

Engr Amir Muqam said that former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has made Pakistan an atomic power, laid network of motorways and enhanced the country's prestige.

Welcoming the recent dialogue between Govt and opposition parties, Engr Amir Muqam said that Govt believed in constructive and meaningful negotiations under the constitution and legal framework for solution of prob-

lems.

He said that share of NFC award given to KP should be used for welfare of people rather than agitation politics, adding KP rulers should compete with Punjab and Sindh Govt in service delivery and good governance.

The irrational civil obedience call would only damage Pakistan and it's people, he said, adding KP Govt failed to restore peace in Kurram. Engr Amir Muqam reaffirmed Govt commitment to continue work for the stability and progress of Pakistan.

Due to Govt successful economic policies, he said that foreign investment started coming back to the country, stock exchange achieved heights and price hike reduced to 4 digit which is a major triumph.

Earlier, Engr Amir Muqam cut the cakes of the birthdays of Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and PMLN Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif.



PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam cutting the cake to celebrate the 148th birthday of Quaid-e-Azam.

PBA delegation meets with CJP Afridi

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar Bar Association's cabinet, led by President Amjad Ali Khan Marwat, met with the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi, on Wednesday.

The meeting was also attended by Advocate Habib Qureshi, who welcomed the cabinet members. During the meeting, General Secretary Azharullah

briefed the Chief Justice about the ongoing projects within the Peshawar Bar Association.

These projects include the allocation of spaces for lawyers, library construction, bar room, and other facilities. The Chief Justice was also informed about the vocational training courses for young lawyers.

The Chief Justice praised the cabinet's performance, saying that it is an example for other bars

to follow. He noted that Peshawar Bar is a "mother bar" and expressed happiness that it has a responsible leadership.

He advised other bars to follow Peshawar Bar's footsteps in organizing vocational training for young lawyers. The Chief Justice also announced that the Supreme Court will provide more than Rs. 10 million for multimedia facilities to Peshawar Bar.

This will enable its members to access lectures and other resources from the Federal Judicial Academy directly. He further assured that the Supreme Court will provide all possible facilities to Peshawar Bar and support the completion of projects within the jurisdiction of Peshawar High Court and District Judiciary.

The meeting also discussed the online linkage of Peshawar Bar with the Federal Judicial Academy,

Kaleem ullah Earns PhD in English Literature from Qurtuba University

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Dr. Kaleem ullah Abid has successfully completed his PhD in English Literature from Qurtuba University of Science and Technology Peshawar. Under the supervision of Professor Dr. Samina Ashfaq, Dr. Kaleem's dissertation received high praise, showcasing his in-depth research and critical analysis.

The external examiner, Dr.

Abdul Samad from Kohsar University Muree, commended his work for its originality and contribution to the field.

Dr. Kaleem expressed gratitude to his mentors and peers for their support. This achievement marks a significant milestone in his academic journey and sets the stage for his future contributions to literature.

the end, Dr Mahboob presented her a shield and thanked her for participation in the event.



Serena Tennis Masters Cup from today in Peshawar: Aisam

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Serena Tennis Masters Cup is set to commence in Peshawar today, featuring Pakistan's No. 1 tennis player, Aqeel Khan, along with the top eight male and female players from across the country.

Addressing a press conference in Peshawar Aisam-ul-Haq President of the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF), national champion, and international tennis player, shared details about the event.

The press conference was attended by PTF Secretary Colonel (R) Ziauddin Tufail, Aqeel Khan, and other notable personalities.

Aisam-ul-Haq stated that despite being at the helm of the PTF for just nine months he is committed to expanding tennis across Pakistan. As part of this mission various tournaments are being organized in different



cities, starting with the Serena Masters Cup in Peshawar.

Aisam-ul-Haq announced that the Serena Masters Cup will also be held in Karachi, Multan, and Faisalabad next year. Additionally, plans are in place to organize the National Tennis Championship in Peshawar soon. He emphasized the importance of grassroots development to

identify and train new talent, stating that Pakistan has no shortage of potential. The PTF aims to support and encourage promising players by providing training opportunities in Sri Lanka and Thailand.

He further assured that efforts to organize men's singles, men's doubles, and women's singles tournaments will continue throughout the year. A tournament featuring the

top eight players from these categories is scheduled for Faisalabad in February, while another Serena Masters Tennis Cup will be held in Islamabad during Ramadan.

Aisam-ul-Haq expressed his delight at visiting Peshawar and participating in the Serena Masters Tennis Cup. He also highlighted the success of the JTI (ITF) program in Peshawar, where over 100 players received training. He expressed hope that these players will represent Pakistan on the international stage in the future.

The tournament will feature men's singles, men's doubles, and women's singles matches. Eight matches are scheduled for today, starting at 10:00 AM, with another eight matches set for December 27. The finals and closing ceremony will take place on December 28.

Governor lauds security forces to kill 13 terrorists in Waziristan

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Wednesday lauded security forces in a counter-terrorism operation, to killed 13 militants in the Sararogha area of South Waziristan.

The operation, which was carried out based on intelligence reports, targeted key hideouts of the terrorists in the area.

Governor Kundi has praised the security forces for their swift and decisive action against terrorists.

In a statement issued

here after the operation, Governor Kundi expressed his appreciation for the military's efforts against militancy. He commended the intelligence-driven approach, highlighting that such operations are crucial in maintaining peace and security in the region.

"The bravery and professionalism of our armed forces are commendable," Kundi said. "Their timely action in Sararogha has once again proven their commitment to securing our borders and protecting our people from the

scourge of terrorism."

The Governor also acknowledged the challenges faced by the security forces while operating in the rugged terrain of South Waziristan, a region long plagued by militant activity.

He reassured the people of the province that the government and military would continue their coordinated efforts to eliminate the threat of terrorism.

Meanwhile, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi has expressed deep sorrow and condolences over the trag-



PESHAWAR: Christians attending prayers on Christmas day at St John Catholic Church.

Remembering Quaid’s visits to ICP

A national tribute to the Father of the Nation

PESHAWAR (APP): Islamia College Peshawar (ICP) is a unique alma-mater of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that was visited by father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah three times in his life to acknowledge historic role of its students during Pakistan Movement.

Impressed by its students' role during Pakistan Movement, the legendary Quaid had visited ICP in 1936, 1945 and 1948 as first Governor General of Pakistan where he highly praised their patriotism, commitment and devotion in completion of his difficult mission for Pakistan.

ICP was established by Muslim League leader Sir Abdul Qayyum Khan in 1913 and today it attained the status of a public sector university.

The great Quaid received a rousing welcome when he came to Peshawar and ICP in 1945. The students of ICP and the Muslim Students Federation (MSF) present-

ed him Rs8,000 as fund for Pakistan Movement and after it the struggle for a separate homeland for Muslims of subcontinent were moved towards its logical end," said Professor Dr. Muhammad Younas Khan of Pakistan Studies Department, ICP, while talking to APP. "The arrival of the great leader of 20th century to Peshawar was a historic occasion where the students and MSF assured him to present 8,000 committed educated workers when he came again to this great alma-mater," he said.

The great leader committed to the cause of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent had moved people of KP, who decorated their homes, bungalows, bazaars, markets, villages, towns and vehicles with national and Muslim League flags besides holding placards inscribed with different slogans of Pakistan Zindabad and Quaid-i-Azam Zindabad.

"The spirit and enthusi-

asm of people of KP was historic. Peshawar was beautifully decorated with national flags hoisted atop of all major buildings and vehicles wearing a festive look," he said.

All bazzars including Qisa Khwani, Hasthagri, cantonment, Firdus and Khyber were beautifully decorated with AIML flags hoisted a top of the buildings besides portraits of Quaid-e-Azam.

"I can easily recalled a sea of people with national flags and portraits of Quaid-i-Azam arrived from all districts of KP and erstwhile FATA to see glimpses of their beloved leader when he came here in 1945 and later as first Governor General of Pakistan on April 12, 1948," said Misal Khan, a retired Information Officer while talking to APP.

Besides senior citizens, the students, youth, labourers, farmers and people of all walks of life in cars, trucks, datsons and rickshaws thronged to

Peshawar to welcome the legendary leader who changed world map through purely democratic struggle after creating Pakistan on August 14, 1947. He said the people of KP showed immense love for Quaid-i-Azam and that is why AIML secured a maximum number of seats in this province in the 1946 elections after that historic victory nobody could stop the independence movement of Pakistan from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The great Quaid also paid his last visit to ICP as the first Governor General of Pakistan on April 12, 1948, and presented glowing tributes to the services of its students towards making Pakistan in these words.

"I am indeed very happy to be present here today and to have the privilege of addressing students of this great Darul Uloom, who are the future builders of Pakistan."

He advised the students to develop a sound sense of

discipline, character, and solid academic background and devote themselves towards their studies.

"Remember your government is like your own garden. Your garden flourishes by the way you look after it and the efforts that you put towards its improvement. Similarly, your government can only flourish by your patriotic, honest and constructive efforts to improve it," the great Quaid told students.

He desired construction of a University in Peshawar from where rays of knowledge spread to every parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Following a gap of one year, the Government established the University of Peshawar near ICP in 1949 in line with the Quaid's vision.

Quaid-i-Azam's love for ICP could be judged from his historic will written on May 30, 1939, in Mumbai in which he declared ICP, Muslim University Aligarh and Sindh Madrassatul Islam Karachi, as among

the inheritors of his property. Later, the Quaid Trust paid Rs10.81 million in different instalments to ICP.

The amount was later spent on the establishment of Quaid-i-Azam College of Commerce, University of Peshawar, the construction of Jinnah Residential Quarters for the college employees, Jinnah College for Women and the newly-constructed Takbeer block at ICP. Quaid-i-Azam had an immense love for tribesmen of merged tribal districts (Erstwhile FATA) for their strong loyalty, supreme sacrifices and consistent support during the Pakistan Movement.

Despite hectic official engagements as the first Governor General of Pakistan, the great Quaid had visited Peshawar where he addressed a Grand Tribal Jira at Governor House, Peshawar on April 17, 1948.

During his historic address to tribal jirga with the overwhelming representation of tribal people,

chieftains and maliks from all tribal districts, the great Quaid highly praised the strong commitment, patriotism and support of tribesmen in the completion of his mission for Pakistan.

"The Quaid-i-Azam's speech to students of ICP and tribal elders was historic. We can achieve every goal in life by strictly adhering to it," said Manzoorul Haq former Ambassador while talking to APP.

The great Quaid knew that students were future builders of Pakistan and that was why he made repeated visits to ICP despite his hectic engagements and poor health condition, he added.

Quaid-e-Azam had laid great emphasis on education, character building and constructive criticism on the government for the sake of improvement and reformation rather than making point-scoring for political and personal gains.

Ambassador Manzoor said that every goal in life

could be achieved by strictly following the Quaid's principles of unity, faith and discipline.

He said it was high time to revitalize the legacy of the father of the nation by equipping students with the ornament of education and supporting our government to adopt a culture of constructive criticism for the sake of improvement to take the country forward towards prosperity.

The students of different schools visited ICP where they paid glowing tributes to the charismatic leader on his 148th birthday anniversary. "I came from Educators Pabbi campus to see the rare portraits of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Khyber Union hall of ICP where the great Quaid addressed students," said Malaika Bibi, a student of 6th grade.

She said that ICP's students historic role during Pakistan Movement and Quaid e Azam love for this great alma-mater has impressed her the most.



In brief

Actions against dacoits sought F.P. Report

WANA: A strong action should be taken against the bandits and thieves present on the routes between Tank and Dera Ismail Khan, and the Wana-D.I. Khan highway should be made safe for those associated with the pine nut trade. This was demanded by the office-bearers of the Pine Nut Union during a press conference at the District Press Club. They said that armed robbers in the Tank district limits looted a vehicle loaded with pine nuts yesterday, causing them losses worth millions. The government has recovered some of the stolen pine nuts from the possession of certain thieves, and they expect the police to take further action to recover the remaining pine nuts. They added that the mountains of Lower Waziristan produce pine nuts worth billions, and the Wana-D.I. Khan road is vital for their business. If they are forced to transport their goods via alternative routes, their entire business will suffer losses. The Pine Nut Union officials demanded that the government ensure the safety of the Wana-D.I. Khan road for their trade and eliminate the thieves from the area. They clarified that the pine nuts transported to Lahore via D.I. Khan contain no illegal goods and comply with all legal requirements. They also issued a warning, stating that if their stolen pine nuts are not recovered by tomorrow, they will stage an indefinite sit-in in front of the DPO Tank's office.

Alleged kidnappers held F.P. Report

LARKANA: On the strict instructions of Deputy Inspector General of Police Larkana Range Nasir Aftab Pathan, the Range Police arrested a robber near Shahi Wah Khabbar fal in the limits of Bakshapur Police Station with the intention of committing a robbery. After the police confronted the robbers on the spot, a robber, Naseer Ahmed son of Ghulam Sarwar Bhutto, was arrested in an injured condition in an exchange of fire while the accomplices of the robbers escaped. While the arrested accused was found to be involved in the kidnapping of another close associate of the robber Badhal Shar and a seven-year-old innocent child, Ahmed Ali Bhutto, while a pistol was recovered from the possession of the arrested accused, the accused arrested in an injured condition was involved in serious crimes such as kidnapping, extortion and espionage of extortion, extortion slips at shops and providing ration to the robbers.

Carton factory inaugurated F.P. Report

QUETTA: A new eco-friendly packaging factory, Al-Khair Corrugated Carton Factory, has been inaugurated in the provincial capital Quetta, marking a significant milestone for Balochistan's economic development. Supported by the European Union's Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP) programme, the factory addresses a critical supply chain gap, reduces reliance on external suppliers, and promotes sustainable practices. Owned by entrepreneur Khair Muhammad, it received a PK 30 million rupees matching grant, enabling the import of advanced machinery from China and Germany. This initiative not only creates local jobs but also aligns with global climate goals through the use of recyclable materials.



QUETTA: Activists of Sunni Ulema Council holding a protest rally.

Tehsil councilors demand development funds

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Samarbagh tehsil councilors on Wednesday demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to provide the council with adequate development funds. The demand was held during a meeting of tehsil councilors with tehsil chairman Saeed Ahmad Bacha in the chair.

The participants expressed serious concerns over the non-availability of development funds and lack of powers. In a joint resolution, the council members demanded that the government should immediately give powers to the tehsil chairmen and ensure proper distribution of development funds.

Speaking on the occasion, Saeed Ahmed Pacha

said that it was unacceptable for the government to ignore the tehsil councils and its chairmen. He said that it was necessary to give powers to elected representatives to solve the problems of the people.

It was decided that if the government failed to accept the demands, a protest sit-in would be held in Peshawar on December 26. He said that all tehsil councilors of Samarbagh would participate in the proposed sit-in.

Teachers' training opposed: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Young Teachers' Association (YTA) on Wednesday demanded the government to immediately reschedule the teachers' induction phase IV training programme in schools falling in the winter zone. Talking

to local journalists at Chakdara the YTA provincial president Atta ur Rehman rejected the government plan to conduct teachers' induction programme in the months of January and February during winter vacations.

He said that it was difficult for teachers, especially female teachers, to attend training sessions in snow-bound hilly and far-flung areas. He said the government should keep the same duration both for the 21 districts in the winter zone and 15 districts in the summer zone. The YTA leader also demanded to complete the training programme in 24 days or conduct it on line, so that teachers could get the training at their homes. He said that training centers for male and female teachers should be increased.

Medical camp for policemen arranged

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: International Police Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (IPA-KP) and Pakistan Red Crescent Society held a free medical camp for policemen and their family members in Lakki Marwat on Tuesday.

Local deputy commissioner Zeeshan Abdullah along with DPO Muhammad Jawad Ishaq and SP investigation Aqeel Hussain inaugurated the camp at the police lines in the District Headquarters Complex Tajazai.

Around three hundred police officials and their family members visited the camp where they availed the facilities of free examination by doctors and medicines. The Pakistan Red Crescent Society had also ensured availability of lady doctors at the medical camp. The administration and police officials met doctors and their assistants and praised them for attending the camp to serve policemen and their family members.

Jawad said that the medical camp had been arranged on the directives of Regional Police Officer Bannu Imran Shahid who also held the office of vice chairperson of IPA-KP. He said that the provincial government had launched various initiatives for the welfare and betterment of cops.

He said that the gallantry and bravery exhibited by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police in the war on terror had been acknowledged at all levels. "The ultimate sacrifices offered by cops in the line of duty will be written with golden words in the history", he maintained. The district police chief said that along with provision of standard healthcare to police officials on their doorsteps, the provincial government would use all available resources for their wellbeing.

Traders pay homage to Quaid F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Patron In-chief Kamalia Tajer Ittehad, Chaudhry Kamran Ahmad Nusrat said that the establishment of Pakistan was possible due to the leadership, vision and struggle of Quaid-e-Azam.

This day gives us a message to remember and practice the principles of Quaid-e-Azam, unity, faith, and organization. Quaid-e-Azam created a Pakistan where every citizen has equal rights, justice, and freedom.

His teachings are a beacon for us and we must play our part to make the Pakistan of his dreams a reality.

e-Sunnat wal Jama'at has been facing persecution and violence throughout Pakistan. He cited the recent incident in Parachinar, where Ahl-e-Sunnat wal Jama'at was subjected to brutal violence. He demanded that the government launch a indiscriminate operation in Parachinar.

He demanded that the federal and provincial governments declare a national holiday on 22nd Jumada al-Thani, the death anniversary of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq. Other speakers, including Maulana Abdul Majid, president of Ahl-e-Sunnat wal Jama'at tehsil Jehangira, also addressed the rally.

DC Nowshera congratulates Christian community, cut cake: Deputy Commissioner Nowshera, Ikramullah Mehsud on Wednesday congratulated the Christian Community on Christmas.

He cute cake with Christians on the occasion of Christmas and facilitated them. The Deputy Commissioner said that all religions emphasized in peace and interfaith harmo-

Govt asked to declare Abu Bakr (RA) death anniversary as holiday

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: The Ahl-e-Sunnat wal Jama'at district Nowshera has demanded that the Pakistani government declare a national holiday on 22nd Jumada al-Thani, the death anniversary of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (R.A.), the first caliph of Islam.

In this regard, a rally was organized by Ahl-e-Sunnat wal Jama'at district Nowshera, led by its district president, Maulana Qari Syed Abid Shah, and general secretary, Qari Syed Abdul Basit. The rally started from Nowshera Kandar and ended at Nowshera Cantt.

Addressing the participants, Maulana Qari Syed Abid Shah said that in Pakistan, national holidays are declared on various occasions, including Christmas and Muharram. However, despite being an Islamic republic, Pakistan does not observe a national holiday on the death anniversary of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq, which is a matter of great regret.

Maulana Qari Syed Abid Shah further said that Ahl-

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah: The unmatched visionary

Ibn-e-Taha

ANSWER to your question is affirmative replied the teacher. Yes, today, our history is being downplayed by less and lesser projection of our great national heroes especially in media of all types. Instead, sensation has over ridden Pakistan's national days and anniversaries. Historical dates like Iqbal day, Jinnah's anniversaries, Liaqat Ali Khan's martyrdom, 16 Dec, are marginalised by sensational and spicy news.

National events/days are not presented as first news item in electronic/digital media, neither flashed as main headlines in print media. 25 Dec, is celebrated only as a holiday and very few functions are arranged at Govt level to mark birth day of founder of Pakistan. Highest level at Govt level and private sector seem less interested in celebrating Jinnah's day.

My son! you may recall 25 Dec, 2015 when Bharti PM Moodi paid an unscheduled visit to Lahore and attended marriage ceremony in family of sitting Prime Minister of Pakistan. Ideally, that day, PM had to be in a seminar/conference addressing ideology of Jinnah and Pakistan. Surely, our enemies are succeeding in leading an identity crisis in Pakistan?

The teacher continued, lawyers who claim, Pakistan was earned by a lawyer, do not follow the thoughts of this role model. Jinnah believed in logic and debate and based his arguments on facts in courts/public/private life. He was selective in accepting law suits and would not ask the judge for any "Stay order" or postponement of next hearing date due to his appearance in another court on the specific date being given by the proceeding court. He was not for sale and would never change loyalties by appearing in different courts for and against the same client/ person/ organization under different cases on plea of rendering services as a professional lawyer for and against. Jinnah would focus on his limited clientage with 100 % success rate. In one of cases won, he returned fee of a Hindu client as the case was decided during lesser hearings against predicted. Hindu client insisted to pay the full fee as agreed but Jinnah refused showing his honor and integrity.

Quaid-e-Azam preached "Faith" in Allah, Muhammad (Sallalla-ho-elah'e wasallum) and in own self. Muslim states were in deteriorated condition after world war 2. Entire west had turned against Muslim states and Muslims were subdued as militants. With his strong belief and confidence Quaid persuaded

west to accept Pakistan as an independent country with Islam as state religion. Jinnah convinced the world, Pakistan as an Islamic state would be a progressive, forward looking and a peace loving country.

Muhammad Ali was a great proponent of united Muslims. He brought diversified Muslims of Sub-continent under one umbrella. People from Arakan till Karachi and East Bengal accepted him as the only leader of the Muslims of sub-continent. Jinnah also had a vision and plan with a committed team of honest men. He was non-controversial for all sects of Muslims due to his clarity of thoughts. Unfortunately the same spirit could not be managed after his death. Ibn-e-Insha describes this situation in his book "The last book of Urdu" states:

"England has English people. China has Chinese people and likewise so many other states have their inhabitants, but here in Pakistan we have Punjabis, Phans, Sindhi and so many other ethnic groups". Quaid-e-Azam was a disciplined man and wanted his nation to follow the law-suit. He was opposed to cynicism, sarcasm and sensations. Muhammad Ali never acted cheap, bazarre nor played with public emotions. He was not a hypocrite like Gandhi who at one side preached Ahensa (Peace)" and on the other hand

called for violent movements like "Quit India", "Civil Disobedience" and "Fill the prisons". Muhammad Ali never asked his followers to attack British officials, Govt buildings and Govt institutions, despite being capable of doing so. Jinnah also did not opt for fasting till death to pressurize the Govt. He earned kudos from the super power of his time for beating them logically in the court and never been to prison.

Teacher continued on personal life of Jinnah by narrating Jinnah stayed overseas as a bachelor, but had no personal scandal despite of opportunities in an open society in England. He was respected within and outside India for his decent manners, etiquettes and principles throughout his life. He earned fame as an honest man without moral allegations and corruption of any type. He was staunch follower of prophet Muhammad (Sallalla-ho elah'e Wasallum) and courageously held the hand of the attacker with knife who attacked him. This incidence resembles several life attempts on prophet Muhammad (Sallalla-ho-elae-he wasallum) where Almighty helped for strengthening him as steadfast.

The teacher explained, till 1912, Jinnah was member of both Muslim League and Congress, but later got convinced that hindus will never let

Tribesmen demand release of their tribal elders

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: People from different walks of life in Jamrud demanded the police department to release their elders, Malik Naseer Ahmad Afridi and Said Ghajan Afridi detained by police yesterday.

It is to be stated here that on Tuesday, Malik Naseer Ahmad Afridi his colleagues were apprehended on the direction of the District Police Officer (DPO) when they visited the office. As per the police official, the detainees were wanted to police in various First Information Report (FIRs) lodged against them in the near past.

In a protest rally organized on Wednesday at Bab-e-Khyber, Jamrud, the tribesmen disapproved the arrest of their elites and said DPO, contrary to the tribal traditions, apprehended his visiting guests.

Addressing to the protes-



tors speakers including Barkat Afridi, district head of Jamat-e-Islami Shah Faisal Afridi, Jamiat Ullema-e-Islam leader Said Kabee Afridi, President Zwan Koki Khel Organization Daud Afridi, Khan Wali Afridi and others categorically condemned arrest of Malik Naseer and Said Ghajan and said their elites were innocent and nothing wrong had done to arrest them. They blamed that fake FIRs have been lodged

against the elders to restrain them of winning basic rights for their co-tribal.

The Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other concern highup had promised them to withdraw all allegedly fake FIRs against their elites, but they could materialize their promise that was injustice to them. They threatened that if the apprehended persons were not set free in three days then they would initiate indefinite agitation against it.

Karakar tunnel a game changer project: Riaz

F.P. Report

BUNER: Former Minister MPA Riaz Khan had claimed the "Karakar Tunnel project" a game changer and will be remembered life long. Talking to media he said the funding issues are being resolved, efforts are being made to complete the project on time.

MPA PK 25 Buner Riaz Khan has said that the Karakar Tunnel project is a historic and visionary project which will benefit Swat and Buner, entire Malakand Division. The project is being hailed as a priceless gift to future generations that will revolutionize the region's economy, tourism and communication.

He categorically rejected the negative propaganda by PML Nawaz and other political parties that

Karakar Tunnel Project was federal government project. He claimed Riaz it was purely provincial government project to be completed under the supervision of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Highway Authority (PKHA). He added that the contractors are facing funding issues, but these issues will be resolved soon and the project will be completed in the next few months.

While recounting his tenure as minister, Riaz Khan said that he had included several important projects in the ADP, including Jowar to Pir Baba Road, Kohe Road, Jangdara Road, and Girarhi Road. However, all these projects were delayed due to different priorities of the PDM caretaker government after the fall of PTI government. He assured

that all these projects will be re-incorporated and completed as soon as possible.

The former minister said that the Jowar hospital project is also under consideration and every possible effort will be made to start work on it so that better health facilities can be provided to the people.

Riaz Khan added that PTI is currently in a state of war and is facing various problems from Islamabad. He expressed regret that the party is not even being given the right to peaceful protest, but in any case the release of Khan will be made possible, he was sure. He appealed to the people to show patience and support KPK government to complete development projects to ensure the development of the region.



QUETTA: All parties head, Rashid Khan Nasir addressing a press conference.



GAZA: Palestinians looking at a home destroyed by an Israeli attack in Deir el-Balah.

Some gaps have narrowed in elusive Gaza ceasefire deal

CAIRO/JERUSALEM (Reuters): Gaps between Israel and Hamas over a possible Gaza ceasefire have narrowed, according to Israeli and Palestinian officials' remarks, though crucial differences have yet to be resolved. A fresh bid by mediators Egypt, Qatar and the United States to end the fighting and release Israeli and foreign hostages has gained momentum this month, though no breakthrough has yet been reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said progress had been made in hostage negotiations with Hamas in Gaza but that he did not know how much longer it would take to see the results. During a speech in Israel's Knesset, Netanyahu said Israel had made "great achievements" militarily on several fronts and that military pressure on Hamas had led its leaders to soften their previous demands. A Palestinian official familiar with the talks said while some sticking points had been resolved, the identity of some of the Palestinian prisoners to be released by Israel in return for hostages had yet to be agreed, along with the precise deployment of Israeli troops in Gaza.

His remarks corresponded with comments by the Israeli diaspora minister, Amichai Chikli, who said both issues were still being negotiated. Nonetheless, he said, the sides were far closer to reaching agreement than they have been for months. "This ceasefire can last six months or it can last 10 years, it depends on the

dynamics that will form on the ground," Chikli told Israel's Kan radio. Much hinged on what powers would be running and rehabilitating Gaza once fighting stopped, he said. The duration of the ceasefire has been a fundamental sticking point through-out several rounds of failed negotiations. Hamas wants an end to the war, while Israel wants an end to Hamas' rule of Gaza first. "The issue of ending the war completely hasn't yet been resolved," said the Palestinian official. Israeli minister Zeev Elkin, a member of Netanyahu's security cabinet, told Israel's Army Radio that the aim was to find an agreed framework that would resolve that difference during a second stage of the ceasefire deal. Chikli said the first stage would be a humanitarian phase that will last 42 days and include a hostage release. The war was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel, in which 1,200 people were killed and 251 taken hostage to Gaza, according to Israeli tallies. Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza has since killed more than 45,200 Palestinians, according to health officials in the Hamas-run enclave. Most of the population of 2.3 million has been displaced and much of Gaza is in ruins.

At least 24 Palestinians were killed in Israeli strikes, medics said. Among the dead were four Palestinians killed when an Israeli airstrike hit a group of Palestinians tasked with protecting aid trucks into Gaza, medics said.

Later, the Israeli military published evacuation orders to residents of several districts in the Shejaia neighbourhood of Gaza City, citing rocket firing from the area.

One of Gaza's few still partially functioning hospitals, on its northern edge, an area under intense Israeli military pressure for nearly three months, sought urgent help after being hit by Israeli fire. "We are facing a continuous daily threat," said Hussam Abu Safiya, director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital. "The bombing continues from all directions, affecting the building, the departments, and the staff." The Israeli military did not immediately comment. It said it was supplying fuel and food to the hospital and helping evacuate some patients and staff to safer areas. Palestinians accuse Israel of seeking to permanently depopulate northern Gaza to create a buffer zone, which Israel denies.

Israel says its operation around the three communities on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip - Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun and Jabalia - is targeting Hamas militants. The United Nations' aid chief, Tom Fletcher, said Israeli forces had hampered efforts to deliver much-needed aid in northern Gaza. "North Gaza has been under a near-total siege for more than two months, raising the spectre of famine," he said. "South Gaza is extremely overcrowded, creating horrific living conditions and even greater humanitarian needs as winter sets in."

UN investigator says possible to find 'enough' proof for Syria prosecutions

DAMASCUS (AFP): The visiting head of a UN investigative body for Syria said it was possible to find "more than enough" evidence to convict people of crimes against international law, but there was an immediate need to secure and preserve it.

The doors of Syria's prisons were flung open after an Islamist-led rebel alliance ousted longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad this month, more than 13 years after his brutal repression of anti-government protests triggered a war that would kill more than 500,000 people. With families rushing to former prisons, detention centres and alleged mass graves to find any trace of disappeared relatives, many have expressed concern about safeguarding documents and other evidence.

"We have the possibility here to find more than enough evidence left behind to convict those we should prosecute," said

Robert Petit, who heads the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) set up by the UN in 2016 to prepare prosecutions for major international crimes in Syria. But he noted that preserving evidence would "need a lot of coordination between all the different actors". "We can all understand the human impulse to go in and try and find your loved ones," Petit said. "The fact is, though, that there needs to be a control put in place to restrict access to all these different centres.... It needs to be a concerted effort by everyone who has the resources and the powers to do that to freeze that access, preserve it". The organisation, known as the Mechanism, was not permitted to work in Syria under Assad's government but was able to document many crimes from abroad. Since Assad's fall, Petit has been able to visit the country but his team still require

authorisation to begin their work inside Syria which they have requested.

He said his team had "documented hundreds of detention centres... Every security centre, every military base, every prison had their own either detention or mass graves attached to it". "We're just now beginning to scratch that surface and I think it's going to be a long time before we know the full extent of it," he told AFP. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor, more than 100,000 people died in Syria's jails and detention centres from 2011. The Saydnaya complex, the site of extrajudicial executions, torture and forced disappearances, epitomised the atrocities committed against Assad's opponents. Petit compared Saydnaya to the S-21 prison in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh, which came to stand for the Khmer Rouge's wider

atrocities and now houses the country's genocide museum. The Saydnaya facility will become "an emblematic example of inhumanity", he said. Petit said his team had reached out to the new authorities "to get permission to come here and start discussing a framework by which we can conduct our mandate". "We had a productive meeting and we've asked formally now, according to their instructions, to be able to come back and start the work. So we're waiting for that response," he said. Even without setting foot in Syria, Petit's 82-member team has gathered huge amounts of evidence of the worst breaches of international law committed during the war. The hope is that there could now be a national accountability process in Syria and that steps could be taken to finally grant the International Criminal Court jurisdiction to prosecute crimes committed in the country.

S Korean opposition threatens to impeach Han over martial law counsel

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korea's main opposition party threatened to impeach acting president Han Duck-soo if he failed to approve legislation to launch a special counsel investigation into President Yoon Suk Yeol's failed bid to impose martial law. Prime Minister Han has taken over from the suspended Yoon, who was impeached on Dec. 14 and faces a Constitutional Court review on whether to oust him.

With a majority in parliament, the opposition Democratic Party (DP) passed a bill this month to appoint a special counsel to pursue charges of insurrection, among others, against the conservative Yoon and to investigate his wife over a luxury bag scandal and other allegations. The party, which has accused Han of aiding Yoon's martial law

attempt and reported him to police, said it would "immediately initiate impeachment proceedings" against the acting president if the legislation was not promulgated. "The delays show that the prime minister has no intention of complying with the constitution, and it is tantamount to admitting that he is acting as a proxy for the insurgent," Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae told a party meeting, referring to Yoon.

Han is a technocrat who has held leadership roles in South Korean politics for 30 years under conservative and liberal presidents. Yoon appointed him prime minister in 2022. Han's office could not immediately be reached for comment. He has previously said he had tried to block Yoon's martial law declaration, but

apologised for failing to do so. Park also accused Yoon of hampering the Constitutional Court trial by repeatedly refusing to accept court documents, intended primarily to notify Yoon of the beginning of the trial. "Any delay in the investigation and impeachment trials is an extension of the insurrection and an act of plotting a second one," Park said.

Yoon's ruling People Power Party accused the DP of employing what it called "impeachment politics" and taking Han's political fate "hostage" to push through the special counsel despite multiple ongoing investigations. A Constitutional Court spokesperson said it had decided to consider the presidential office's refusal to receive the documents as delivery completed, and

proceed with the trial.

A joint investigative team including police and the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials has made a second attempt to call Yoon in for questioning on Dec. 25, though it was unclear whether he would appear. Seok Dong-hyeon, a lawyer helping form Yoon's defence team, told reporters that he was not delaying the trial but needed time to prepare, and would respond to any investigations after a decision on the impeachment was made. Woo Jong-soo, investigation chief of the national police agency, told parliament that police had tried to raid Yoon's office twice but the presidential security service denied them entry. Woo said his team sent a request to preserve evidence, including a secure phone server.

Russian team invites Iran's leader to visit

DUBAI (Reuters): A Russian delegation met Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Tehran, Iranian news agencies said, as the two countries prepared to sign a comprehensive cooperation agreement. The Russian delegation invited Pezeshkian to visit Russia early in 2025, the media reports said. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei earlier said the deal was set to be signed during a bilateral visit in January.

Russia has cultivated closer ties with Iran and other countries hostile towards the United States, such as North Korea, since the start of the Ukraine war. The country's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in October that Moscow and Tehran intended to sign a deal which would include closer defence cooperation. The Russian delegation to Iran is headed by deputy prime ministers Alexei Overchuk and Vitaly Savelev, according to Russia's Interfax news agency. "The parties are expected to discuss the joint work of Iran and the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) within the framework of a full-fledged agreement on a free trade zone," Interfax said. The United States accused Tehran in September of delivering close-range ballistic missiles to Russia for use against Ukraine, and imposed sanctions on ships and companies it said were involved in delivering Iranian weapons. Tehran denies providing Moscow with the missiles.

Drug lord Fabio Ochoa deported to Colombia

BOGOTÁ, Colombia (AP): One of Colombia's legendary drug lords and a key operator of the Medellín cartel has been deported back to the South American country, after serving 25 years of a 30-year prison sentence in the United States. A short while later, Fabio Ochoa was again a free man. Ochoa arrived in Bogota on a deportation flight, wearing a modest grey sweatshirt and carrying his personal belongings in a plastic bag. After stepping out of the plane, Ochoa was met by immigration officials in bullet proof vests. There were no police on site to detain him.

Immigration officials took his fingerprints and confirmed through a database that Ochoa is not wanted by Colombian authorities. The country's immigration agency said on the social media platform X that Ochoa was "freed so that he could join his family." "I was framed," Ochoa claimed as reporters at Bogota's El Dorado Airport asked if he regretted his actions. The former cartel boss smiled as he hugged his daughter, whom he had not seen in seven years, and said he would go to Medellín to live with his family. "The nightmare is over" said Ochoa, 67.

Ochoa and his older brothers amassed a fortune when cocaine started flooding the US in the late 1970s and early 1980s, according to US authorities, to the point that in 1987 they were included in the Forbes Magazine's list of billionaires. Living in Miami, Ochoa ran a distribution center for the cocaine cartel once headed by Pablo Escobar. Escobar died in a shootout with authorities in Medellín in 1993. Ochoa was first indicted in the US for his alleged role in the 1986 killing of Barry Seal, an American pilot who flew cocaine flights for the Medellín cartel, but became an informant for the Drug Enforcement Administration. Along with his two older brothers, Juan David and Jorge Luis, Ochoa turned himself in to Colombian authorities in the early 1990s under a deal in which they avoided being extradited to the US.

The three brothers were released from prison in 1996, but Ochoa was arrested again three years later for drug trafficking and was extradited to the US in 2001 in response to an indictment in Miami naming him and more than 40 people as part of a drug smuggling conspiracy.

Airline pilots, crews voice concerns about Middle East routes

LONDON (Reuters): In late September, an experienced pilot at low-cost European airline Wizz Air felt anxious after learning his plane would fly over Iraq at night amid mounting tensions between nearby Iran and Israel.

He decided to query the decision since just a week earlier the airline had deemed the route unsafe. In response, Wizz Air's flight operations team told him the airway was now considered secure and he had to fly it, without giving further explanation, the pilot said. "I wasn't really happy with it," the pilot, who requested anonymity from fear he could lose his job, told Reuters. Days later, Iraq closed its airspace when Iran fired missiles on Oct. 1 at Israel. "It confirmed my suspicion that it wasn't safe."

In response to Reuters' queries, Wizz Air said safety of crew and passengers was its utmost priority and would not be compromised "in any circumstances", adding its decisions on where to fly are based on stringent risk assessments in collaboration with third party intelligence specialists. "Our aircraft and crews will only fly in airspace that has been deemed safe and we would never take any risks in this respect," Wizz Air also said in a statement. The airline said it had conducted a thorough risk assessment before deciding to fly over Iraqi airspace in November and followed guidance from the European Commission and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), which had deemed it safe on July 31.

It also said it was rerouting some flights following EASA recommendations and its own risk assessment review. It did not give further details on which routes and flights were affected. The airline has suspended flights to and from Tel Aviv until Jan. 14. Reuters spoke to four pilots, three cabin crew members, three flight security experts and two airline executives about growing safety concerns in the European air industry due to escalating tensions in the Middle East following Hamas' attack on Israel in October 2023, that prompted the war in Gaza. The Middle East is a key air corridor for planes heading to India, South-East Asia and Australia and last year was criss-crossed daily by 1,400 flights to and from Europe, Eurocontrol data show.

The safety debate about flying over the region is playing out in Europe largely because pilots there are protected by unions, unlike other parts of the world. Reuters reviewed nine unpublished letters from four European unions representing pilots and crews that expressed worries

about air safety over Middle Eastern countries. The letters were sent to Wizz Air, Ryanair, airBaltic, the European Commission and EASA between June and August. "No one should be forced to work in such a hazardous environment and no commercial interests should outweigh the safety and well-being of those on board," read a letter, addressed to EASA and the European Commission from Romanian flight crew union FPU Romania, dated Aug. 26. In other letters, staff called on airlines to be more transparent about their decisions on routes and demanded the right to refuse to fly a dangerous route. There have been no fatalities or accidents impacting commercial aviation tied to the escalation of tensions in the Middle East since the war in Gaza erupted last year.

Air France opened an internal investigation after one of its commercial planes flew over Iraq on Oct. 1 during Tehran's missile attack on Israel. On that occasion, airlines scrambled to divert dozens of planes heading towards the affected areas in the Middle East. The ongoing tensions between Israel and Iran and the abrupt ousting of President Bashar al-Assad by Syrian rebels at the weekend have raised concerns of further insecurity in the region. The use of missiles in the region has revived memories of the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine in 2014 and of Ukraine International Airlines flight PS752 en route from Tehran in 2020. Being accidentally shot-down in the chaos of war is the top worry, three pilots and two aviation safety experts told Reuters, along with the risk of an emergency landing.

While airlines including Lufthansa and KLM no longer fly over Iran, carriers including Etihad, flydubai, Aeroflot and Wizz Air were still crossing the country's airspace as recently as Dec. 2, data from tracking service FlightRadar24 show. Some European airlines including Lufthansa and KLM allow crew to opt-out of routes they don't feel are safe, but others such as Wizz Air, Ryanair and airBaltic don't. AirBaltic CEO Martin Gauss said his airline meets an international safety standard that doesn't need to be adjusted. "If we start a right of refusal, then where do we stop? [When] the next person feels unhappy overflying Iraqi airspace because there's tension there?" he told Reuters on Dec. 2 in response to queries about airBaltic flight safety talks with unions. Ryanair, which intermittently flew to Jordan and Israel until September, said it makes security decisions based on EASA guidance.

Philippines says to acquire US Typhon missile system

MANILA (AFP): The Philippines said it planned to acquire the US Typhon missile system as part of a push to secure its maritime interests, sparking warnings from China of a regional "arms race". The US Army deployed the mid-range missile system in the northern Philippines earlier this year for annual joint military exercises with its longtime ally, and decided to leave it there despite criticism by Beijing that it was destabilising to Asia.

Philippine Army chief Lieutenant-General Roy Galido told a news conference that the missile system would be "acquired because we see its feasibility and its functionality in our concept of archipelagic defence implementation". "I'm happy to report to our fellow countrymen that your army is developing this capability for the interest of protecting our sovereignty," he said, adding the total cost of the acquisition would depend on "economics".

The presence of the US missile launcher had angered Beijing, whose navy and coast guard forces have engaged in escalating confrontations in recent months with the Philippines over disputed reefs and waters in the South China Sea. Beijing

claims almost the entire South China Sea despite an international ruling that its assertion has no legal basis. Manila and Washington, longstanding treaty allies, have deepened their defence cooperation since Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos took office in 2022 and began pushing back on Beijing's claims to the South China Sea. And, China swiftly condemned the decision to acquire the system as a "provocative and dangerous move" and warned it risked triggering an "arms race".

"It is an extremely irresponsible choice for the history of its own people and the people of Southeast Asia, as well as for regional security," foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said. "The region needs peace and prosperity, not missiles and confrontation," she added, urging Manila to "correct its wrong practices as soon as possible". As a rule, it takes at least two or more years for the Philippine military to acquire a new weapons system from the planning stage, Galido said, adding it was not yet budgeted for 2025.

It took five years for Manila to take delivery of the BrahMos cruise missile last year, he added.

The land-based "mid-range capability" Typhon missile launcher, developed by US firm Lockheed Martin for the US Army, has a range of 300 miles (480 kilometres), though a longer-range version is in development. Galido said the Typhon system would enable the army to "project force" outwards up to 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres), which is the limit of the archipelago nation's maritime entitlements under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. "You have to take note of the fact that at 200 nautical miles there is no land there and the army cannot go there," he said. The Typhon platform "will protect our floating assets", he said, a reference to ships of the Philippine navy, coast guard and other vessels.

Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun warned in June that the Typhon deployment was "severely damaging regional security and stability". But Galido dismissed the criticism of the Typhon system in the Philippines. "We should not be bothered by others' seeming insecurities because we don't have any plans to go outside of our country's interests," he said.

Brazil bridge collapses, spilling sulfuric acid into river

BRASILIA (Reuters): A bridge connecting two states in Brazil's northern and northeastern regions collapsed as vehicles were crossing, killing at least one person and spilling sulfuric acid into the Tocantins River. The National Department of Transport Infrastructure said the central span of the 533-meter (0.3-mile) bridge, linking the cities of Estreito in Maranhao state and Aguiarnopolis in Tocantins state, gave way in the afternoon. A tanker truck carrying the acid plunged into the water, officials said.

According to the fire department, one person

has been confirmed dead and another was rescued alive. Aguiarnopolis city councilman Elias Junior was recording a video asking authorities to fix problems with the bridge, which he said could no longer handle the heavy trucks passing over it. As he pointed to a large crack on the shoulder of the bridge, the structure collapsed in front of him, causing him to run back.

Reuters could not immediately independently verify the video. Junior did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Preliminary estimates indicate at least 11 people were involved in the acci-

dent with two trucks, a car, and a motorcycle falling into the river, which is more than 50 meters (164 feet) deep.

By early evening, rescue divers halted their efforts after identifying that one submerged tanker was leaking sulfuric acid, said the fire department from Tocantins. The Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira Bridge, inaugurated in 1960, was built with reinforced concrete and is part of the BR-226 highway, connecting the federal capital Brasilia to Belem, a northern city set to host the United Nations Climate Change Conference next year

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Neighbors can take twilight of the Biden era

THE half-empty-glass coverage of Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya's visit to Beijing on Wednesday by some Western media conveys their dismay at the two neighbors making determined efforts to put their ties back on the right track for healthy development.

In his first visit to China in the post, Iwaya unmistakably tried to make his tentative hosts feel assured of the Shigeru Ishiba government's readiness to reboot the dormant Sino-Japanese relations that had frosted over due to the previous Fumio Kishida government's one-sided pro-US policy.

In his meeting with not only his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, but also Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang, along with other senior Chinese officials, the two sides reaffirmed the need to perceive each other as partners, rather than competitors or even a threat.

In particular, a 10-point consensus the two sides reached during Iwaya's visit on promoting people-to-people exchanges, if materialized, will effectively deepen mutual understanding and consolidate the foundation to promote cooperation in other fields, helping to address the deficit in mutual trust over the past few years.

Since the two neighbors agreed to cooperate on monitoring the Fukushima nuclear waste water discharge project in September, they have markedly accelerated the pace of mending ties. Ishiba met Premier Li in Vientiane, Laos, in October and Chinese President Xi Jinping last month in Lima, Peru. Soon after that China rolled out a 30-day visa exemption policy for visitors from Japan and multiple dialogue and cooperation mechanisms in different fields that had been stalled since the COVID-19 pandemic have been resumed between the two sides. The top Japanese diplomat's one-day visit will therefore hopefully have been conducive to promoting "strategic and mutually beneficial" relations between the two neighbors and stabilizing the situation in the Asia-Pacific.

Although the two countries still have what Iwaya said are some "challenges and matters of concern" to overcome, that the Japanese side is making efforts to address them is being taken as an indication that the Ishiba government is seeking to reassert Japan's strategic autonomy in its foreign policy.

The so-called security concerns the previous Kishida government cited to justify its hike in defense spending, participation in the US-led "chip war" against China, and intensifying military cooperation with the US and its allies were actually hand-me-downs from the Joe Biden administration, which was eager to make Japan a US proxy in the region.

These confrontational policies have only served to weigh heavily on the Japanese economy, isolated Japan within the neighborhood, and aggravated regional security tensions. The consequences of these policies prompted Kishida to abruptly step down using a party scandal as an excuse.

The Biden administration wanted Japan to be the US' anti-China bridgehead in the region, and it hyped up the "value" differences between Tokyo and Beijing. Yet in actuality, the two neighbors have time-honored and deep historical, cultural and people-to-people bonds based on the same Asian values.

The maritime dispute between the two countries had not popped out as a defining factor of their relations before the US began exploiting it to drive a wedge between them.

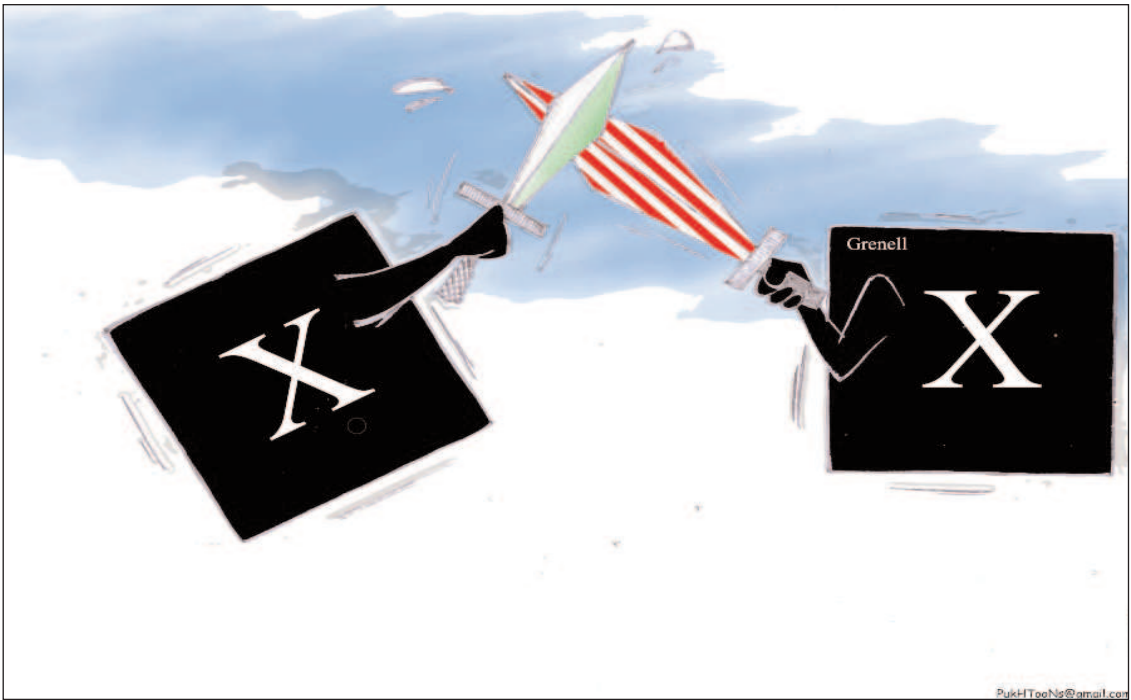
With a new administration about to take office in the US, the two neighbors should seize the moment as a window of opportunity to work for a "constructive and stable" relationship, as agreed by the two heads of state in their APEC-sideline meeting in Lima.

It is worth noting that Foreign Minister Wang Yi had a telephone talk with his Republic of Korea counterpart, Cho Tae-yul, one day before Iwaya's visit, in which the two sides also expressed a common wish to promote the sound and stable development of their strategic cooperative partnership and to deepen pragmatic collaboration in various fields, despite the temporary turmoil in the political circle in Seoul.

As close neighbors and important countries in Asia and the world, relations between the three neighbors hold great significance for the region and beyond. China is willing to work with both Japan and the ROK to comprehensively advance relations with the aim of building a constructive, stable and productive China-Japan-ROK community with a shared future in the new era.

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The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.



Pakistan and freedom of religion: A reflection on Christmas

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

PAKISTAN, as envisioned by its founding father Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was established on the principles of equality, justice, and freedom for all its citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs. The idea of a nation where people of all faiths could live in harmony is deeply embedded in its foundation. The celebration of Christmas on December 25 serves as a reminder of the commitment to religious freedom enshrined in Pakistan's ethos and constitution. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the teachings of Islam, which advocate tolerance and respect for people of all faiths.

Islam, the religion of the majority in Pakistan, emphasizes the sanctity of religious freedom. The Quran clearly states, "There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the right path has become distinct from the wrong path." (Al-Baqarah 2:256). This verse underscores the importance of allowing individuals the freedom to follow their faith without coercion. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also emphasized the protection of religious minorities in his sayings and practices.

In one Hadith, he said, "Whoever wrongs a person protected by a treaty or burdens him beyond his capacity, I will argue

against him on the Day of Judgment." Such teachings form the moral framework that advocates for peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities.

Pakistan's constitution echoes these principles, providing all citizens the right to profess, practice, and propagate their religion. Article 20 guarantees freedom of religion, and the state has often taken measures to ensure that minorities feel included and respected. Christmas, celebrated by Christians around the world, is recognized in Pakistan as a public holiday, symbolizing the nation's respect for its Christian community. Churches are adorned with lights, and communities come together to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, a revered prophet in Islam.

The Quran recognizes Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) as one of the greatest messengers of Almighty Allah, highlighting his miraculous birth and his mission of guidance and compassion. Muslims hold him in high regard, and the acknowledgment of his role in Islamic theology builds a bridge of mutual respect between Muslims and Christians.

Beyond Christmas, Pakistan celebrates the religious diversity of its population in various ways. The Sikh community is given special

respect, with the government facilitating the annual pilgrimage to Kartarpur Sahib, a revered site for Sikhs. Similarly, Hindus celebrate festivals such as Diwali and Holi with enthusiasm, supported by local authorities to ensure a secure and joyous environment. These celebrations highlight Pakistan's commitment to fostering an inclusive society where religious minorities can freely observe their traditions.

However, the journey toward complete religious harmony is not without challenges. At times, incidents of intolerance have marred the nation's reputation, often fueled by ignorance or misinterpretation of religious teachings.

Addressing these issues requires a collective effort to promote education, interfaith dialogue, and a stronger commitment to the values espoused by both religion and the constitution.

Islam's emphasis on justice and compassion provides a strong foundation for promoting interfaith harmony. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) established the Charter of Medina, a groundbreaking document that guaranteed the rights of religious minorities in a pluralistic society.

This example remains a guiding light for fostering peace and understand-

ing among diverse communities in Pakistan.

Christmas, as a celebration of joy and goodwill, serves as a reminder of the shared values that unite humanity. It is an opportunity for Pakistan to showcase its rich cultural tapestry, where people of different faiths come together in a spirit of respect and cooperation. As the Christian community gathers to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ, their celebrations contribute to the nation's collective strength and unity.

Religious freedom is not merely a constitutional obligation; it is a moral imperative that strengthens the social fabric of a nation. When citizens of all faiths feel respected and included, they contribute more effectively to the country's progress. Pakistan's commitment to religious freedom must continue to be upheld and strengthened to ensure that future generations inherit a nation where diversity is celebrated, not feared.

As the world celebrates Christmas, Pakistan stands as a testament to the possibility of coexistence and mutual respect among different faiths. By drawing upon the teachings of Islam, the vision of its founding father, and the principles enshrined in its constitution, the nation can continue to build a society where freedom of religion is not just a right but a cherished reality.

In Afghanistan, Trump will have to play a balancing game

Aziz Amin

SINCE Donald Trump's re-election as United States president, there has been growing discussion about what his incoming administration's policies towards Afghanistan might look like.

Many anticipate a tougher stance against the Taliban, but a closer look at Trump's track record and statements on the issue indicates he is unlikely to make any drastic changes to the pragmatist and staunchly anti-intervention policies he pursued during his first term in power.

During his first term as president, Trump made his stance against protracted foreign engagements and especially the decades-long US presence in Afghanistan clear. He was the architect of the 2020 Doha Agreement between the US and the Taliban, which paved the way for the US withdrawal from the country and ultimately allowed the Taliban's return to power.

The Doha Agreement was a major turning point in America's Afghanistan strategy. Dissatisfied with the progress of his administration's South Asia policy, frustrated by a perceived lack of accountability among military advisers and eager to prove to his voting base that he could indeed end one of America's longest and most costly wars, Trump began to look for a fast way out of Afghanistan.

And after all the traditional strategies failed to produce a workable exit plan, he entered into direct negotiations with the Taliban to end the conflict.

After his re-election, Trump is likely to stick to

this business-minded approach to foreign policy, which remains popular with his base, and favour pragmatic deals over costly confrontations and military entanglements in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The Taliban itself seems to believe the Trump presidency could be beneficial for its future prospects. For example, the Afghan government hopes the future Trump administration "will take realistic steps toward concrete progress in relations between the two countries and both nations will be able to open a new chapter of relations", Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi said in a post on X in November soon after Trump's victory in the US election.

The Taliban's optimism for future relations stems from its positive interactions with the first Trump administration. After all, the first Trump administration negotiated directly with the Taliban, started the process of a US withdrawal from Afghanistan and prepared the ground for its return to Kabul.

However, although he has been more open to a pragmatic collaboration with the Taliban than President Joe Biden and firmly against any direct military confrontation, Trump is unlikely to let the Taliban do as it likes with the country or give it everything it needs without extracting a price.

If the Taliban fails to make progress in fulfilling the commitments it made as part of the Doha Agreement, for example, Trump would likely curtail US assistance or condition it on tangible

progress in specific areas.

Trump has consistently argued for cutting back foreign aid as part of an "America First" approach, and he can also reduce US assistance to Afghanistan significantly without offering a reason or condition. He also would not hesitate to impose severe economic sanctions on the Taliban government if he concludes that it is harming American interests in one way or another.

US humanitarian aid amounting to about \$40m a week since the Taliban takeover is an important lifeline to Afghanistan's impoverished population. Any limitation or reduction in US aid would have significant consequences for its wellbeing and that of the fragile Afghan economy. Such a decision would deepen Afghanistan's economic crisis and further erode progress in education, healthcare and food security.

Since Trump's last term as president, global attention has moved away from Afghanistan. After the US withdrawal and with the beginning of globally consequential hot conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine, the country became somewhat peripheral to Washington's foreign policy agenda.

As an "America First" president who will have to spend considerable time dealing with crises in the Middle East and Europe, Trump is highly unlikely to treat Afghanistan as anything other than a problem he already solved.

However, Trump's isolationist tendencies in foreign policy coupled with the aid cuts and economic sanc-

tions he may impose on the Taliban could easily result in the collapse of the Afghan economy and once again turn Afghanistan into an urgent problem for the US and its allies.

Afghanistan's economic collapse could trigger a new migration crisis, significant regional instability and create fertile ground for extremist groups, such as the ISIL (ISIS) affiliate in Khorasan Province, to flourish.

While Trump's noninterventionist stance appeals to an American audience wary of foreign intervention, the ripple effects of a weakened and further impoverished Afghanistan could present longer-term security challenges.

Such a scenario would also have severe consequences for the Afghan people – worsening economic hardship and causing a potential collapse of health services, renewed conflict and further isolation from the rest of the world.

Once Trump is back in the White House and trying to deliver on his "America First" agenda, Afghanistan is unlikely to be a priority in his mind.

Nonetheless, the choices he makes regarding Afghanistan will have important consequences not only for the long-suffering Afghan people but also the entirety of the international community.

In short, in his second term, Trump will need to find the right balance between pragmatic disengagement and responsibilities of global leadership to be successful in his Afghanistan policy and ensure that his efforts to end one conflict do not create a worse one down the line.

Palestinian Christians facing an existential threat

Chris Doyle

EVERY year, at Christmas, much of the world turns its eyes to Bethlehem and the world of two millennia ago. Images of the baby Jesus in a manger surrounded by shepherds and wise men adorn Christian churches across the world.

For the last six decades, this has been completely decontextualized from Bethlehem's modern-day fate. Few realize the city is Palestinian, let alone illegally occupied. The media often falsely describe it as being part of Israel. By Christmas 2025, that might actually be the case, given the Israeli plans to annex the West Bank.

Scant attention is paid to the fate of Palestinians living there or in Palestine as a whole. Many just lazily think all Palestinians are Muslims.

Very few think of the Christians in Gaza. It was a small but ancient community of about 1,000 before this war. They, like all Palestinians in Gaza, have now endured almost 15 months of suffering that few can imagine, in what many consider to be a genocide. Many worship in the Church of Saint Porphyrios, one of the oldest churches in the world. For more than a year, it has served as a shelter to both Christians and Muslims.

Much of the church is now in ruins owing to an Israeli bombing on Oct. 19 last year that killed 18 people. The deliberate targeting of religious buildings is a war crime in international law. Many mosques have been bombed as well. The loss of Palestinian cultural heritage in Gaza is massive, though far from the most devastating aspect of Israel's atrocities.

But Palestinian Christians in the West Bank have much to fear too. Bethlehem, a city already cut off from most of its land, faces complete encirclement by illegal Israeli settlements. Israeli ministers have been accelerating settlement expansion under the cover of war.

In August, the go-ahead was given for the settlement of Nahal Heletz, next to Battir, a world heritage site to the west of Bethlehem. This new settlement in the Makhroul Valley will connect the Cremisan and Al-Walaja valleys and aims to sever the connection to the Bethlehem area. Christians own 91 percent of this valley. Once completed, Bethlehem will lose one of its last areas for agriculture.

Tourism, a major source of income in Bethlehem, has ground to a halt. Previously, the city could expect 1.5 million visitors per year. Local businesses have been forced to close. The Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, including Christians, is

arguably under even greater threat. The proportion of Christians in the city's population has dwindled from about a quarter at the start of the 20th century to less than 2 percent today.

Ever since this far-right extremist Israeli coalition government took office in December 2022, its fanatical supporters have increasingly targeted Christians in the holy city, pointing to a rise in attacks against Christians. Even priests get pushed. Some Israeli extremists have been chanting, "Death to Arabs, Death to Christians." Many have been spat on. Graves have been desecrated.

Settler bodies have also targeted the Armenian quarter of the Old City, where a large plot of land is at risk of being seized. Armenians, who have had a presence in the Old City since at least the fourth century, have had to mount a constant watch to protect their sites.

All of this is part of a determined strategy to Judaize the entirety of the holy basin of the city. Jerusalem is known as the city of peace, but it is anything but that today. Its times of greatest strength have been when all three major monotheistic faiths have coexisted in harmony.

Palestinian Christians outside the city are cut off. Those in Bethlehem largely cannot go to Jerusalem to pray, even at Easter and Christmas. Some have never even been there. For those in Gaza, it is totally impossible right now, and even before the current war it was almost an impossibility. It is easier for me in London to get to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem than those living 10 km away.

Palestinian Christians are an integral part of Palestinian society. They, like all Palestinians, deserve our solidarity at this time, when their very existence is threatened.

What is perhaps most extraordinary is the way in which many Christian communities, not least in the US, are totally blind to their suffering and the systemic discrimination they face. Christian Zionists, who number in their millions, back the very Israeli occupation that threatens to eradicate a 2,000-year-old Christian presence in the Holy Land.

Yet, even in the ranks of other Christians, the ignorance of the plight of their Palestinian co-religionists is impressive. One could also extend that to those in Lebanon and Syria, who will be marking another tough Christmas. Perhaps, as Christians gather in churches around the world this Christmas, they might spare more than just a passing thought for those that are struggling to keep their faith going in the land where it all began.

America’s maxing out its bah-humbug energy

DONALD Trump is several weeks away from being inaugurated US president for a second term, but he has already demonstrated that, for all his popular adulation, he may not be able to control his own party in Congress.

Legislators, particularly in the House of Representatives, were faced with another of their brinkmanship-flaunting crises over extending the debt ceiling – the amount that the country is allowed, by law, to owe creditors. But cooler heads arrived at a reasonable compromise to avoid a potentially disastrous Christmas shutdown that could have led to more than 800,000 public employees losing their pay cheques and numerous public services and amenities being made unavailable.

Congress’s spending package extended the suspension of the debt ceiling. A series of profoundly misguided laws, beginning in 1917, has ensured that Congress must routinely suspend the “debt ceiling” to keep the government functioning and prevent the country from defaulting on its extensive debts.

If the US ever did default, it would probably send not just the US economy but also the global economy into a tailspin, with dangerous-to-downright-cataclysmic consequences.

Senators, who serve six-year terms and represent entire states, are generally much more prudent, but increasingly Republicans,

and occasionally Democrats, in the House are insisting on playing political and fiscal Russian roulette with fundamental national and global economic stability at stake. They typically grandstand about cutting spending, usually without any concrete or practicable proposals, or bring up some demagogic issue identified to secure interviews with the cable-television “news” stations and, increasingly, podcasts that drive US public opinion, such as it is.

Congress was therefore set to pass a fairly mundane compromise bill, when two potent outside forces suddenly intervened to scupper it.

Mr Trump roared his disapproval, demanding that House Republicans abolish the debt ceiling altogether. And his current right-hand man, Elon Musk, arguably the world’s wealthiest individual, took to his favourite trophy possession, X (formerly known as Twitter), to threaten all Republican legislators who did not insist on much greater cuts to public spending.

Their motivations are obvious. Mr Trump, who never ceased to complain about Democratic spending and who ironically ran on a platform of major cuts to national expenditures, would love to get rid of the debt ceiling because, despite his rhetoric, he seemingly intends to increase the national debt enormously.

That’s what he did during his first term, when the self-described “king of debt” ballooned the nation-

Hussein Ibish

al debt by the third-highest amount in history, including during both world wars and the Civil War. Fuelled in particular by a huge 2017 tax cut aimed mainly at the wealthiest Americans and corporations, under Mr Trump the debt-to-GDP ratio equalled that reached at the end of the Second World War.

The incumbent President Joe Biden certainly increased the debt as well, but only by about half as much during his four years in office as Mr Trump did in his first term. And this is despite Mr Biden’s significant increases to public investments, pandemic expenditures, and a national economic policy aimed at boosting domestic manufacturing, including of strategic goods such as computer chips.

Mr Trump has never seemed bothered by glaring contradictions in his public platforms. This year he ran on lowering inflation while promising large new tariffs on imported goods and the mass deportation of millions of asylum-seekers and other migrants. One could hardly identify two policies more precisely suited to increase inflation swiftly and considerably. But his voters either don’t appear to have put two and two together, or if they do, just don’t care.

So while he ran on reducing spending and the national debt, which he has vowed he could eliminate in eight years, in fact he is preparing two core agenda items that can only signifi-

cantly increase them: another huge tax cut and the aforementioned mass deportations. The tax cuts can only slash government income, especially since there is no apparent or proposed alternative source. And Mr Trump’s deportation of many millions of migrants, as he promises, has never been budgeted but, if actually carried out, will inevitably cost countless billions.

Mr Musk, who, as I pointed out many weeks ago in these pages, is attempting to politically weaponise his fabulous wealth, has been put in joint charge of a new government “department” of efficiency. It’s not a department. In fact, it’s yet another familiar blue-ribbon commission into government waste. There have been quite a few of these in the past, to little effect. But he appears to have embraced the task sufficiently to put out more than 150 X posts threatening that Congress members who voted for the original compromise should be thrown out of office in two years, when House members stand for re-election.

Many House members blamed Speaker Mike Johnson for delaying the budget vote sufficiently to give Mr Trump and Mr Musk time to create a most unwelcome Christmas crisis. Ultimately, Mr Johnson, with Mr Trump’s grudging support, was able to secure a budget measure that will last until March 14, when the whole wretched soap opera will be re-enacted yet again. But he

had to rely on the support of the Democrats, who no doubt reasonably feared that Mr Biden would be blamed, and become the Ebenezer Scrooge of this Washington Christmas pantomime, and therefore all voted for the resolution.

Mr Musk got some of the cuts he wanted, such as to funding for childhood cancer research, but Mr Trump didn’t get his debt ceiling abolition. More ominously for him, 39 House Republicans – the party only has a four or five-vote majority – defied him on the bill, insisting that the cuts didn’t go far enough.

This group, or at least many of them – more than enough to create endless headaches for him – may be on a collision course with Mr Trump over government spending and, especially, the debt ceiling. Mr Trump only wants the debt ceiling gone because he seemingly intends to increase the debt. That may not sit well with elements in his party that took him seriously and literally when he insisted that he was running on shrinking public spending and national debt.

Mr Trump has already demonstrated a troubling inability to control Republican House members and a reliance on Democratic support that will probably vanish next year. Constructive legislation should always be supported. But Democrats have no interest in saving Mr Trump and other Republicans from their own radicalism and incoherence.

The evolution of global power dynamics

Christopher Phillips

looks set to expand on this, potentially opening up further rifts with Europe.

Israel’s wars have also damaged the reputation of Western states in the Global South, as they have continued to arm and support Israel and done too little to rein in Netanyahu. Though Israel ignored the International Court of Justice’s ruling in July that its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is unlawful, the case, brought by South Africa, pointed to a shift in the global order. Non-Western states are increasingly willing to use Western-established institutions like the International Court of Justice to highlight what they perceive as Western hypocrisy.

Geopolitically, both China and Russia have made much of this in the past year, arguing that they are more reliable partners to the Global South than the hypocritical West. While a cease-fire in Lebanon appears to be holding, the longer the Gaza war continues, the more damage it could do to the integrity of the Western alliance and its global reputation. The Western alliance risks further weakness from the continued popularity of right-wing populism at home. The year 2024 has seen populists triumph in the Austrian elections, enter government in the Netherlands, and come close to power in France. The growth of popular nationalism undermines the principle of collective security and points to a more transactional approach to intra-Western relations.

The Ukraine war is a case in point. Initially, Western states were united behind Kyiv, but increased criticism has been led by populists. Hungary’s Viktor Orban is the most vocal, but the Netherlands’ populist Party for Freedom has also questioned aid to Ukraine. Meanwhile, Alternative for Germany, which won a state-level election for the first time in 2024 and looks set to do well in the upcoming national elections, has also historically been pro-Russia and critical of Kyiv.

Until now, European unity against Russia has largely held despite the election of populists, either because they have proven less isolationist in power, as with Italy’s Giorgia Meloni, or because they govern smaller states like Hungary.

But should Alternative for Germany enter power in 2025, this could seriously impact Europe’s Russia policy. Already, Europe faces a tricky 2025 due to the incoming Trump administration. If Trump presses ahead with tariffs on allies, it will both damage European economies and further strain US-EU relations, both of which will weaken the Western alliance. Moreover, if Trump insists, as expected, on reducing America’s NATO commitments and on Europeans paying higher

defense costs, this will further challenge EU economies. It could also make them more insular, focused on defending Europe rather than projecting power further afield. The net result would be a weaker Western alliance globally.

Beyond Europe, 2024 has been a mixed year for America’s geostrategic rivals. Russia has recovered from some of the isolation it experienced in 2022-23 by embracing non-Western powers, ensuring its isolation is limited to the West rather than being global. Hosting the expanded BRICS conference in October underlined this, with the leaders of China, Turkiye and Egypt, among others, traveling to Kazan to meet Putin. The expansion of BRICS, which formally welcomed the UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia and Iran in 2024, also boosts China, which is keen for the bloc to rival Western-dominated international institutions. But Beijing is somewhat less confident as the year ends, as it faces the twin problems of sluggish growth in its economy and the return of Trump, who has appointed several China hawks to his Cabinet and appears to be gearing up for a trade war.

Herein could lie the paradox of Trump’s return for geopolitics. His combative approach, particularly his willingness to use trade as a weapon, understandably concerns both his European allies and his Chinese rivals – even if another foe, Russia, may be hoping he will broker a favorable deal for Moscow in Ukraine. This might make the US ostensibly more powerful and, in contrast to the Biden years, a more central actor in world affairs. But Trump’s transnationalism and a seeming lack of commitment to the Western alliance could leave the West as a whole weaker on the world stage, with it already suffering as a result of geopolitical shifts and the rise of isolationist populism at home.

Moreover, the US today lacks the power to push global actors into an anti-Chinese trading position in the way it might have done during either the Cold War or the post-Cold War era of US dominance. Washington may damage China’s economy, but this is unlikely to seriously limit Beijing’s influence in the Global South and non-Western world.

Likewise, other powerful economies like India, South Africa and Brazil, while conscious of not provoking Trump, will not likely bend excessively around him in a way they might have during the 1990s and 2000s.

Trump’s return will therefore likely represent a shift in style rather than a fundamental change in global geopolitics. This year continued the trend toward a weakening West within a multipolar world and 2025, with Trump in the White House, looks set for that to largely continue.

The end is near for armed militias in Iraq

AMID shifting regional power dynamics, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken made a notable visit to Baghdad to engage with the Iraqi leadership on the growing influence of armed militias. This visit underscores the Biden administration’s final attempt to stabilize the region while addressing security concerns that directly affect American forces and allies.

During his meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani, the American official emphasized the importance of curbing the activities of armed militias. Since their formation, these groups have been responsible for a series of attacks on US military personnel stationed in Iraq. The militias have been instrumental in transferring weapons to militants in Syria, which Washington views as a direct threat not only to regional security but also to Iraq’s sovereignty.

The timing of Blinken’s appeal is significant. With Bashar Assad gone and Hezbollah’s recent military defeat, Washington sees an opportunity for Iraq to assert itself. The outgoing administration believes Iraq could act as a stabilizing force in a volatile region, provided its government distances itself from external pressures.

While Blinken refrained from publicly naming Iran during his remarks, his focus on militias and weapons smuggling sent a clear message. The US

wants Iraq to step up its efforts in preventing those activities and work toward dismantling networks that threaten further regional stability.

For its part, Baghdad finds itself in a precarious position. Al-Sudani has expressed a desire to prioritize Iraq’s national sovereignty and avoid entanglement in broader geopolitical conflicts. However, balancing this vision with the reality of Iranian influence within Iraq – politically, economically, and militarily – remains a formidable challenge. This diplomatic mission comes as Washington seeks to capitalize on the weakening position of the so-called “axis of resistance” in the region. The collapse of Assad’s hold over Syria and Hezbollah’s significant struggles in its conflict with Israel have disrupted Tehran’s regional strategy. Therefore, Blinken’s visit signals an attempt to consolidate these shifts and prevent Tehran from regaining its footing.

The influence of foreign-funded armed militias in Iraq was not the only issue on the table. The American diplomat also pressed the Iraqi government to shut down the Houthi office in Baghdad, which operates under the leadership of Ahmed Al-Sharafi, known as Abu Idris. This office functions as a hub for dozens of Houthi military leaders who collaborate closely with the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades, one of the prominent armed groups supported and fund-

Dalia Al-Aqidi

ed by Tehran.

Although Iraq officially recognizes Yemen’s internationally recognized government, headquartered in Aden, it has never formally acknowledged the Houthis as legitimate representatives of the Yemeni state. Yet, the Houthi presence in Baghdad extends far beyond any standard diplomatic activity. Their operations, led by Abu Idris, remain focused on security coordination, and strategic alliances with Iran-backed groups, including armed militias and certain social organizations. This cooperation allows the Houthis to maintain a level of influence in Iraq despite their unrecognized status, further embedding themselves in the regional network of nonstate actors. In contrast, Osama Mahdi Ghanem, the Yemeni ambassador representing the internationally recognized government, operates through formal diplomatic channels, primarily liaising with Iraq’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, the Houthi activities, conducted in parallel to these formal diplomatic efforts, complicate Iraq’s position and raise questions about its ability – or willingness – to control such groups operating within its borders. The rarely noticed existence of the Houthi office in Baghdad serves as a symbolic and practical extension of Tehran’s regional agenda. It provides the Houthis a platform for coordinating military and

political strategies, deepening their ties with Iraqi factions, and sustaining their broader influence in the Middle East.

The recent events in Syria bring to mind Iraq’s not-so-distant past as if history is repeating itself. Statues have been torn down, and symbols of authoritarian rule have crumbled under the weight of sweeping change. The fall of Syria’s 61-year Baath regime – built on force, fear, and foreign backing – mirrors what unfolded in Iraq. However, this time, the difference lies in a growing regional consensus to reject armed militias, who have long inflicted suffering and turmoil on the people of the region.

With Donald Trump’s inauguration on Jan. 20, his new administration will ramp up pressure on the Iraqi government to dismantle the Popular Mobilization Forces and to sideline armed militias operating outside state control. That type of pressure was not merely rhetorical; during Trump’s first presidential term, Washington took concrete steps to weaken the influence of militias, like targeting their weapons depots and dismantling their military headquarters. The message was clear: Armed groups should not have a place in a sovereign Iraq.

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, Iraq’s Shiite Coordination Framework quickly convened a series of meetings centered on concerns that Syria’s scenario might soon

play out in Iraq. Key militia leaders participated in these meetings, alarmed by what they perceived as a coordinated plan to dismantle the “axis of resistance.”

Iraq urgently needs genuine reforms within its political system, particularly to address the influence of “non-state actors,” groups that exploit state resources while undermining the rule of law and legitimate authority. Reform must begin with one critical step – ensuring all weapons are under the state’s exclusive control. Equally important is holding accountable those responsible for the deaths of thousands of Iraqis, including the young protesters of the October Revolution.

To truly move forward, Iraq must root out financial, administrative, and political corruption once and for all, which requires bold and decisive actions that prioritize transparency and enforce accountability at every level of governance.

The US, regardless of who occupies the White House, will remain committed to a dual mission – supporting Iraq’s stability and sovereignty while working to curb the disruptive influence of armed militias. However, the real challenge lies in whether Iraq can strike this fragile balance – rebuilding its institutions, regaining control, and meeting both domestic and international expectations.

The road ahead is difficult, but the need for reform is clear and pressing.

Colombia is defending its sovereignty from the power of global corporations

Nick Dearden

TRADE deals can allow international corporations to trample over the rights of governments in the Global South. That is the message from the Colombian government, which describes the effect of such deals as a “bloodbath” for their national sovereignty. And now, Colombia’s President Gustavo Petro has said he wants to renegotiate the deals his country has with the United States, European Union and the United Kingdom.

He has a strong case because, in the last couple of years, the US and European countries have also been renegotiating similar trade and investment deals, as they try to prevent themselves from being sued in the secretive “corporate courts” that these deals create.

Only this year, the British government withdrew from a toxic investment deal, called the Energy Charter Treaty, after a slew of cases in which European governments were sued by fossil

fuel corporations for taking climate action which supposedly damaged the profits of said businesses.

So the question now is whether European countries are going to accept that southern countries need the same policy space to deal with climate change and numerous other problems they face. Or whether they will demand these countries continue to abide by these awful, one-sided deals.

At the core of the problem, is something known as investor-state dispute settlement or ISDS. In essence, ISDS creates a “corporate court”, which lets multinational corporations from a trade partner country sue governments in an international tribunal.

These “corporate courts” have been inserted into trade and investment deals since the 1950s, initially dreamt up as a way of protecting Western interests in developing countries. They created a legal system which would have made it harder for governments that might want

to, say, nationalise oil-fields owned by Western multinationals. So, from the outset, these deals were implicitly neocolonial. But as time went by, the scope of these corporate courts was broadened by corporate lawyers. Today, corporations are able to sue for pretty much any law or regulation they do not like. Worse, these cases are often heard in secret, overseen by corporate lawyers who do not have to worry about the impact of their decisions on society, human rights or the environment – only investment law. And these “courts” usually have no right of appeal, and can only be utilised by foreign investors.

As such, ISDS has been used by tobacco corporations to challenge governments which want to ensure cigarettes are sold only in plain packaging. They have been used to challenge increases to the minimum wage and windfall taxes. But increasingly, they are being used to challenge all manner of environ-

mental regulations necessary to halt climate change. In fact, they are becoming a major barrier

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As such, ISDS has been used by tobacco corporations to challenge governments which want to ensure cigarettes are sold only in plain packaging. They have been used to challenge increases to the minimum wage and windfall taxes. But increasingly, they are being used to challenge all manner of environmental regulations necessary to halt climate change.
.....

to the climate action governments must undertake to keep our planet habitable.

As such, Western countries are finding themselves on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars from corporations, simply for exercising their democratic duties. Unsurprisingly, they are revoking the treaties which have put them in this situation. But they are much less keen on allowing other governments to take the same

measures. One rule for us, quite another for the Global South.

The Colombian government has decided to call out this hypocrisy and take matters into its own hands. President Petro has said allowing corporations to settle disputes outside national courts should never have happened, saying instead Colombia is forced “to put ourselves in the mouth of the wolf”.

He is right. In the last decade, 23 known cases have been brought against Colombia under ISDS, many issued by foreign mining companies in

direct response to measures taken by Colombia to protect the natural environment and the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Mining giant Glencore, for example, sued Colombia following the decision of the country’s Constitutional Court to suspend a proposed expansion to what is already the largest open-pit coal mine in Latin America.

The Cerrejon mine has always faced fierce local opposition and has resulted in toxic contamination of air, soil and water supplies and the displacement of 35 Indigenous communities from their ancestral territories. The Constitutional Court decided that the expansion of the mine would severely impact the local community ecosystem.

Glencore said the court’s decision was discriminatory, unreasonable and arbitrary, and used ISDS to bring four separate cases against Colombia. It won the first case and was awarded \$19m, while the other

three are still in process for undisclosed sums of money.

In a separate case, Canadian mining company Eco Oro is claiming \$696m in compensation when the Constitutional Court ruled to protect the paramos – rare, high-altitude wetland ecosystems that serve as vital sources of freshwater. Even though the ISDS system in question is explicitly supposed to guarantee governments policy space to protect the environment, the arbitration panel ruled that this environmental exception did not preclude the obligation to pay compensation.

Colombia is not alone. In recent years countries including Kenya, South Africa and Ecuador have begun to exit this deeply undemocratic system. One of the first treaties Colombia wants to renegotiate is the UK-Colombia deal. Colombia’s ambassador to the UK has been clear in denouncing the deal, saying these treaties “have become a drain on Colombia and many other

countries”, specifically pointing out the power they give to the fossil fuel industry to push back on climate action and sue countries “for not earning what they intended to earn by polluting”.

But they will face serious opposition. That means they will need support from citizens and movements here in Britain. Fortunately, the trade union of the very civil servants working in the UK government to negotiate trade deals have already come out in support of the Colombian position, saying “we need real climate action”.

We must join them. ISDS is an arcane system, but in recent years campaigners have pulled it out of the shadows and begun to dismantle it in numerous trade deals. Seventy years on from when this neocolonial system first appeared, we can finally defeat it. And if we want to halt climate change and build democracy we need to do it fast. Colombia is now on the front line, and they need our support.



Discussion on ‘Business Case for Decarbonization in Pakistan’ organized

ISLAMABAD (APP): A roundtable discussion on the “Business Case for Decarbonization in Pakistan” hosted by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) emphasized the critical need for industrial decarbonization to address the nation’s economic, energy, and environmental crises that was possible through ensuring emerging technologies and financial instruments accessible to developing nations like Pakistan.

The event, moderated by Saleha Qureshi, Lead of the Pakistan Industrial Decarbonization Initiative at SDPI, brought together experts from various sectors to explore viable solutions to mitigate Pakistan’s vulnerability to climate change while boosting its economic resilience, said a press release.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Khalid Waleed, Energy Expert at SDPI, pointed out that Pakistan’s economy is trapped in a cycle of low productivity, trade deficits, and unsustainable energy costs. He stressed the urgency of shifting from conventional approaches to sustainable solutions, highlighting the potential risks posed by international regulatory mechanisms like the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Pakistan’s textile sector, in particular, faces significant challenges under these global policies, which could undermine

competitiveness unless the industry adapts to decarbonization.

Farrukh Ahmad, Deputy General Manager ESG at the Pakistan State Oil (PSO), shared insights into how his organization is leveraging decarbonization as an opportunity rather than a challenge. PSO, which holds half of the country’s oil storage, is actively working on energy efficiency, renewable energy initiatives, and the development of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure to reduce carbon footprints. He noted PSO’s commitment to leading the energy sector towards a cleaner future.

Hammad Bashir, Former NTE, Private Financing Advisory Network (PFAN), emphasized that decarbonization should not be viewed as mere “green-washing” but as a genuine business case.

He acknowledged the challenges faced by Pakistan’s industries but highlighted the importance of creating tailor-made solutions that align with both environmental goals and economic realities.

Rt. Hon. Benjamin James Matthew Williamson emphasized the challenge of striking a balance between legislative efforts and incentives in driving sustainability and decarbonization. According to Mathew, achieving these goals requires capacity building at multiple levels,

as well as the integration of strategies on a broader scale. This approach unites sectors like agriculture, with diverse data sets across different tiers of emission scopes.

He also highlighted that Pakistan has a significant opportunity to become a leader in industrial decarbonization. By ensuring the necessary infrastructure and focusing on education, the country can position itself at the forefront of this critical global movement. Mathew believes these efforts will pave the way for Pakistan’s economy to follow an upward trajectory, supporting sustainable growth and innovation.

Ms. Marianne Tan, Associate Director, Policy & Strategy, South Pole reinforced the importance of carbon markets in the decarbonization process, proposing a win-win solution where industries reduce emissions and trade carbon credits. She also advocated for a transition from coal to renewable energy, citing global examples such as the Rockefeller Foundation’s Coal-to-Clean initiative.

Dr. Hina Aslam, Visiting Fellow, SDPI addressed the broader implications of decarbonization, stressing that even developed countries are grappling with the challenge of transitioning to low-carbon industries. She pointed to sectors like steel and cement as critical areas where emissions

reductions can be achieved through innovative production processes.

Ubiad ur Rehman, Head of Energy Unit, SDPI stressed the critical role the CCUS technologies play in the decarbonization agenda and also highlighted the research study on the Role of CCUS in Cement Decarbonization in Pakistan.

The discussion also touched on the broader context of climate vulnerability in Pakistan, with Anab Mehmood, Industrial Decarbonization expert highlighting the \$29 billion in economic losses caused by the 2022 floods. She emphasized that companies must adopt decarbonization strategies to remain competitive and comply with international regulations such as CBAM.

Throughout the dialogue, experts agreed that financing remains a major hurdle for Pakistan’s decarbonization efforts. . Shakeb Elahi, SDPI Advisor, concluded that decarbonization presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Pakistan to transform its energy grid and industrial landscape.

The roundtable underlined the necessity of combining legislative action with market-driven incentives, ensuring that Pakistan can transition to a low-carbon economy while safeguarding its industrial competitiveness in the global market.

ICCI sign MOU with ITP

ISLAMABAD (APP): A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed on Wednesday between the Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) and the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) to launch the “Green and Clean Islamabad” project.

The initiative aims to tackle environmental pollution in the federal capital and promote awareness through various activities.

A police spokesperson told APP that Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Muhammad Sarfraz Virk and ICCI representative Ahsan Bakhtawari signed the memorandum.

He said under the agreement, the Islamabad Traffic Police, as part of the “Green and Clean Islamabad” project, will take vigorous actions against vehicles causing environmental pollution in the federal capital. Additionally, the ITP will organize various awareness activities, including tree-planting campaigns across the city, with the support of the Islamabad business community.

On this occasion, CTO Virk said that ITP special squads patrol various areas and key boulevards of the city. These squads are directed to conduct regular checks and issue fines for vehicles involved in environmental pollution in the city.

Quaid’s motto way forward for nation F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Atif Ikram Sheikh while addressing the function organized on Quaid-e-Azam Day said that Quaid-e-Azam’s motto of ‘Unity, Faith and Discipline’ is a way forward for the nation. For freedom the dedication and unwavering determination of the founder of Pakistan will always be remembered. The entire nation today pays tribute to Quaid-e-Azam for his tireless struggle for the rights of the Muslims of the sub-continent.

Federation President Atif Ikram said that today the nation should put political and group differences aside and pledge to play its role for the promotion of national stability and national unity. We will make every sacrifice for integrity and development. We have to fight unitedly against extremism, intolerance, sectarianism and all kinds of prejudice.

Atif Ikram said that the Quaid-e-Azam realized the importance of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent where all citizens have the right to freedom of belief, profession and equal opportunities. His determination was made possible only by his steadfastness.

SVP WCCIS attends GIZ meeting

SIALKOT (APP): Senior Vice President (SVP) of the Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sialkot (WCCIS), Gulzaib Waqas Awan, attended the GIZ Women’s Employment (WE) project overview meeting here at Indus Hall, Avari Hotel, Lahore.

The event, organized by the Ministry of Commerce and GIZ, focused on fostering women’s empowerment through strategic collaboration with WCCIS.

The meeting included discussions on the scope, objectives, and strategies WE Project, aimed at creating employment pathways for women. Key topics included skill development, career advancement, industry integration, and the role of Women Chambers in promoting sustainable opportunities.

Participants also explored collaborative mechanisms and outlined actionable steps to achieve the project’s goals.

Gulzaib Waqas Awan highlighted the commitment of WCCIS to empowering women entrepreneurs and emphasized the importance of fostering partnerships that drive inclusive economic growth in Pakistan.

Toyota global production down



TOKYO (Reuters): Toyota Motor’s (7203.T), opens new tab global production decreased for a 10th straight month in November, the Japanese carmaker said on Wednesday, although its worldwide sales grew for the second consecutive month on solid demand in the United States and China.

The world’s biggest automaker manufactured 869,230 vehicles globally in November, down 6.2% from the same month last year, a larger fall than October’s 0.8% dip.

Toyota’s US output was down 11.8%, making a slow recovery although the production of Grand Highlander and Lexus TX SUV models resumed in late October after a four-

month stoppage.

China production dropped 1.6%, which was however better than a 9% decline in the previous month, as Toyota saw higher local sales of its Granvia and Sienna minivan models and the electric sedan bZ3 jointly developed with BYD (002594.SZ), opens new tab.

Amid the rise of BYD and other Chinese brands, Toyota has decided to build an independent plant in Shanghai and start manufacturing electric cars for its Lexus luxury brand from around 2027, the Nikkei newspaper reported on Monday.

In Japan, which accounts for about a third of Toyota’s global output, production

was down 9.3% in November, due in part to a two-day production halt at its Fujimatsu and Yoshiwara plants.

Toyota saw its worldwide sales rising for a second straight month, by 1.7% to 920,569 vehicles, setting a new record for the month of November.

In the January-to-November period, Toyota’s global output was 5.2% lower than the same period last year at around 8.75 million vehicles, while global sales were down 1.2%.

The production and sales figures include vehicles of Toyota’s Lexus brand but exclude those of group companies Hino (7205.T), opens new tab and Daihatsu.

Imtiaz to launch biggest hypermarket

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: IMARAT Group has announced a landmark partnership with Imtiaz, Pakistan’s leading retail chain, marking a major milestone for the IMARAT Downtown development. This collaboration is part of a broader vision to bring the best brands from Pakistan and around the world to IMARAT Downtown, further solidifying its position as Islamabad’s premier destination for shopping, business, and entertainment. Imtiaz will open its largest hypermarket spanning 75,000 sqft, offering a world-class shopping experience. Designed to international standards, the hypermarket will feature cutting-edge interiors and exceptional services, setting a new standard of retail excellence in the heart of Islamabad.

Shafiq Akbar, Chairman of IMARAT Group, shared his thoughts on the collaboration: “At IMARAT, we take immense pride in seeing Pakistan’s name shine globally. With IMARAT Downtown, we’re not just bringing an internationally competitive development to Islamabad, but one that will surpass global standards. We had the option to bring international brands; however, after thorough

research, we chose to partner with Imtiaz, a leading local brand, because we believe they can serve the people of Islamabad better than any international competitor. We are confident that Imtiaz will thrive alongside global retail giants.”

Imtiaz Hussain, the founder of Imtiaz Hypermarket, expressed his excitement about the venture: “Imtiaz has many exciting ventures on the horizon, with the grand opening of our 40th and largest hypermarket at IMARAT Downtown being the most prominent. This new location will not only enhance the shopping experience but also create employment opportunities for hundreds of people. I truly believe that this is the best location in Pakistan, and as more people experience it, they will recognize IMARAT Downtown as the true heart of Islamabad.”

He continued, “Imtiaz’s core mission has always been to serve the people of Pakistan, and we are committed to generating opportunities that uplift our nation. As part of this vision, we are expanding our brand to include a university aimed at providing education to underprivileged individuals, with the added benefit of employment opportunities at Imtiaz upon graduation.”

Hussain added, “We are thrilled to be a part of IMARAT Downtown. This partnership aligns perfectly with our goal to provide an exceptional shopping experience while expanding our reach.”

IMARAT Downtown is strategically located at the exact center of Islamabad, along the 1200-foot wide Islamabad Expressway, making it one of the most accessible and visually impressive locations in the city. With a grand 300-foot entrance with dancing fountains, it is set to become the city’s new central business district, offering a world-class destination for shopping, entertainment, and lifestyle.

The partnership with Imtiaz strengthens IMARAT Downtown’s vision of offering an integrated, world-class experience for both local and international visitors. By combining local excellence with global appeal, this development is set to become a landmark destination. Together, IMARAT and Imtiaz are embarking on an exciting new chapter, delivering exceptional value for customers, partners, and communities across Pakistan. This collaboration is poised to reshape the retail landscape and position both brands for continued growth and success on the global stage.

MODON inks \$453m in private sector deals

JEDDAH (Arab News): Saudi industrial cities are set for further growth as the sector’s authority revealed it has signed 23 development contracts with the private sector, valued at over SR1.7 billion (\$453 million).

The agreements, announced by the Saudi Authority for Industrial Cities and Technology Zones, or MODON, encompass a wide range of projects aimed at boosting industrial capabilities.

These include the expansion of industrial cities, the construction of ready-made factories, the enhancement of MODON’s safety and security systems, and initiatives aligned with the National Industry Strategy.

Additionally, the projects will address water and irrigation needs, improve water treatment facilities, upgrade electricity services, and expand road networks.

MODON’s latest contracts highlight the growing role of the private sector in supporting Saudi Arabia’s ambitious Vision 2030 goals, which emphasize economic diversification, local production, and the

creation of an attractive environment for both domestic and foreign investment.

The projects are expected to enhance the competitiveness of Saudi industrial cities, foster greater investment, and improve operational efficiency for businesses.

The agreements will also contribute to regional development, improve environmental sustainability, and promote vegetation growth, MODON stated in a post on its X account.

The development of these projects is in line with Saudi Arabia’s broader efforts to build a dynamic and innovative economy.

This move follows a previous round of agreements in July, when MODON signed nine contracts valued at SR1 billion to enhance infrastructure and service facilities across various industrial hubs. Key initiatives from that round included the development of infrastructure in Makkah’s and Jeddah’s industrial cities and the installation of 132-kilovolt overhead power lines in Tabuk’s industrial city.

Looking ahead, MODON plans further expansion with projects that will improve electrical services, such as the construction of 115-kV overhead power lines in Hafr Al-Batin’s industrial city. The authority is also focusing on enhancing infrastructure networks for the first and second phases of Dammam’s Third Industrial City.

Since its establishment in 2001, MODON has overseen the development of 36 industrial cities and is responsible for managing both operational and under-construction industrial lands across the Kingdom.

In the first quarter of 2024, MODON attracted SR3.4 billion in private sector investments, signed 142 new industrial contracts, and registered a total of 6,758 factories.

As part of its commitment to sustainable growth, MODON also planted over 576,000 trees and finalized 335 logistics contracts, underscoring its broader environmental and economic development objectives.

Saudi non-oil exports jump 12.7% to \$6.76b in October: GASTAT

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi Arabia’s non-oil exports surged 12.7 percent year on year in October, reaching SR25.38 billion (\$6.76 billion), underscoring the Kingdom’s push to diversify its economy away from oil dependence.

According to the General Authority for Statistics, chemical products led the non-oil export categories, accounting for 26.8 percent of the total, while plastics and rubber products followed, contributing 23.7 percent.

The rise in non-oil exports is a cornerstone of Saudi Arabia’s broader Vision 2030 strategy, which aims to transform the Kingdom’s economic landscape and reduce reliance on oil revenues.

“The ratio of non-oil exports (including re-exports) to imports increased to 35.2 percent in October 2024 from 30.1 percent in October 2023. This was due to a 12.7 percent increase in non-oil exports and a 3.8 percent decrease in imports over that period,” GASTAT said in its report.

While non-oil trade climbed, total merchandise exports fell 10.7 percent in October, primarily driven by a 17.3 percent drop in oil exports. The share of oil in overall exports declined to 72.6 percent from 78.3 percent a year earlier, reflecting the Kingdom’s ongoing commitment to reducing its dependence on crude sales.

Saudi Arabia implemented a voluntary oil produc-

tion cut of 500,000 barrels per day in April 2023, a measure that remains in place until December 2024 to stabilize global markets.

China remained Saudi Arabia’s largest trading partner, importing goods worth SR14.95 billion, or 16.1 percent of the Kingdom’s total exports in October. Other major destinations included India with SR8.79 billion, Japan with SR8.70 billion, and South Korea with SR8.31 billion.

On the import side, Saudi Arabia’s inbound shipments fell 3.8 percent year on year to SR72.01 billion. Machinery and equipment topped the list, comprising 25.7 percent of total imports, marking a 6.9 percent annual increase. However, transportation

equipment imports declined 21.6 percent, representing 15.3 percent of the total.

China also dominated Saudi imports, sending goods worth SR17.58 billion in October, followed by the US with SR5.69 billion and the UAE with SR4.34 billion.

King Abdulaziz Sea Port in Dammam served as the leading entry point for imports, processing goods valued at SR21.16 billion, or 29.4 percent of total inbound shipments.

Saudi Arabia’s latest trade data highlights its progress in bolstering non-oil sectors while navigating global oil market challenges, aligning with its long-term economic transformation goals.

KKR, Bain each bid more than \$5b for Seven & i assets: Sources

TOKYO (Reuters): Private equity firms KKR (KKR.N), opens new tab and Bain Capital each offered more than \$5 billion in first-round bids for the non-core assets of Japan’s Seven & i Holdings (3382.T), opens new tab, according to people familiar with the matter.

KKR offered around 800 billion yen (\$5.1 billion) for York Holdings, an entity due to be spun out of the Japanese retailer, two of the people said. Rival US firm Bain offered around 1.2 trillion yen, one person said. Local buyout firm Japan Industrial Partners offered around 750 billion yen, one said.

All three firms were successful in the first round of

bids for the assets, according to two of the people. Reuters spoke to three people about the first-round bids, all of whom declined to be identified because the information hasn’t been made public. The size of the bids has not previously been reported.

The bids exceed the 500 billion yen enterprise value - a measure that includes debt - that the 7-Eleven owner had expected, according to one of the people.

A spokesperson for Seven & i declined to comment, saying the bidding process was not public. KKR, Bain and Japan Industrial Partners also declined to comment.

Seven & i is looking to hive off non-core business-

es, including its sprawling supermarket operations, into the York Holdings unit, which will house 31 subsidiaries including the group’s superstores business, baby goods store Akachan Honpo and the company that operates Denny’s restaurants in Japan.

Separately, the retailer’s founding family is in talks to take Seven & i private. That deal, a management buyout, is designed to fend off a \$47 billion takeover offer from Canada’s Alimentation Couche-Tard (ATD.TO), opens new tab.

The three private equity firms will now submit legally binding proposals but may alter their offers following due diligence, two of the people said.

Seven & i is aiming to select the winning bid as early as February, one person said. The decision would then be finalised by the spring, another person said.

The founding family has also approached Bain and KKR about mezzanine funding for the management buyout, two of the people said.

Seven & i’s market capitalisation stood at 6.2 trillion yen as of Dec. 24. The privatisation, if realised, would be the largest ever of a Japanese firm.

Unsuccessful bidders from the first round could still enter negotiations if the three fail to reach an agreement with Seven & i, two of the people said.

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Nippon Steel’s US Steel takeover plan support in steelmaking areas

TOKYO (Reuters): Japan’s Nippon Steel (5401.T), opens new tab is seeing support for its proposal to acquire US Steel (X.N), opens new tab in the regions of the United States where steel mills are located. Nippon Steel’s President Tadashi Imai told reporters on Wednesday.

On Monday, a US foreign investment committee referred the decision whether to approve or block the \$15 billion deal to US President Joe Biden, who has 15 days to decide. Biden and his incoming

successor, Donald Trump, have both expressed opposition to the purchase.

On Wednesday, Imai reiterated that Nippon Steel has made a number of commitments to address national security concerns of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, adding he believed there was “progress in understanding”.

“In the communities of the various regions where the steel mills are located, there is a considerable amount of support for this acquisition,” Imai said. “I

hope that President Biden will understand...the value of this acquisition to the US economy.”

Both companies have previously said they had planned to close the deal, which has also faced opposition from a powerful the United Steelworkers labor union (USW), before the end of 2024.

Nippon Steel shared a letter to Biden dated Dec. 23 and signed by two dozen US municipality officials in areas where US Steel mills are located, asking the US president to approve the

takeover deal.

“We respectfully urge you to listen to the voices of the steelworkers and everyone else whose economic security is tied to US Steel - they are speaking loudly in unison that this deal must be approved,” the letter said.

In order to win support for the acquisition, Nippon Steel has previously said it will not use the deal as cover to import steel and has made a series of pledges to protect jobs and invest in US facilities it sees as key to its future growth.



In brief

PSB introduces Gold Card to honour athletes

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) has approved the issuance of a Gold Card for medal winners, Olympians and world champions with an aim to recognize and honour their achievements at the international level. According to a PSB notification, the initiative, endorsed during the recently-held PSB's 31st Board meeting, falls under the Cash Award Policy 2024. The Gold Card will serve as a token of gratitude for the athletes' contributions to Pakistan's sporting legacy. It grants exclusive benefits, including complimentary access to all sports facilities at the Pakistan Sports Complex in Islamabad and PSB Coaching Centres nationwide. Additionally, cardholders will enjoy up to 20 days of complimentary accommodation per calendar year at PSB hostels. Beyond the complimentary limit, accommodations can be availed at Board-approved rates. Eligible athletes can apply for the Gold Card through their respective National Sports Federations (NSF). The NSF will verify the applicant's credentials, including their status as a medal winner, Olympian, or world champion and forward the application along with supporting documents to the PSB's Director General. Applications will be reviewed by a dedicated committee and upon successful verification, the PSB Director General will approve and issue the Gold Card. The card will have a validity of five years, after which it can be renewed through the same process. The initiative not only provides practical support to athletes but also underscores Pakistan's commitment to fostering a culture of sports excellence. For further details and application guidelines, medal winners, Olympians and world champions are encouraged to contact their respective National Sports Federations.

Oscar returns to Sao Paulo

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP): Brazilian international midfielder Oscar, who played for Chelsea, is returning to Sao Paulo, where he started his career, the club announced on Tuesday. "Welcome, Oscar, what a great addition," read text at the end of a video posted on the club's social media accounts. Oscar -- whose full name is Oscar dos Santos Emboaba Junior, and who is aged 33 -- became a free agent after spending eight seasons in China with Shanghai Port, where he arrived in 2017 after leaving Chelsea. The attacking midfielder started his career at Sao Paulo and made his first-team debut in 2008. Two years later, he transferred to another Brazilian club, Internacional de Porto Alegre, in a controversial move that sparked a long legal dispute. An Olympic bronze medalist with Brazil's U23 team at the London 2012 Games, Oscar later moved to England, playing for Chelsea, where he scored 38 goals in 203 matches. In four-and-a-half years with the Blues, he won four trophies, including two Premier League titles (2014-2015 and 2016-2017), the Europa League (2013), and the English League Cup (2015). Oscar scored 12 goals in 48 games for Brazil. The most famous was the only one Brazil scored in their 7-1 defeat to Germany in the semi-finals of the 2014 World Cup on home soil.

Yasir and Ali star as Stallions trump Markhors to win Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup

RAWALPINDI (APP): A swash-buckling hundred from opener Yasir Ali and another brilliant bowling display by Mohammad Ali guided ABL Stallions to Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup title with a thumping 75-run win over UMT Markhors in the final at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Wednesday evening. Yasir cracked a 57-ball 100 with seven towering sixes and five boundaries to propel Stallions to 199-5 in 20 overs before Ali destroyed Markhors with 3-19 restricting them to 124 all out in 19.1 overs. Stallions have added another title in

Pakistan's T20 history while UMT Markhors have lost their second final, having also lost the Champions Cup one-day final in Faisalabad in September this year. Chasing a daunting 200-run target, Markhors lost wickets at regular intervals. They relied heavily on Fakhar Zaman who failed to follow up his belligerent 89 in the Qualifiers, falling for 20 to Jahandad Khan who finished with 2-31. Spinner Usman Tariq took 2-10 in his four tight overs. Mohammad Faizan smashed three sixes and as many fours in his 33-ball 43 while skipper

Ifthikhar Ahmed scored 21-ball 22. Markhors' promising players Abdul Samad and Saad Masood failed to score that summed up their team's below-par batting. It was Yasir all the way in ABL Stallions' innings after they opted to bat with an idea to put a solid total on the board. Maaz Sadaqat hit the first ball of the innings from Mohammad Nawaz for a six while Yasir smashed two more maximums to show clear intentions. Pacer Akif Javed, pick of the bowlers with 2-32, dismissed Maaz in the third over to bring UMT Markhors back in the match.

UMT Markhors had an ideal opportunity to get Yasir out on 12 but Akif Javed dropped a skier off Nisar Ahmed and it cost them dearly. Yasir benefitted with smashing ways, adding 41 for the second wicket with skipper Mohammad Haris whose 15-ball 21 had two sixes. Hussain Talat managed just nine, while Tayyab Tahir scored 17 runs. Yasir, the 22-year-old from Bannu in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, reached his half-century off 33 balls with a six off Nawaz and then lifted the tempo. From 88 he smashed two sixes to reach his

second T20 century off 56 balls. He later holed out off Mohammad Faizan. Jahandad Khan cracked two sixes and a boundary in his ten-ball 22 not out to get Stallions to 199-5 in 20 overs. Ali finished as the top bowler with 22 wickets, admirably starring in his team's triumph in the tournament. **Scores in brief:** ABL Stallions beat UMT Markhors by 75 runs at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. ABL Stallions 199-5 in 20 overs (Yasir Khan 100, Jahandad Khan 22 not out, Mohammad Haris 21; Akif

Javed 2-32). UMT Markhors 124 all out in 19.1 overs (Mohammad Faizan 43, Ifthikhar Ahmed 22, Fakhar Zaman 20; Mohammad Ali 3-19, Usman Tariq 2-10, Jahandad Khan 2-31). Player of the Final - Yasir Khan (ABL Stallions). Player of the Tournament - Mohammad Ali (ABL Stallions). Best Batter of the Tournament - Hussain Talat (ABL Stallions). Best Bowler of the Tournament - Mohammad Ali (ABL Stallions).



RAWALPINDI: Stallions team celebrate after winning Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup 2024-25 trophy at Pindi Cricket Stadium.

Pakistan vs South Africa two-match Test series from Thursday

CENTURION, (APP): Pakistan are set to feature in a two-match Test series against South Africa beginning with the Boxing Day Test at the SuperSport Park in Centurion on Thursday. The second Test will commence at the Cape Town's Newlands Cricket Ground from January 3. In their ongoing all-format tour to South Africa, Pakistan lost the three-match T20I series 2-0 while came back to inflict a historic 3-0 white-wash in the ODI series. The Test series, part of the ICC World Test Championship, is expected to be highly competitive as well. Members of the Pakistan's Test squad reached South Africa on 13 December in order to prepare well and acclimatise with the local conditions. The Test squad has seen return of the experienced fast bowler Mohammad Abbas, who last played for Pakistan against West Indies in August 2021. He has forced his way back in the squad with 31 scalps in five Quaid-e-Azam Trophy

matches this season.

Fast bowler Khurram Shahzad, who was ruled out of the three-match home Test series against England due to injury has returned to the squad too. Aqib Javed is the interim head coach of Pakistan men's team and this will be his first red-ball series after taking the charge in the white-ball series against Zimbabwe last month.

Pakistan and South Africa have played each other in 12 Test series since 1995, out of which seven have been won by South Africa while Pakistan emerged victorious in two, while three ended-up as draws. In the recent most Test series between the two nations, Pakistan beat South Africa 2-0 at home in Jan-Feb 2021.

Shan Masood, Pakistan's Test captain in a statement said: "We are eagerly looking forward to measure ourselves against South Africa, who have always been one of the top sides in the world. We have got some momentum from the

recently concluded home Test series against England and the ODI series which featured a number of our Test squad members.

"The return of pacer Khurram Shahzad, who did really well on his debut in Australia and the seasoned campaigner Mohammad Abbas is a welcome development for Pakistan's Test side looking to bag wins in one of the toughest conditions for overseas teams.

"We know South Africa have done well in this iteration of the ICC World Test Championship but we have prepared for this series in the best possible manner as well after having arrived in the country at least two weeks ago."

Pakistan Test squad: Shan Masood (captain), Saud Shakeel (vice-captain), Aamir Jamal, Abdullah Shafique, Babar Azam, Haseebullah (wk), Kamran Ghulam, Khurram Shahzad, Mir Hamza, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Naseem Shah, Noman Ali, Saim Ayub and Salman Ali Agha

Schedule of matches: 10 Dec - 1st T20I - South Africa beat Pakistan by 11 runs at Kingsmead Cricket Stadium, Durban 13 Dec - 2nd T20I - South Africa beat Pakistan by seven wickets at SuperSport Park, Centurion 14 Dec - 3rd T20I - Match abandoned without a ball being bowled at the Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg 17 Dec - 1st ODI - Pakistan beat South Africa by three wickets at the Boland Park, Paarl 19 Dec - 2nd ODI - Pakistan beat South Africa by 81 runs at Newlands Cricket Ground, Cape Town 22 Dec - 3rd ODI - Pakistan beat South Africa by 36 runs (DLS) at the Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg 26 - 30 Dec - 1st Test vs South Africa at the SuperSport Park, Centurion (1pm PKT) 3-7 Jan - 2nd Test vs South Africa at the Newlands Cricket Ground, Cape Town (1pm PKT).

Saim Ayub, a new star on horizon of cricket arena

ISLAMABAD (APP): During the past couple of months, a new star has emerged on the horizon of international cricket in the shape of swash-buckling, wristy and stylish Pakistani opener Saim Ayub.

His meteoric rise has stunned his critics who had written him off following his below-average performances after his international debut against Afghanistan in March 2023.

Part of Pakistan's T20I and Test squad for some time but a new Saim Ayub emerged after his one-day international debut in Australia last month. In his debut ODI match in Melbourne on November 4, he could score only one run on five balls.

He was already under the scanner for a dismal performance in the T20I World Cup earlier in the year. Nobody knew that only four days later, on November 8 in Adelaide his career would take a new turn and he would silence his detractors with a sparkling match-winning innings.

On that day, his 82 knockoff 71 balls including five sixes led Pakistan's charge to a series-levelling nine-wicket victory against mighty Aussies. He had made a quiet start and could muster just 7 from 27 balls. On the last ball of the eighth over when he played a square drive against Josh Hazlewood on the last ball of eight over and then magnificently deposited Pat Cummins and Starc into the crowd before sweeping Adam Zampa's ball in the grandstand. Overall he hit six sixes - one off Cummins and Starc each and two of Zampa and Hardie each.

Even after that innings then prophets of doom might have thought that Saim's Melbourne knock was a fluke, but another confident innings of 42 (52) including four fours and one six at Perth in the third ODI was a manifestation that he had come on global cricket stage to stay.

South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia (SENA) are



considered the toughest tests for Asian batters' technique and temperament and Saim had passed that test with flying colours which beyond any doubt must have given him immense confidence. After those two innings on Australian soil, he has emerged as a different player and since then he has tasted success in white ball cricket like never before.

Against Zimbabwe, he scored 155 runs in three ODI matches including a 53-ball century which was third fastest by any Pakistani batter. The two fastest centuries were made by none other than Shahid Afridi.

Keeping in mind his form he was added to Pakistan's T20I team in Zimbabwe and he provided two quick starts with scores of 36(18) and 24 (18) in the first two matches whereas he was rested in the last one. On South African soil, his dream debut ODI season touched a new high as he played a heroic role in a tense run chase of 240 runs at Paarl. A magnificent hundred from the Pakistan opener helped seal a thrilling win in the first ODI, turning the game on its head after Pakistan lost four top-order batters on only 60 runs. Abdullah Shafique, Babar Azam, Rizwan and Kamran Ghulam were back in the pavilion by the start of 20th over and the visitors were in deep trouble. This innings was marked with controlled aggression and the maturity of mind of a seasoned cricketer.

When the fourth wicket fell, Saim had scored 30 runs off 54 balls and was trying to bide time on the crease. He even played two consecutive maiden overs from Baartman without losing patience.

He along with Agha Salman soaked the pressure and slowly but steadily built a crucial partnership. By the end of the 25th over the pair took the score to 87 mostly by taking singles and doubles in the rebuilding process like mature and seasoned players. In the 20th over Pakistan reached the 100 mark and 32 over Saim hit a boundary after 40 balls. In the 35 over by Baartman, Saim hit two consecutive sixes and a four on first three balls releasing pressure.

In the 40th over he hit Rabbada a four and six to complete a marvelous second century of his brief ODI career in his seventh match. In the second ODI, he played a brisk knock of 25 runs whereas in the third Saim Ayub riding on his stunning form scored a match-winning 101 runs off 94 balls as Pakistan completed a series clean sweep over South Africa at the Wanderers Stadium on December 22.

His second century of the series propelled him into an exclusive group of overseas batters who have scored multiple ODI centuries in South Africa. Besides Saim Ayub, Virat Kohli, David Warner, Fakhar Zaman, and Joe Root have achieved the same feat, while Kevin Pietersen and Kohli have three centuries in South Africa.

Ayub's century was a masterclass in controlled aggression and elegance. Reaching his half-century in a memorable six off Marco Jansen. The 22-year-old's third ODI century further cemented his place among cricket's rising stars, as he has now averaged an impressive 64.37 in his brief career, with three centuries and one half-century to his name.

Army claims first Women Empower National Volleyball Championship

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Army women's volleyball team emerged victorious in the first Women Empower National Volleyball Championship, defeating Karachi's team 3-0 in the final match held on December 23, 2024, in Karachi.

The championship, which featured teams from various provinces along with departmental teams and volleyball clubs across Pakistan, showcased the growing promi-

nence of women's volleyball in the country.

The Army team demonstrated exceptional performance throughout the tournament, maintaining an undefeated record en route to the championship match. Their journey culminated in a decisive victory over the host city's team in the final.

The tournament brought together teams from different regions of Pakistan, providing a platform for female athletes to compete at the national level. The championship represented

a significant milestone in promoting women's participation in competitive volleyball across the country.

The final match, played in Karachi, drew attention to the developing landscape of women's sports in Pakistan, with both finalists displaying competitive spirit throughout the tournament. The championship served as a demonstration of the expanding opportunities for women in Pakistani sports, particularly in team-based competitions at the national level.

Fakhar, Saim can together power Pakistan to 400-run total

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Former Pakistan captain Yousif Khan said on Wednesday that Fakhar Zaman and Saim Ayub can together power Pakistan.

Speaking to media in Karachi, the T20 World Cup winning captain said: "Fakhar Zaman should definitely be there in the team. Both Fakhar and Saim should play in the middle or lower order."

"We should rally behind those who play for the team. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has

taken the smart move in this regard," Khan stated.

He maintained: "Playing against the top teams is beneficial."

Highlighting the challenges embraced by the Pakistan cricket during the testing times, Khan said: "We have played our cricket abroad for nine years. Asad Shafiq and Azhar Ali had played their cricket mostly on the foreign conditions."

He shed light on the franchise system in the competitive cricket, say-

ing, "The cricket board gets support from the franchise cricket."

"Today, it is not an easy thing to organise the local cricket tournament. It is a good omen that the big tournament is being held here in Pakistan," Khan said.

Speaking about the India-Pakistan clashes, saying, "It is my wish to see the matches between India and Pakistan on a regular basis."

"You become a big player by playing against India," he maintained.



MELBOURNE: Usman Khawaja of Australia plays with his kids during an Australia Men's Test Squad training session at Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Djokovic eyes more Slam glory as Swiatek returns under doping cloud

SYDNEY (AFP): Novak Djokovic is confident he can still win Grand Slams, starting at the Australian Open, with the Serbian kickstarting his bid for an unprecedented 11th title and record 25th major crown in Brisbane this week.

Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka, who is gunning for a third Melbourne Park trophy, joins him at the Queensland Tennis Centre from December 29-January 5 in a stellar women's field.

The 2025 season gets under way on Friday with the mixed-teams United Cup in Perth and Sydney, headlined by world number two Iga Swiatek in her first tournament since revelations that she served a one-month doping suspension.

It is the first season since 37-year-old Djokovic began playing that none of the other so-called "Big Four" will be on the other side of the net following the retirements this year of Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray. Roger Federer called it quits in 2022.

As they faded, Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz stepped up to become the

new Grand Slam kings, with both men opting against a warm-up tournament leading into the first major of the year which begins on January 12.

As doubts grew over Djokovic's motivation and ability to take down the new guard after a disappointing 2024, he snatched the tennis world by hiring Murray to coach him.

Kyrgios returns The British three-time major winner is set to miss Brisbane but hook up with his old rival at the Australian Open. "I still will try to go strong because I feel like my body is serving me well. I still have motivation to win Grand Slams, make more history," said Djokovic, who needs one more Slam crown to surpass Margaret Court's 24.

"That's one of the biggest reasons why I asked Andy to work with me, because I still have big plans, so as long as that's the case, I will keep going."

By his standards, 2024 wasn't kind, failing to win a Slam, claiming just one title -- Olympic gold in Paris -- and ending his sea-

son in October. A resurgent Grigor Dimitrov, Holger Rune, and Frances Tiafoe are also playing in Brisbane, as is Australian Nick Kyrgios, who returns after injuries restricted him to just one ATP Tour singles match in two years.

He and Djokovic are set to play doubles together. Challenging Sabalenka on Pat Rafter Arena will be America's top talents Jessica Pegula and Emma Navarro, ranked seven and eight respectively, along with former world number two Ons Jabeur and veteran Victoria Azarenka.

Sabalenka, who beat China's high-flying Zheng Qinwen in the Melbourne final this year, had a sensational 2024 which culminated in being named WTA Player of Year this month.

The 26-year-old reached seven finals and won four titles, successfully defending the Australian Open, lifting her first US Open and winning WTA 1000 events in Cincinnati and Wuhan. She also recaptured the number one ranking from five-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek.



In brief

IRSA releases 34,700 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 34,700 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 38,000 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1470.84 feet and was 72.84 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,500 cusecs and 15,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1132.20 feet, which was 83.20 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,800 cusecs and 4,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 21,300, 25,600, 20,900 and 1,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 1,800 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

ITP, ICCI sign MoU

ISLAMABAD (APP): A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed on Wednesday between the Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) and the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) to launch the "Green and Clean Islamabad" project. The initiative aims to tackle environmental pollution in the federal capital and promote awareness through various activities. A police spokesperson told APP that Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Muhammad Sarfarz Virk and ICCI representative Ahsan Bakhtawari signed the memorandum. He said under the agreement, the Islamabad Traffic Police, as part of the "Green and Clean Islamabad" project, will take vigorous actions against vehicles causing environmental pollution in the federal capital. Additionally, the ITP will organize various awareness activities, including tree-planting campaigns across the city, with the support of the Islamabad business community. On this occasion, CTO Virk said that ITP special squads patrol various areas and key boulevards of the city. These squads are directed to conduct regular checks and issue fines for vehicles involved in environmental pollution in the city.

ANF recovers 115 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting six operations across the country arrested six drug dealers and recovered over 115 kg drugs worth over Rs 10 million, said an ANF Headquarters spokesperson here on Wednesday. He informed that two different operations were conducted near Red Sun Capital Square B-17 in Islamabad and ANF recovered 14.4 kg opium, 70.8 kg hashish and 12 kg ice hidden in two vehicles while two suspects were arrested. 12 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle intercepted near Kala Shah Kaku Interchange Lahore and a suspect was arrested during the operation. In fourth operation, 10 intoxicated tablets were recovered from a parcel sent from Peshawar at a courier office in Karachi. 6 kg of hashish was recovered from the possession of the suspect rounded up near a bus stop in Islamabad. 302 grams ice was recovered from a suspect held near Srinagar Highway Islamabad. Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.



ISLAMABAD: Christian community perform religious rituals during Christmas prayer at Fatima Church F-8. —APP Photo

Ahsan urges nation to reinvigorate Quaid's ideals for development

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday urged the nation, especially the younger generation, to adopt Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's golden principles of unity, faith, and discipline.

"This adoption will transform Pakistan into a strong, sovereign and prosperous nation—a true embodiment of Quaid-e-Azam's dream," he said in a message on the founder of Pakistan's 148th birth anniversary.

He said that the Quaid's tireless work and dedication to national unity were a beacon for all Pakistanis, adding, "His life gives

us the message that if we move forward with determination, integrity and mutual consent, no obstacle can stop us from becoming a developed and prosperous state."

The minister said that today, Pakistan stood at a crucial crossroads, and it was the duty of every citizen to play their part in national development by upholding the principles of Quaid-e-Azam and setting aside personal interests.

The government, he said, guided by the principles of Quaid-e-Azam, was adopting the 5Es framework as the basis of its development strategy. "This framework, based on exports, e-Pakistan, equity, energy and environment, is meant to put

Pakistan on the path of sustainable growth and prosperity, so that when we celebrate the centenary of Pakistan's independence in 2047, Pakistan will be among the leading economies of the world."

Ahsan Iqbal said the current economic challenges in the country also required the nation to adopt the principles of discipline from Quaid-e-Azam and put the economy on the path of stability by promoting self-reliance. "It is the time to eradicate corruption, promote tolerance, and provide equal opportunities for development to every citizen so that all segments of society can participate in the process of national development," he remarked.

Uzbek envoy extends greetings on 'Quaid-e-Azam Day'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Alisher Tukhtaev on Wednesday extended warm greetings on 'Quaid-e-Azam Day' to the Pakistan's nations and emphasized to follow the vision of the founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

In a message released here, the Ambassador of Uzbekistan said that this day honours the remarkable legacy of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose vision and determination continue to inspire unity and progress.

He said that today, 25th December, "we proudly observe Quaid-e-Azam Day, the birthday of the great leader and founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali

Jinnah. His legacy serves as an inspiration to all who seek justice, unity, and progress, he said.

The Ambassador said that Quaid-e-Azam laid the foundation for an independent Pakistan, setting an example of resilience and dedication to his people. May his principles continue to lead us to new heights, reminding us that the strength of any nation lies in unity and mutual respect.

In his message on this auspicious day, he said that the fraternal relations between Pakistan and Uzbekistan have deep historical and cultural roots.

Today, "we continue to build bridges of friendship and cooperation, strengthen our ties and discover new horizons. He wished that

may this brotherhood grow even stronger, and our joint efforts bring prosperity and development to our nations!

The Uzbek envoy said that Uzbekistan and Pakistan share a common desire for peace, mutual understanding, and progress and "I firmly believe that our cooperation will set an example for the entire region." "I sincerely wish the people of Pakistan prosperity, harmony and success! May every day bring you joy, peace and a bright future! With respect and best wishes."

May the spirit of Quaid-e-Azam inspire unity and lead the nation to even greater accomplishments Uzbek Ambassador extends greetings on 'Quaid-e-Azam Day'.

MD PTDC for launching double decker Bus Service

ISLAMABAD (APP): Managing Director Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC), Aftab ur Rehman Rana has unveiled the plan to launch Sightseeing Double Decker Bus Service in Islamabad.

He was giving a briefing to the tourism industry stakeholders here on Wednesday. On this occasion, Naveed Anjum, Manager of TDCP, Mukhtar Ali Manager TICs and Sadia Nauman, Manager P&P of PTDC and representatives of main hotels of Islamabad were also present in the briefing session.

The briefing revealed that Islamabad Sightseeing Double Decker bus service will be launched in January 2025 under the joint venture of Pakistan Tourism

Development Corporation (PTDC) and Tourism Development Corporation of Punjab (TDCP) to promote tourism in the capital city of Islamabad.

Mr. Rana, while giving a power point presentation, informed that government is committed to use all its energies to promote tourism in Pakistan to make it a major sector of economic growth.

He said this new initiative will provide the visitors of Islamabad a unique experience to explore the key monuments and tourist sites of capital city through a guided tour twice a day on daily basis with pick and drop facility from all major hotels in Islamabad.

In the second phase of this program, PTDC in collaboration with private sec-

tor will also launch weekend sightseeing tours of tourist sites around Islamabad including Taxila, Rohta Fort, Ketar Raj, Kallar Kahhar, Khewra, Takht-e-Bahi, Murree, Patriata and Peshawar.

Mr. Rana said that this modern and ecofriendly double decker bus service is a landmark initiative of PTDC and TDCP which will greatly help in improving the tourists appeal of capital city of Islamabad.

He said, PTDC has already developed an integrated tourism plan for Islamabad with a aim to promote the image of capital city as the gateway tourist destination of Pakistan through a collaborative approach of all the key stakeholders from public and private sector.

Naqvi pays tribute to Quaid-e-Azam on his birth anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has paid rich tribute to the wise and great leader of the Muslim world, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on his 148th birthday anniversary here on Wednesday.

In his message on Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's birth anniversary, Mohsin Naqvi said that this day demands a commitment to make Pakistan a great country according to Quaid-e-Azam's vision.

He added that unity, brotherhood, religious tolerance and coexistence are the true message of the day.

Interior Minister said that Quaid-e-Azam laid great emphasis on the importance of minority rights and religious freedom, adding that the founder of Pakistan was a great champion of protection of minority rights and religious tolerance.

He stressed that as a nation, we have to move forward by adhering to the principles of Quaid-e-Azam for the promotion of minority rights and religious tolerance. He emphasized that we have to put aside personal differences in the national interest and think of the beloved homeland.

Interior Minister said that Quaid-e-Azam changed the course of history for the rights of Muslims of the

subcontinent through his passionate leadership. He brought Muslims together on one platform and realized the dream of an independent Muslim state. He highlighted that thanks to Quaid-e-Azam's tireless struggle, today we are breathing in an independent homeland and this kindness of the founder of Pakistan cannot be repaid. He stated that Quaid-e-Azam's eternal role in the creation of Pakistan is a huge milestone.

Mohsin Naqvi further said that Quaid-e-Azam had dreamed of a society based on tolerance, forbearance, equality and tolerance and for such a welfare society, everyone will have to join hands so that the dream of the Quaid-e-Azam can be fully realized.

He emphasized that as a nation, we have to follow the guiding principles of unity, faith and discipline and this is the best way to pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam. He said that only true, honest and sincere leaders like Quaid-e-Azam change the destiny of countries, the goal of sustainable development and prosperity can be achieved by following the instructions of Quaid-e-Azam.

Mohsin Naqvi extends Christmas greetings, emphasizes importance of interfaith harmony: Federal Interior Minister Mohsin

Naqvi has extended warm greetings to the Christian community on the joyous occasion of Christmas.

He said that this day is a symbol of love, peace and brotherhood. He said that Prophet Isa (AS) was sent into this world as a symbol of peace, brotherhood and respect for all humanity. He has said that Prophet Isa (AS) preached the high values of tolerance, love and compassion.

The Interior Minister said that along with happiness, this day also gives a message of respect for humanity. He said that the focus of the teachings of Prophet Isa (AS) was not one class but the whole of humanity. He emphasized that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah added the white colour to the national flag for minorities.

He stated that it is our duty to protect the rights of minorities and that all minority communities in Pakistan enjoy complete freedom in every way. He highlighted that the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees the protection of the rights of minority communities. He further said that the role of the Christian community in the construction and development of Pakistan is beyond doubt. He prayed that Christmas may bring more success and happiness for the Christian community.

Tajik envoy felicitates on 'Quaid-e-Azam Day'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Tajikistan to Pakistan, Sharifzoda Yusuf Toir on Wednesday felicitated the Pakistan's nation on 'Quaid-e-Azam Day' to the Pakistan's nations and also urged to follow the path and vision of founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

In a message released here, he said that on behalf of the Embassy of Tajikistan in Pakistan, "I extend warmest greetings to the people of Pakistan on the occasion of Quaid-e-Azam Day."

Today, "we commemorate the birthday of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the

founder of Pakistan and a visionary leader who fought tirelessly for the rights and freedom of the Muslim people of the Indian subcontinent."

His unwavering dedication and perseverance ultimately led to the creation of Pakistan, a homeland for Muslims, on August 14, 1947, he said.

As "we celebrate Quaid-e-Azam Day today on December 25, we honor not only the legacy of Muhammad Ali Jinnah but also the values of unity, resilience, and determination that he embodied. His leadership and vision continue to inspire generations

of Pakistanis and serve as a beacon of hope for the country's future."

On this special day, "I would like to express my deepest admiration for the people of Pakistan and their remarkable achievements. Tajikistan and Pakistan enjoy a strong bond of friendship and cooperation, and we look forward to further strengthening our ties in the years to come."

Once again, "I extend my warmest greetings to the people of Pakistan on Quaid-e-Azam Day. May this day be a celebration of Pakistan's rich history, its vibrant culture, and its bright future."

PAC holds photo exhibition "Quaid Kay Shab o Roz"

RAWALPINDI (APP): Punjab Arts Council organized a photo exhibition titled "Quaid Kay Shab o Roz", in connection with Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's birth anniversary.

The exhibition showcased over 150 rare photographs depicting the life of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The aim of the exhibition was to educate the younger generation about the monumental struggle and sacrifices of the Father of the Nation for the creation of a separate homeland. During the exhibition, a documentary film reflecting the life and achievements of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was also screened.

The event was inaugurated by Tahira Aurangzeb, MNA. Seema Jilani, MNA

and Secretary for Information and Culture, Punjab Shazia Rizwan, MPAs Zaib-un-Nisa Awan, Asma Abbasi, Rifat Abbasi, and Director Arts Council Sajjad Hussain also attended the exhibition.

Tahira Aurangzeb on the occasion said that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a symbol of hope and determination, whose unwavering resolve led to the creation of Pakistan. She emphasized the importance of adopting Quaid's principles in our lives.

Seema Jilani expressed her pride in being a citizen of a country that was achieved through the struggle of such a dedicated, selfless, and honest leader. She added that not only experts and historians from the sub-

continent but also international historians pay tribute to this great leader's wisdom, vision, and leadership.

Parliamentary Secretary information & Culture Department Shazia Rizwan highlighted that Quaid-e-Azam fought for the Muslims on the basis of the Two-Nation Theory.

"Under his leadership, Pakistan emerged as an independent state, for which the nation pays tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah", she said. Shazia further said that the nation is progressing in literature and culture in line with Quaid-e-Azam's vision, and stressed the need to reaffirm the commitment to his teachings and unity. The exhibition attracted a large number of citizens.



ISLAMABAD: PML-N Parliamentary Secretary Farah Naz, Nuzhat Sadiq, Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and others cutting cake to celebrate Quaid-e-Azam 148th birth anniversary.

21 accused arrested, drugs & weapons seized

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police apprehended 21 accused involved in different criminal activities including drug peddling and possessing illegal weapons on Wednesday.

Police recovered weapons, liquor and drugs from their possessions.

A public relation officer told APP that the ICT Police Aabpara, Karachi Company, Sumbal, Industrial area, Sabzi Mandi, Khanna, Kirpa, Shams Colony, Humak, Phulgran and Shehzad

Town police teams took legal action against accused involved in possessing illegal weapons and drug peddling activities.

He said police team also arrested 17 accused namely Asif, Kamran, Kailash, Yasir Mehmood, Harris, Wali Shair, Amanat Khan, Ahmad Butt, Inayat, Abdul Khaliq, Muhammad Khan, Umrad, Malik Tuseeq, Mohsin Ali, Obaid Ullah, Afzal and Akhtar Ayub and recovered 2,976 grams heroin, 1,690 grams hashish, 60 liters of liquor, six pistols and two daggers

from their possession.

Moreover four absconders were also arrested from various areas of the city during the last 24 hours. SSP Operation Muhammad Arslan Shah Zaib said that the Islamabad Police is actively working to ensure the safety of citizens' lives and property in the federal capital, emphasizing that no elements will be allowed to disrupt citizens' peace. Protecting the lives, property, and dignity of citizens is the Islamabad Police's top priority.

Minister chaired meeting

KABUL (BNA): The Security and Clearance Commission convened under the chairmanship of Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid, Acting Minister of National Defense and Head of the Commission. The meeting featured extensive discussions on various security and clearance-related issues. The commission's leadership emphasized ensuring greater security and transparency in the clearance process during the session.

Taliban flog two men

PAKTIKA (Amu TV): Taliban publicly flogged two men in Paktika on Wednesday as their use of corporal punishment continues. The Taliban-run supreme court said in a statement that the two men had been convicted of adultery. One was sentenced to 39 lashes and five years in prison, while the other received 29 lashes and a two-month prison term. This latest incident adds to a growing number of public floggings carried out by the Taliban in recent months.

‘Hundreds of ethnic disputes resolved’

HERAT (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Borders, Ethnicities, and Tribes announced at a public gathering in Herat that hundreds of ethnic and community disputes in the country have been resolved peacefully over the past three years. According to officials from the ministry, the enmities and hostilities inherited from four decades of war in the country were widespread; however, the ministry has addressed a significant portion of these issues. Mohammad Ali Jan Ahmad, Deputy Coordinator for Jirgas and Tribal Affairs at the Ministry of Borders and Tribes, stated: “Across Afghanistan, conflicts that have resulted in killings and injuries number in the thousands; how-

ever, we have resolved nearly 600 such disputes in just one year.” Meanwhile, some tribal elders attending the gathering called on the caretaker government to address the people's problems. Nematullah Sadat, one of the tribal elders, said: “Provide work opportunities for the people. Unemployment has caused many problems, and officials need to focus on this issue.” Abdul Rahman, a representative of the Kuchis in Herat, added: “The Kuchis lack access to water, schools, and clinics, and our roads are in poor condition. Roads must be constructed for us.” Some tribal elders noted that resolving conflicts and hostilities among people in

their villages has improved living conditions. Nisar Ahmad Roshani, a tribal elder, said: “Since the Islamic Emirate came to power, ethnic grudges and animosities have been eliminated.” Mohammad Kabir, another tribal elder, added: “Unity and harmony prevail among the people of Injil, and there is no problem of discord.” This gathering was organized to express public support for the caretaker government and to preserve the Islamic system. According to the Ministry of Borders, Ethnicities, and Tribes, similar gatherings are being held across the country to address people's problems and bring them closer to the caretaker government.

Research initiated for Kaj Samad Dam

NIMROZ (TOLOnews): The research work for Kaj Samad Dam, with a cost of nearly two billion afghani, has been initiated in the Gulistan district of Farah province by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). This dam, with a length of 56 meters, has a storage capacity of 140 million cubic meters. Mohammad Younus Akhundzada, acting Minister of MRRD, said: “The design of this dam will be undertaken by Afghan engineers themselves. Our engineers are successful and experienced, and we are designing this dam for Afghans. The design will be completed within 6 to 7 months, after which we will move to the contract stage.” With the construction of this dam, the drinking water and agricultural needs of the residents of Nimroz will be resolved. According to officials, upon completion of this dam, 14,000 hectares of agricultural land in the districts of Delaram, Chakhansur, and Khashrod in Nimroz province will be irrigated. Mohammad Qasim Khalid, governor of Nimroz, said: “With the completion of this project, I am confident that the needs of all the people of Nimroz for agriculture and drinking water will be met, and God willing, the water issue of this area will be completely resolved.” Some residents of Nimroz say that with the construction of this water dam, the challenges of water shortages for irrigating their agricultural lands will be reduced. Mohammad Sediq, a resident of Chakhansur district in Nimroz, said: “I am happy that I came today for the inauguration of the dam. It was our dream for the dam to be inaugurated. The benefits of this dam are immense, and it will also prevent floods.” Niaz Mohammad, a resident of Delaram district in Nimroz, said: “When this dam is completed, more districts will benefit from it.”

UNAMA head stresses global solidarity to combat drugs in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLOnews): UNAMA head and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Roza Otunbayeva, has stressed the need for greater solidarity among global institutions to support Afghanistan in its fight against drugs. While visiting a rehabilitation center for drug addicts in Kabul, Otunbayeva highlighted the importance of providing vocational training services to rehabilitated individuals. Alongside Roza Otunbayeva, representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO) for Afghanistan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) also visited this rehabilitation center. The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan stated: “This Centre is a testament to the power of hope and international solidarity. The collaboration between WHO, UNODC, the EU and implementing partners like the International Medical Corps and the Youth Health and Development Organization gives these women and children the opportunity to heal and reclaim their futures.” The World Health Organization noted in a statement that decades of conflict and instability in



Afghanistan have left most Afghans vulnerable, with one-third of families impacted by drugs. Representatives from WHO Afghanistan and UNODC emphasized the importance of a comprehensive approach by global institutions in the fight against drugs. Edwin Ceniza Salvador, the World Health Organization's (WHO) Representative in Afghanistan, said: “This Kabul Hospital Drug Addiction Center is a 150-bed... where we provide medical management for women who are addicted to drugs, but at the same time also provide them with the

livelihood skills where they will help them to be integrated back in the community. This is a very prime example of where we can collectively join hands with our implementing partners, International Medical Corps and the YPHO to provide a comprehensive approach.” Polleak Ok Serei, the UNODC Representative, spoke about drug treatment, stating: “This drug treatment center focuses on women and children. We just accompanied the visit of the Assistant Secretary General and the Special Representative of the

Secretary General just to showcase what could be done and of course to push for more similar support in all of the other virtual consensus in Afghanistan.” Meanwhile, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) held its first Counter-Narcotics Working Group meeting on November 28, 2024. UNAMA noted in a statement that the establishment of this working group was based on recommendations from the independent 2023 evaluation submitted to the UN Security Council.

Shaheen: US presence brought no benefits



KABUL (TOLOnews): The Islamic Emirate, in response to remarks by a Republican member of the US Congress regarding the withdrawal from Afghanistan, stated that the withdrawal of US forces was based on the Doha Agreement. Suhail Shaheen, the head of the Islamic Emirate's political office in Qatar, emphasized that prior to negotiations between the US and the Islamic Emirate, the US had increased its troop levels in Afghanistan. However, the presence of US forces in Afghanistan did not yield

positive results. Suhail Shaheen, head of the Islamic Emirate's political office in Qatar, said: “The US implemented several strategies in Afghanistan and increased the number of its troops, but none of these strategies produced results. They could not win the war practically in Afghanistan, which is why they proposed negotiations to the Islamic Emirate.” The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan has always elicited reactions from United States (US) officials. Recently, a Republican

member of the US Congress told Fox News that the Biden administration's foreign policy “has left the world in a worse situation, starting with the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan.” “We must adopt a moderate policy with both the Eastern and Western worlds to ensure that Afghanistan does not once again become a battlefield for proxy wars and invasions by major powers,” said Salim Paigir, a political analyst. A month after the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York's Twin Towers in the US, the United States, under the banner of eliminating al-Qaeda, launched an invasion of Afghanistan. This resulted in a twenty-year presence in the country, which finally ended on 9th of Sunbula 1400 Solar year, when, following the return of the Islamic Emirate to power, the last US soldier departed from Afghanistan, marking the end of the US's twenty-year war in the country.

UN-Habitat: Half of Afghans to live in cities by 2060

KABUL (TOLOnews): The United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) has predicted that by 2060, one in two people in Afghanistan will live in cities. Expressing concern over this issue, the organization added that many Afghan cities are not prepared for rapid urban growth. Part of the UN-Habitat statement reads: “In Afghanistan, 1 in 2 people

are expected to live in cities by 2060. Yet, many cities are not ready for this rapid urbanization.” Meanwhile, officials from the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) said that more than 70% of the country's citizens live in rural areas, and only 25% reside in cities. “In 1403 Solar year, out of a population of 35.9 million in the country, 70%

live in rural areas and villages, while 9.2 million people, accounting for 25.8%, make up the urban population,” said Mohammad Halim Rafi, the spokesperson for the National Statistics and Information Authority. At the same time, some residents of the capital say there is a need for urban culture to be observed by the people. “Living in the country-

side differs from living in the city. Those coming from provinces or districts to the city should dispose of waste in designated places and help keep the city clean,” said Mohammad Aslam, a Kabul resident. “Anyone coming to the city should observe urban culture and collaborate in keeping the city clean,” said Shir Ahmad, another Kabul resident.

Logar cement project contract signed, says Ministry of Mines

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum signed a contract for the construction of a major cement production plant in the Altamur region of Logar with a Chinese company that also has an Afghan partner. Hedayatullah Badri, acting minister of mines and petroleum, stated during the contract signing ceremony that approximately \$145 million will be invested in the plant, creating job opportunities for hundreds of local residents. The acting minister said that this is the fourth major cement mining contract awarded to domestic and foreign companies. According to Badri, the Logar Cement Contracting Company will have the

capacity to produce 2,500 tons of cement daily. Hedayatullah Badri further said: “The mentioned company will invest approximately \$145 million in establishing the plant and has the capacity to produce 2,500 tons of cement daily, thereby creating job opportunities for hundreds of youth in the country.” Meanwhile, the head of the contracting company stated that the investment volume in the cement mine will be increased gradually while adhering to Afghan laws. Wu Zidan, head of the Logar Cement Contracting Company, said: “We are not only considering making profits only, but we also consider the common goals

for the local people and also we will be lawful to obey the laws and regulations of Afghanistan, and we are going to be contributor to the reconstruction of the new Afghanistan.” “Our actions are not solely aimed at making profits but also focus on common goals and the well-being of local communities. We are committed to complying with Afghanistan's laws and aim to participate in rebuilding a new Afghanistan.” The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum also announced that the Logar cement contract will last for 30 years. In the first phase, the contracting company will work on exploring the

mine, followed by constructing the factory, and later commence cement production. Homayoun Afghan, the ministry's spokesperson, said: “The area of this contracted mine is approximately 51 square kilometers, classifying it among the large-scale mines, and the contract is set for 30 years.” According to statistics from the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, since the return of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, private domestic and foreign companies have invested approximately \$623 million in four major cement projects located in the provinces of Jawzjan, Herat, Parwan, and Logar.

IEA claims country does not face shortage of female healthcare staff

KABUL (Amu TV): Mohammad Hassan Ghiasi, the Taliban's deputy minister of public health for policy, claimed on Wednesday that Afghanistan is not facing a shortage of female healthcare workers, despite mounting concerns after ban on women's medical education. “According to the statistics we have, there is no shortage of female healthcare personnel,” Ghiasi said. “This is a national issue that our leadership has been carefully addressing, and we will share the outcomes with you soon.” Responding to a question about consequences of Taliban's ban on medical education for women, Ghiasi said claimed that Afghanistan has nearly 30,000 trained midwives

who are not currently integrated into the country's healthcare system. Ghiasi further claimed that the Taliban are working on plans to employ these midwives in newly established healthcare centers, ensuring compliance with what he described as “Islamic and Sharia principles.” “We have more than 30,000 midwives who are awaiting employment opportunities,” he said. “We promise to utilize their expertise in appropriate roles within the healthcare system while adhering to religious guidelines.” He downplayed the situation as a “lack of coordination” rather than a significant problem, adding, “We hope to share our achievements in addressing these issues with the public soon.”



The Taliban's recent ban on women pursuing medical education has drawn sharp criticism from global organizations, including the United Nations, which warned that Afghanistan faces a severe shortage of female healthcare workers. This shortfall poses a critical threat to maternal and child health, particularly in rural areas where female medical staff are essential

for providing culturally appropriate care. While international experts continue to sound the alarm, the Taliban's leadership appears to dismiss these concerns. Critics argue that the restrictions on women in healthcare will exacerbate an already fragile healthcare system, which has been struggling since the Taliban's return to power in 2021.

‘A path of hardship and despair’: Afghan migrant recounts perils of irregular migration



KABUL (Amu TV): For Setara, a pseudonym she chose to protect her identity, the dream of a better life led her down a perilous path. Alongside her husband and family, she embarked on an irregular migration journey from Afghanistan to Iran, one fraught with hunger, exhaustion, and inhumane

conditions in human smuggling camps. Speaking anonymously due to security concerns, Setara shared her story of survival, urging others to avoid what she called a “path of hardship and despair.” A journey begins in desperation Setara's journey started

in Nimroz Province, a notorious hub for human trafficking networks. The family endured two days in a smuggling camp that she described as lacking even the most basic necessities. “There was no food, no water, and no place to stay,” Setara said. “The conditions were unbearable. After two days, we were told to move toward neighbor country.” The journey quickly became more grueling as they approached the border. Smugglers crammed 15 people into vehicles designed for far fewer passengers, exposing them to extreme heat and discomfort. “The heat was so intense that my scalp and hair were

damaged,” Setara recounted. “Every hour, the difficulties became heavier and more complicated.” Treacherous mountain crossings One of the most harrowing parts of the journey was crossing mountainous terrain on foot, a trek that lasted hours and carried the constant risk of fatal falls. “The mountain paths were so steep and dangerous that if you slipped, you wouldn't survive,” Setara said. “People had to discard their belongings because carrying anything extra was impossible. All we could manage was a small bag and the clothes we were wearing.” Setara described the scene as chaotic. “It felt

like all of Afghanistan was heading to Iran,” she said. “People were in terrible conditions, throwing away their belongings because they couldn't carry them any longer.” Inhumane conditions in smuggling camps The lack of food and water compounded the physical and emotional toll of the journey, but Setara found the conditions in smuggling camps particularly appalling. “We walked for over 12 hours, and our feet were covered in blisters,” she said. “The camps were taken to be uninhabitable—places where no human being should ever live. We had no food, and if any was available, it was

dry bread that was barely edible.” The smugglers treated migrants as commodities, passing them from one group to another. “We were handed off like goods, moving from one smuggler to the next until we reached our destination,” she said. A harsh reality in Iran Setara and her family eventually reached Iran, but the challenges did not end there. As undocumented migrants, they faced significant discrimination and harsh living conditions. “There were no jobs for Afghans,” Setara said. “Employers told us they weren't allowed to hire Afghans. We had no home and often spent nights on the streets because we had

nowhere else to go.” The situation worsened when Iranian authorities detained her husband and forcibly deported him back to Afghanistan. With no other options, Setara returned to Afghanistan as well, disillusioned by the journey and its aftermath. Reflecting on her experience, Setara described irregular migration as a dangerous and dehumanizing process. She urged others not to follow the same path. “My message to anyone thinking about leaving Afghanistan illegally is simple: Don't do it,” she said. “The journey is too dangerous. Smugglers push people to move quickly to avoid detection by border

guards, but those guards often shoot directly at migrants, killing many.” Economic hardship, unemployment, and political instability have driven countless Afghans to embark on irregular migration routes in search of a better life. Yet, for many, the journey leads to suffering, exploitation, and tragedy. The testimonies of survivors like Setara reveal the stark realities of these dangerous routes, from physical abuse and life-threatening conditions to the emotional toll of displacement and uncertainty. Her story is one of many, each marked by pain, resilience, and the hope for a future beyond poverty and insecurity.



KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister, Syed Murad Ali Shah along with Governor, Kamran Tessori talking to media persons at Mazar-e-Quaid.

Israeli forces kill dozens in Gaza as ceasefire talks face challenges

GAZA: Israeli forces are pounding the besieged Gaza Strip, killing at least 25 Palestinians and wounding dozens more as indirect ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas face more obstacles. Medics in the bombed enclave said the Israeli military targeted yet another school sheltering displaced families on Wednesday in the Gaza City suburb of Sheikh Radwan.

The strike killed three Palestinians, including a child, and injured several others. The attack came shortly after an earlier strike targeted a residential home in Gaza City, killing a pregnant woman. According to Al Jazeera's Hind Khoudary, reporting from Deir el-Balah in central Gaza, medics were able to save the baby but "lost the mother".

"The situation is dire on every level across the Gaza Strip," Khoudary said. "Elsewhere, a very famous Palestinian writer [Walaa Jumaa al-Ifranji] was killed along with her husband [Ahmed Saeed Salama] in an Israeli attack on their home south of the Nuseirat refugee camp," in central Gaza, she added. An Israeli attack on the Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza also killed two people on Wednesday.

Separately, several Palestinians were killed and wounded in al-Mawasi, an area Israel has declared a "safe zone" for people forced to flee their homes in southern Gaza's Khan Younis, where the military said it carried out a strike against a Hamas fighter. The Israeli military routinely

targets displacement camps as well as schools-turned-shelters, killing mostly women and children in its genocide since October last year, which has killed more than 45,000 Palestinians.

The military also targets hospitals and medical facilities. In the besieged north, where Israeli forces launched a renewed ground offensive more than two months ago, one of the last partially operating hospitals in Gaza has come under intense Israeli attack. An Israeli siege on Kamal Adwan Hospital has intensified over the past few days, and Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud reports that it has now been "rendered nonoperational given all the constant attacks and the use of explosive devices".

Gaza's Ministry of Health said Israeli forces have also continued to besiege two other medical facilities that are barely operational as they surround Beit Lahia, Beit Hanoun and Jabalia. The Israeli army forced officials at the Indonesian Hospital to evacuate patients and staff on Tuesday and continued to operate close to nearby Kamal Adwan Hospital. They also ordered the emptying of that hospital, but officials there have refused, citing risks to dozens of patients.

Palestinians have accused Israel of seeking to permanently depopulate northern Gaza to create a buffer zone. The Israeli attacks came as Palestinians in Gaza saw yet another sombre Christmas. Pope Francis denounced the "extremely grave"

humanitarian situation in Gaza and appealed for the freeing of Israeli captives held by Hamas in his traditional Christmas address at the Vatican. "May there be a ceasefire, may the hostages be released and aid be given to the people worn out by hunger and by war," he said.

Meanwhile, Hamas and Israel traded blame on Wednesday over the failure to conclude a ceasefire agreement despite progress reported by both sides in the past days. Hamas said Israel had set new conditions while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused the group of going back on understandings already reached.

"The occupation has set new conditions related to withdrawal, ceasefire, prisoners, and the return of the displaced, which has delayed reaching the agreement that was available," Hamas said in a statement. Hamas said, however, that it was showing flexibility and the talks, mediated by Qatar and Egypt, were going in a serious direction.

Netanyahu blamed Hamas, saying the group "continues to lie, is reneging on understandings that have already been reached and is continuing to create difficulties in the negotiations". Israeli negotiators returned to Israel from Qatar on Tuesday evening for consultations about a deal after a significant week of talks, Netanyahu's office said on Tuesday. The United States and the two Arab mediators have stepped up efforts to conclude a deal in the past two weeks. — Aljazeera

Hamas says 'new' Israeli conditions delaying agreement on Gaza truce

JERUSALEM (AFP): Hamas accused Israel on Wednesday of imposing "new conditions" that it said were delaying a ceasefire agreement in the war in Gaza, though it acknowledged negotiations were still ongoing. Israel has made no public statement about any new conditions in its efforts to secure the release of hostages seized on October 7, 2023.

Indirect talks between Israel and Hamas, mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States, have taken place in Doha in recent days, rekindling hope for a truce deal that has proven elusive. "The ceasefire and prisoner exchange negotiations are continuing in Doha under the mediation of Qatar and Egypt in a serious manner... but the occupation has set new conditions concerning withdrawal (of troops), the ceasefire, prisoners, and the return of displaced people, which has delayed reaching an agreement," the Palestinian militant group said in a statement.

Hamas did not elaborate on the conditions imposed by Israel. On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu told parliament that there was "some progress" in the talks, and on Tuesday his office said Israeli representatives had returned from Qatar after "significant negotiations." Last week, Hamas and two other Palestinian militant groups — Islamic Jihad and the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — said in a rare joint statement that a ceasefire agreement was "closer than ever," provided Israel did not impose new conditions.

Efforts to strike a truce and hostage release deal have repeatedly failed over key stumbling blocks. Despite numerous rounds of indirect talks, Israel and Hamas have agreed just one truce, which lasted for a week at the end of 2023. Negotiations have faced multiple challenges since then, with the primary point of disagreement being the establishment of a lasting ceasefire in Gaza.

Another unresolved issue is the governance of post-war Gaza. It remains a highly contentious issue, including within the Palestinian leadership. Israel has said repeatedly that it will not allow Hamas to run the ter-

ritory ever again. In an interview with The Wall Street Journal last week, Netanyahu said: "I'm not going to agree to end the war before we remove Hamas."

He added Israel is "not going to leave them in power in Gaza, 30 miles from Tel Aviv. It's not going to happen." Netanyahu has also repeatedly stated that he does not want to withdraw Israeli troops from the Philadelphia Corridor, a strip of land cleared and controlled by Israel along Gaza's border with Egypt. The war in Gaza was sparked by Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attack on Israel, during which militants seized 251 hostages.

Ninety-six of them are still being held in Gaza, including 34 the army says are dead. The attack resulted in 1,208 deaths, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed at least 45,361 people in Gaza, a majority of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the UN considers reliable.

Iran says Syria's future unclear after foreign minister hits back

TEHRAN: Iran's top diplomat has said it is too soon to judge Syria's future as many developments could affect it after his counterpart in the fledgling Syrian government heavily criticised Tehran. "I think it is currently too soon to judge, both for us and for those others who think victories were won in Syria," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said with a smile in a short clip of an interview released on his Telegram channel on Wednesday.

The comments came after Syria's new Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani told Iran it must respect the will of the Syrian people and the country's sovereignty and security. "We warn them against spreading chaos in Syria and we hold them responsible for the repercussions of the latest remarks," he said, but did not specify the remarks he was referring to.

Araghchi has led Iran's diplomatic response in the aftermath of the fall of longtime Tehran ally Bashar al-Assad, which has consisted of expressing a willingness to maintain bilateral relations while caveating that that would heavily depend on the country's position concerning Israel. But Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has described the events in Syria as a ploy by the United States and Israel — with

agency by neighbouring Turkey — has employed stronger language.

"The Syrian youth have nothing to lose. Their universities, schools, homes and lives are not safe," he said in a speech earlier this week. "What can they do? They must stand with firm determination against those who have orchestrated and brought about this insecurity and God willing, they will prevail over them." The Iranian leader also said the US design to "dominate" countries consists of either establishing a regime with which they can work or "chaos and riots". Syria's events, Khamenei said, led to the latter.

Iran spent tens of billions of dollars, mostly during the decade-long Syrian civil war, to keep the al-Assad government in place with assistance from Russia. The Iran-led "axis of resistance" has lost one of its members and a crucial ground supply route to Hezbollah through Syria with the fall of the al-Assad dynasty.

Khamenei said Iran was partly repaying Syria since Hafez al-Assad, the deposed president's father, assisted Iran when it was being invaded by neighbouring Iraq in the 1980s by cutting off a crucial Iraqi oil pipeline. Iran and the region also made significant gains by fighting in Syria to push back ISIL (ISIS) and other armed groups, the Iranian supreme leader

emphasised. Unconfirmed reports have suggested Syria may be planning to pursue billions in compensation from Iran in international courts.

Last week, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Esmail Baghaei told reporters that claims that Syria owes Iran \$50bn are "exaggerated", but added that any existing debts will be transferred to the new leadership of the country based on the principle of state succession. In addition to its investments to support a presence in Syria, Iran also supplied crude oil to the al-Assad government. The oil export has now ceased, with the last oil tanker making a U-turn for Iran on the day of his overthrow.

The hardening stance against Tehran from the new Syrian government comes as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, also referred to as Abu Mohammed al-Julani, and others have been meeting with top international officials — including from the US, European Union, Turkey and Iran's Arab neighbours — and reopening embassies. Syria's de facto leader on Tuesday reached an agreement with rebel factions to come together as one force under the country's Defence Ministry. Prominent HTS commander Murhaf Abu Qasra was appointed as defence minister. — Aljazeera

US agency targeting foreign disinformation shuts down

WASHINGTON (AFP): A leading United States government agency that tracks foreign disinformation has terminated its operations, the State Department has said, after Congress failed to extend its funding following years of Republican criticism.

The Global Engagement Center (GEC), a State Department unit established in 2016, shuttered on Monday at a time when officials and experts tracking propaganda have been warning of the risk of disinformation campaigns from US adversaries such as Russia and China. "The State Department has consulted with Congress regarding next steps," it said in a statement when asked what would happen to the GEC's staff and its ongoing projects following the shutdown.

The GEC had an annual budget of \$61m and a staff of about 120. Its closing leaves the State Department without a dedicated office for tracking and countering disinformation from US rivals for the first time in eight years. A measure to extend funding for the centre was stripped out of the final version of the bipartisan federal spending bill that passed through the US Congress last week.

The GEC has long faced scrutiny from Republican lawmakers, who accused it of censoring and surveilling Americans. It also came under fire from Elon Musk, who accused the GEC in 2023 of being the "worst offender in US government censorship [and] media manipulation" and called the agency a "threat to our democracy."

The GEC's leaders have pushed back on those views, calling their work crucial to combating foreign propaganda campaigns. Musk had loudly objected to the original budget bill that would have kept GEC funding, though without singling out the centre. The billionaire is an adviser to President-elect Donald Trump and has been tapped to run the new so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), tasked with reducing government spending, in Trump's upcoming administration.

In June, James Rubin, special envoy and coordinator for the GEC, announced the launch of a multinational group based in Warsaw to counter Russian disinformation on the war in neighbouring Ukraine. The State Department said the initiative, known as the Ukraine Communications Group, would bring together partner governments to coordinate messaging, promote accurate reporting of the war and expose Kremlin information manipulation. In a report last year, the GEC warned that China was spending billions of dollars globally to spread disinformation and threatening to cause a "sharp contraction" in freedom of speech around the world.

Yoon defies second summons over martial law

SEOUL: Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol has defied a summons to appear for questioning over his short-lived declaration of martial law for the second time in a week.

Yoon did not appear for questioning on suspicion of insurrection and abuse of power after being ordered to attend the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials in Gwacheon, south of Seoul, at 10am on Wednesday. Yoon previously failed to respond to a separate summons by prosecutors on December 15.

Yoon, who served as the country's top-ranking prosecutor before entering politics, has been suspended from his duties since December 14, when the National Assembly voted for his impeachment in a 204-85 vote. The Constitutional Court of Korea is currently deliberating whether to uphold the motion and remove Yoon from office, a step that must be approved by at least six of nine justices.

The court has scheduled its first public hearing on the matter for December 27 and could take up to six months to deliver its ruling. New elections would be held within two months if Yoon's removal is confirmed. — Aljazeera

38 dead after Azeri Airlines plane crashes in Kazakhstan

AKTAU: At least 38 people have died after an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane crashed near the Kazakhstan city of Aktau. The plane with 62 passengers and five crew members on board crashed on Wednesday after it was forced to make an emergency landing about three kilometres (1.8 miles) from Aktau.

"The situation is not very good, 38 dead," Russia's Interfax news agency quoted Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbayev as saying. The Embraer 190 aircraft was en route from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus. Azerbaijan's prosecutor general's office earlier said 32 of the 67 people on board had survived. "We cannot disclose any investigation results at this time. All possible scenarios are being examined, and the necessary expert

analyses are underway," it said in a statement.

"An investigative team, led by the deputy prosecutor general of Azerbaijan, has been dispatched to Kazakhstan and is working at the crash site," Azerbaijan Airlines said it was suspending all its flights from Baku to Russia's Chechnya region until the investigation is concluded, according to the Russian state news agency TASS.

"According to preliminary reports, the plane requested landing at an alternative airport before the accident ... due to heavy fog in Grozny," Al Jazeera's Yulia Shapovalova reported from Moscow. Passengers on the plane included citizens from Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Shapovalova added. The airline has set up a hotline for family members of the passengers. Russia's aviation watchdog said in a statement that

preliminary information suggested the pilots decided to make an emergency landing after a bird strike. Aktau is on the opposite shore of the Caspian Sea from Azerbaijan and Russia. Authorities in Kazakhstan said a government commission will investigate the crash and its members have been ordered to fly to the site and ensure that the families of the dead and injured were getting the help they needed.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev cut short a visit to Russia where he was due to attend a summit on Wednesday. "We deeply sympathise with those who lost their relatives and friends in this plane crash and wish a speedy recovery to all those who managed to survive," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said. Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-backed leader of Chechnya, also expressed his condolences in a statement. — Aljazeera

Presidential ordinance to regulate seminaries

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government on Wednesday decided to issue a presidential ordinance to regulate the registration of seminaries, sources said.

According to officials, President Asif Ali Zardari will promulgate the ordinance, a move aimed at formalising the process under a legal framework. The decision follows extensive consultations among Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, and President Zardari.

The proposed ordinance received consensus from key stakeholders, including the JUI-F, to ensure a smooth implementation process. Sources further stated that the ordinance will provide legal protection to madrassahs under the Directorate General of

Religious Education and the amended Societies Registration Act, streamlining their operations within a regulatory framework.

Sources further said Fazlur Rehman would again approach the Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-Madaris for consultation if the premier would come up with the new suggestions. Soon after receiving PM's invitation for talks, Maulana Fazlur contacted Mufti Taqi Usmani for consultation.

It is pertinent to mention here that Ittehad Tanzeemat-i-Madaris Pakistan on Tuesday deviated from a 2019 stance and announced that "seminaries will not become part of any government department and remain autonomous." The seminaries organisation had in 2019 agreed to come under the control of the federal education ministry.

The Ittehad issued a

statement after a delegation met JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman at his residence to support him as he is stressing the government to issue a gazette notification for the Societies Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024, which would roll back the 2019 agreement and make the district administration the authority to register seminaries.

In the statement, Mufti Taqi Usmani said the boards took the decision to become subservient to the education ministry under pressure, as at that time they thought it was better to be under the control of the education ministry than anyone else. Mufti Taqi Usmani Mufti announced that seminaries would remain autonomous and would not become subservient to authorities in Pakistan like in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt.

Erdogan says YPG 'will be buried' in Syria

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has warned that Kurdish fighters in Syria will either lay down their weapons or "be buried", amid hostilities between Turkiye-backed Syrian rebels and other armed groups since the fall of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad earlier this month.

Following al-Assad's ouster on December 8, Ankara has repeatedly insisted that the Kurdish YPG militia must disband, asserting that the group has no place in Syria's future. The change in Syria's leadership has left the country's main Kurdish factions on the back foot. "The separatist murderers will either bid farewell to their weapons, or they will be buried in Syrian lands along with their weapons," Erdogan told lawmakers from his ruling AK Party in parliament on Wednesday. "We will eradicate the ter-

rorist organisation that is trying to weave a wall of blood between us and our Kurdish siblings," he added.

Turkiye views the YPG militia — the main component of the United States-allied Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) — as an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militia, which has waged a rebellion against the Turkish state since 1984. The PKK is designated a terrorist organisation by Turkiye, the US and the European Union. Ankara has repeatedly called on its NATO ally Washington and others to stop supporting the YPG.

Al Jazeera's Sinem Koseoglu, reporting from Istanbul, said this is not a surprising statement by Erdogan "as it is the official rhetoric of the Turkish government". Since the YPG is considered "the Syrian branch of the PKK, Ankara

believes that they should either lay down arms, or they should fight and they will be defeated," Koseoglu said.

Earlier, Turkiye's defence ministry said the armed forces had killed 21 YPG-PKK fighters in northern Syria and Iraq. SDF commander Mazloum Abdi acknowledged last week the presence of PKK fighters in Syria for the first time, saying they had helped battle ISIL (also known as ISIS) fighters and would return home if a total ceasefire was agreed with Turkiye, a core demand from Ankara. He denied any organisational ties with the PKK. Erdogan also said Turkiye would soon open its consulate in Aleppo, adding that Ankara expected an increase in traffic at its borders in the summer of next year as some of the millions of Syrian migrants it hosts begin to return to their homes. — Aljazeera

Russia launches 'inhuman' Christmas Day attacks: Zelensky

KYIV (Reuters): Russia attacked Ukraine's energy system and some cities with cruise and ballistic missiles plus drones on Wednesday in an "inhuman" Christmas Day assault, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

Nearly three years into the war, the strikes wounded at least six people in the north-eastern city of Kharkiv and killed one in the region of Dnipropetrovsk, the governors there said. Half a million people in Kharkiv region were left without heating, in temperatures just a few degrees Celsius above zero, while there were blackouts in the capital Kyiv and elsewhere.

"Today, [Russian President Vladimir] Putin deliberately chose Christmas to attack. What could be more inhuman? More than 70 missiles, including ballistic missiles, and more than a hundred attack drones," he said. Russia's Defence Ministry confirmed it had conducted a "massive strike"

on what it said were critical energy facilities supporting the work of Kyiv's "military-industrial complex". "The aim of the strike was achieved. All facilities have been hit," it said in a statement.

Ukraine's military said its air defences downed 59 Russian missiles and 54 drones overnight and on Wednesday morning. Ukrainians were marking their second Christmas on Wednesday, according to a new calendar in another step towards erasing Russian influence. Most Ukrainians are Orthodox Christians and the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine, set up in 2018, agreed in 2023 to move away from the traditional Julian calendar used in Russia where Christmas is on January 7.

Russia has intensified attacks on the Ukrainian energy sector since the spring of this year, damaging almost half of its generating capacity and causing prolonged black-

outs. Ukraine's air force said ballistic missiles attacked Kharkiv. Regional governor Oleh Synyehubov said on Telegram there was damage to civilian non-residential infrastructure, without giving more detail.

D n i p r o p e t r o v s k Governor Serhiy Lysak said the fatality there occurred in an attack on regional power facilities. "Since the morning, the Russian army has been massively attacking the Dnipro region. It is trying to destroy the region's power system," he said. Ukraine's Energy Minister German Galushchenko said on Facebook that Russia was massively attacking the power sector and that restrictions on electricity supply were in place. Ukraine's largest private energy company DTEK said its generating facilities were attacked, with power equipment seriously damaged, in the 13th large-scale assault on the energy sector this year.