



ISSI inaugurates ‘China Corner’ to further promote China Studies

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: China Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised the inaugural ceremony of ‘China Corner’ at the ISSI Library. The event was graced by Ambassador Syed Tariq Fatemi, Special Assistant to Prime Minister/Minister of State (Foreign Affairs), as Chief Guest. Ambassador Khalil Hashmi, Ambassador of Pakistan to China, and Mr. Shi Yuanqiang, Deputy Head of Mission at Embassy of China in Pakistan, attended as Guests of Honour.

The event was attended by prominent members of diplomatic community, bureaucracy, civil society and the media. This is the first ever ‘China Corner’ to be established in a think-tank in Pakistan.

In his welcome address, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood highlighted that ISSI has been serving as an important hub for research on China in Pakistan with multiple institutional collaborations with Chinese think tanks and universities. ISSI is also a dialogue partner for the Pakistan-China Think Tank Forum with the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) as part of the Joint Working Group of CPEC on International Cooperation. He further added that the ‘China Corner’ has a collection of more than 600 physical and 5000 electronic books, journals, newspapers, and monographs related to China studies that are available for scholars to benefit from.

He also emphasized that since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the Pakistan-China relationship has followed a steady progression and has now evolved into

an All-weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership, and is now an indispensable factor of stability in the region and beyond. It encompasses diplomatic, political, economic, security, defence, technological, educational, cultural, and people-to-people domains. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), powerfully manifests the commitment of the leadership on both sides to foster transformational economic development and regional connectivity.

During his remarks, Ambassador Khalil Hashmi stated that Pakistan-China relationship has surpassed the traditional construct of inter-state relations and is now a comprehensive and unique partnership built on mutual trust, mutual support and mutual respect as its foundational principles. The establishment of ‘China Corner’ at ISSI is not only about studying China but also to build bridges and make synergy between both countries to work together. It holds immense potential as a space where ideas will flourish and the future of Pakistan-China bilateral relationship shall be supported. He encouraged students, scholars, researchers, policymakers and practitioners to make full use of this platform.

Mr. Shi Yuanqiang, Deputy Head of Mission at Embassy of China, emphasized that ISSI has made outstanding efforts to promote mutual understanding and information about China. Chinese Embassy has been cooperating with ISSI and also contributed books and CDs for the ‘China Corner.’ He added that Pakistan and China are all-weather strategic cooperative partners and iron-clad friends and that the friendship between the two countries has

stood the test of time and is as solid as rock and as stable as Mount Tai. The salience of bilateral relationship is shared by highest level of leadership of both countries, and China is ready to work with Pakistan to help build a China-Pakistan community of shared future.

In his address, the Chief Guest Ambassador Syed Tariq Fatemi elaborated that there is something very fascinating about Pakistan China relations that has perplexed scholars of international relations abroad for years. The history of both countries shows that despite huge differences between the people and philosophies of the two countries the relationship continued to strengthen. Pakistan was among the first to recognize China, it was also the first to advocate for Chinese membership in the UN.

In the shape of CPEC Pakistan has been fortunate enough to be the first symphony in the Chinese orchestra of BRI. To recognize the cooperation between two countries is not only good for the two countries but for the entire region. He added that the Chinese leadership had reaffirmed to the Prime Minister in their latest meetings that CPEC will not only continue to go forward but would also be enlarged and expanded.

Earlier, in his opening remarks Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director CPSC, stated that the ‘China Corner’ will provide comprehensive access to information and resources about China’s governance model, economic policies, and diplomatic strategies. This repository will be a resource for fostering knowledge, dialogue, and collaboration. It embodies a commitment to understanding China’s development narrative and leveraging this understanding for shared progress and prosperity.



LAHORE: Managing Director, Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal Senator Shaheen Khalid Butt is being welcomed by organization’s officers.

CTD budget enhanced to acquire digital monitoring systems

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Punjab government has approved an additional fund of over Rs1.9 billion for the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) to strengthen operations against terrorism. The funds will be utilized to purchase state-of-the-art digital media monitoring software, open-source intelligence systems, modern machinery, and vehicles, enhancing the department’s capability to combat terrorist threats.

Sources revealed that the funds, requested during the current financial year, will be allocated for software acquisition, transport, and essential equipment. With a noticeable rise in terrorism incidents, particularly in KP and Balochistan, this funding marks a critical step toward enhancing counter-terrorism measures in Punjab.

Earlier this year, in April, the CTD Punjab identified 25,432 suspected terrorists linked to various banned organisations. A report compiled by the department details the affiliations and personal information of these individuals. Among them, 8,926 suspects were linked to the same organisation, while 968 were reportedly influenced by the ideology of Daesh, an internationally designated terrorist group. The CTD has intensified surveillance of these individuals, focusing on tracking their activities and preventing further security threats.

2025 must be year of progress

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Shaikh said that national unity and accountability was pivotal for steering Pakistan toward progress and prosperity in the coming year.

Talking to media, he said that the government has set the country on the right path of progress and stability. “We must strive to make 2025 a year of development and prosperity for the country. Hope is essential, and efforts must align with this vision,” he said. The minister welcomed recent steps toward political reconciliation, including the formation of negotiation committees by both sides and agreements to avoid divisive rhetoric. He urged all political leaders to engage constructively while respecting the democratic mandate of each party.

Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu

Bannu Township Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Cancellation of Advertisement No. 3(24)

Reference to the Advertisement No. 3(24) of the RFP for Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu, which was published in the daily newspaper ‘The Frontier Post’ Peshawar on 13-12-2024 and also uploaded on the PPRA website. This advertisement is hereby treated as cancelled due to technical reasons.

Vice Chancellor

Kalam Bibi International Women Institute, Bannu
Bannu Township, Bannu. Ph: 0928-633810

Sharjeel reviews progress on Red Line BRT project



F.P. Report

KARACHI: A high-level meeting presided over by the Senior Minister of Sindh Sharjeel Inam Memon reviewed the progress in the Red Line project. Issues pertaining to progress on construction of the bus depots and terminals, utilities shifting and other allied works came up for discussion in a meeting which attended by Secretary Transport Asad Zamin, the CEO Trans Karachi Tariq Manzoor Chandio, the international consultants and others. The work done so far was explained to the participants by CEO Trans Karachi Tariq Manzoor Chandio. During the meeting, international consult-

ants presented recommendations on how some of the works should be done to meet international standards and resolve some of the ongoing challenges. Talking to the media on the sidelines of the meeting, Sindh Senior Minister, Provincial Minister for Information, Transport and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon said that the Red Line BRT is amongst the major initiatives concerning infrastructural development in Karachi and that the challenges are addressed to complete the project as per the timeline. He said that Red Line BRT is a game changer for Karachi commuters, and any further delay in the progress cannot be afforded. During the

meeting, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon asked the Transport Department to remain in close liaison with the utility service providers. He said coordinated efforts must be made regarding the resolution of issues like utility transfers and expedite construction. He said the Sindh government is committed to a modern, efficient, and eco-friendly transportation system for Karachi people. This track of the Red Line BRT stretches along the 26 kilometers’ journey, supposed to be the backbone for mass transit in Karachi as a whole. The potential capacity of the Red Line BRT has the ability to carry thousands of passengers each day, hence reducing traffic on the roads.

Woman shot dead for ‘honour’ in Karachi

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A married woman was allegedly axed to death in the name of honour by her maternal grandfather in Marfani Goth within the remit of the Awami Colony police station. On Thursday, according to police, Razia Sanullah, 40, was shot and killed inside a home in Gulshan-i-Buner, police said.

Speaking to media, Malir Superintendent of Police (SP) Saeed Rind said the police suspected involvement of close relatives behind the murder. “During the initial probe, police have received some clues, which have suggested that the incident might be an outcome of so-called honour,” Rind said. He said that close relatives were “unhappy” with the woman’s activities to the extent that they did not attend her funeral prayer. Her neighbours, however, attended the funeral.

The body was shifted to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) for legal formalities and the police were further investigating the case. Last month, a woman was stabbed to death allegedly by her husband in the name of so-called honour on the outskirts of the metropolis.

In September, a newlywed couple was gunned down, and their relative was injured over ‘honour’ in Orangi Town. In July, a

young woman was allegedly axed to death in the name of honour by her maternal grandfather in Marfani Goth within the remit of the Awami Colony police station.

Man arrested for harassing woman: District Central Police in Karachi have arrested a suspect, identified as Amir, for allegedly harassing a woman at a market in Sector 5M North Karachi. The incident came to light after a video of the incident went viral on social media.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Central Zeeshan Siddiqui said that the woman was shopping at a stall when three youths, including Amir, allegedly harassed her. The SSP said that Amir was arrested with

the help of the viral video.

A case has been registered against Amir and others at Bilal Colony police station and raids are being conducted to arrest his two accomplices. Read More: Karachi man strips naked in front of passerby woman in Surjani

Earlier in a separate case, the footage of an incident came to light, showing a man harassing a pedestrian woman in Karachi. In the disturbing video, a woman was subjected to harassment while walking on a road in Pak Colony area of Karachi, later fleeing the scene. Authorities report that although the video of the incident has been emerged, the victim has not yet come forward to report the incident to the police, however, the police have apprehended the suspect involved in the incident.

Govt stands firm against PTI pressure tactics: Talal

F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Senator Talal Chaudhry issued a stern warning on Thursday, emphasizing that the government will not succumb to external or internal pressure from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and all matters will be addressed in accordance with the law and the constitution.

The Senator criticized PTI’s attempts to sway foreign entities will be unsuccessful. Senator emphasized that PTI’s foreign lobby will not achieve its goals. Instead, he urged PTI to focus on resolving internal issues through dialogue within the country.

Talal Chaudhry stated that Pakistan seeks to maintain cordial ties with its neighboring countries, but will not hesitate to take action against any entity that attempts to disrupt the nation’s peace and stability. Senator emphasized that PTI should cease its hate-based lobbying efforts and instead adopt a more mature approach to addressing issues.

By promoting maturity and respect, Chaudhry encourages PTI to engage more positively and productively. Senator Talal Chaudhry emphasized that the government has formed a committee to address certain issues, and PTI must take this development seriously.

Locals, traders hold jirga

F.P. Report

BANNU: Bannu Quami Jirga, Chamber of Commerce and District Bar Association held joint meeting regarding deteriorating law and order, installation of barriers at entrances in the city, on Thursday.

According to details, the absence of police and being limited to police stations was called a question mark. The leaders announced their full support for all the demands of Bannu Quami Jirga and their struggle side by side. General Secretary Ghulam Qibaz Khan, other officials were present. Shoaib Khan Saduzai Advocate, Malik Haroon Khan Advocate, Asfandiar Khan Advocate and other advocate officials presented concerns regarding the closure of inner-city roads. Bacha Advocate, while briefing the media after the joint meeting, said that the 16 points presented during the peaceful sit-in of the Quami Jirga should be immediately implemented by the Chief Minister and the Apex Committee.

Faryal pays glowing tribute to Shaheed BB

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Mrs. Faryal Talpur, President Pakistan Peoples Party Women’s Wing and Member of the Sindh Assembly, paid glowing tribute to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto on her 17th martyrdom anniversary. She described her as an extraordinary leader, a beacon of hope for the people, and a symbol of democracy.

In her message, Mrs. Faryal Talpur emphasized that Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto’s unwavering struggle for democracy, human rights, and social justice continues to serve as a guiding light for the Pakistan Peoples Party and the nation.

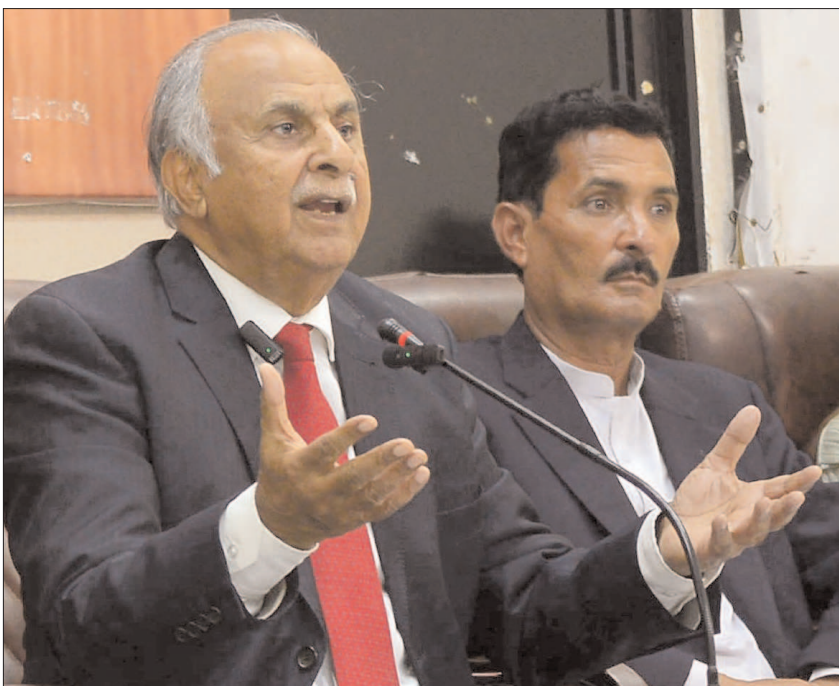
She stated that Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto’s life was a testa-

ment to courage, resilience, and selfless dedication to the rights of the oppressed. She stood fearlessly against tyranny and injustice, dedicating her life to the dream of a progressive and prosperous Pakistan.

Mrs. Faryal Talpur further said that the leadership of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto paved the way for empowering women, protecting the rights of minorities, and strengthening democratic institutions. She also lauded the leadership of President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, stating that they are carrying forward Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto’s mission with determination and vision. She remarked that President Asif Ali Zardari is undoubtedly the custodian

of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto’s philosophy of reconciliation, while Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari embodies the same courage and commitment that defined her legacy.

Under Chairman Bilawal Bhutto’s leadership, the Pakistan Peoples Party continues its struggle for the rights of the people and is realizing the vision of its great leader. Mrs. Faryal Talpur urged party workers and the nation to honor the memory of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto by upholding the principles she stood for: democracy, equality, and social justice. She called on everyone to renew their commitment to unity and to building Pakistan where the dreams of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto can flourish.



KARACHI: President of ex-servicemen society, Gen. retired, Abdul Qayyum addressing a press conference.

Former students’ leaders seeks role in PPP affairs

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Former activists of the People’s Students Federation (PSF), PPP students’ wing have asked the party leadership to take steps for the activation of the party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Addressing a function held here in connections with the death anniversary of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto here on Thursday, they said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has potential to organize and strengthen the party.

For this purpose the former student activists demanded of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and co-chairman President Asif Ali Zardari to handover

the party affairs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Aseefa Bhutto Zardari to organize the party, saying all party wings will extend full support to her to achieve this goal.

The death anniversary function was held at Peshawar Press Club (PPC) with former president PPP district Peshawar Israr Khan Nehqi in the chair. Former PSF leaders from across the province attended the event.

Addressing the participants of the function, Engineer Ghani Gul Mehsud, Bilal Khan Tarakai, Fazale Rabi, Akhtar Zaman, Bacha Hussain and Haq Nawaz paid glowing tributes to the struggle of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

and Shaheed Benazir Bhutto against the military dictatorships.

They said that whenever PPP come to power, it had worked for the welfare of the poor, workers and down-trodden classes of the society. They said that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto turned the country into a nuclear power while Shaheed Benazir Bhutto gave missile programme to make defence of the country impregnable. The speakers said that the former students’ activists have spent their lives for the strengthening of the party and urged the party leadership to utilize their experience for the revival of the lost glory of the party in the province.

Meeting of Cabinet Supervisory Committee on outsourced hospitals held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet, Supervisory Committee regarding outsourced hospitals was held today under the chairmanship of Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Health Ihtesham Ali. The meeting was attended by committee members, including Minister for Local Government and Rural Development Arshad Ayub and Minister for Agriculture Major (Retd.) Sajjad Barakwal. While other participants included Special Secretary Budget and Development Habibullah, Director General Health Dr. Muhammad Saleem, Managing Director KP Health Foundation Dr. Adnan Taj, and representatives from the Finance, Law, and Parliamentary Affairs Departments.

During the meeting, the committee was briefed on the current status of outsourced hospitals, their outstanding payments, and the need for continuous supply of medicines in Kurram.

Expressing concern, the Minister for Agriculture noted that patients are not getting timely treatment due to the lack of medicines in Kurram. He requested the committee to ensure the uninterrupted supply of medicines to the district.

The committee stressed the immediate completion of the Health Foundation's Board of Directors. It also directed the activation of the Search and Nomination Committee and completion of the Health Foundation Board by January 15. Additionally, the committee instructed engagement with hospital-operating organizations to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of healthcare services.

A detailed briefing on establishing a one-window operation for outsourced hospitals will be presented in the next meeting. The committee also directed the timely payment of outstanding dues to Implementing Partners (IPs) for the current quarter. The next meeting of the committee is scheduled for January 15, 2024.

Public servants are change agents in lives of people: DG NIPA

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: "Public servants are the change agents in the lives of the people. National progress and prosperity is contingent upon the decisions and role of public servants." These views were expressed by Director General NIPA / PPSA / PARD Peshawar Capt. (Retd.) Usman Gul while addressing graduating officers on the eve of graduation ceremony of the 36th Senior Management Course here at NIPA Peshawar in which 31 officers from different occupational groups/services of the Federal & Provincial Governments participated.

The ceremony was attended by chief instructors, faculty and administrative and support staff of the three premier training institutes and 31 graduating officers of the 36th SMC.

The Director General highlighted that NIPA Peshawar under the umbrella support and guidance of the Rector NSPP Dr. Ijaz Munir, imparted the best possible training while aiming to enhance skills, knowledge base and core competencies of the trainee officers in evidence-based decision, public policy analysis, strategic management and ICT interventions.

He added, "Now it is your responsibility to reflect these traits in your respective workplaces to enhance the quality of your decisions and provide better public service to the people." He urged them to have friendly interactions with the people so that people come to you with open hearts and think of you as friends. The Director General while appreciating the efforts of the SMC faculty stated that the dedicated faculty of NIPA Peshawar deserve all commendation for their untiring efforts in making the course a success as reflected by the Course Review Committee's feedback in which the graduating officers expressed their utmost satisfaction with the quality and impact of the 16-week rigorous training programme.

The Director General lauded the dedication and hard-work of the administration of the three training institutes and extended appreciation to DS Admin Mr. Asad Zia Siddiqui who put his utmost potential and services in ameliorating and strengthening the physical and training infrastructure of the entire campus.

The Chief Instructor SMC Mr. Tariq Bakhtiar presented the course report to the Director General and explained the rigorous journey of the training course spanning over 16-weeks. The Director General awarded course completion certificates to the graduating officers on the occasion.

IKD and KMU launch certificate xourse in Andro-Urology

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Institute of Kidney Diseases (IKD) Hayatabad, Peshawar, in collaboration with Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar has introduced a groundbreaking program titled Certificate in Andro-Urology. This initiative, the first of its kind in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is designed to enhance the expertise of medical professionals in reproductive medicine and infertility treatment.

The KMU Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq, handed over the course launching notification to IKD Assistant Professor Dr. Mir Abid Jan. At the occasion Dr. Abid expressed his gratitude to the Vice Chancellor, highlighting the significance of this collaborative effort. He emphasized that the program would not only strengthen ties between IKD and KMU but also open new avenues for addressing infertility and sexual health issues in the region.

Scheduled to commence in January, this six-month certification program is tailored for medical doctors and aims to enhance knowledge and skills in addressing critical issues such as infertility, male sexual health, and associated challenges.

Each session will enroll 20 participants, who will receive training through a structured curriculum that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

The program will focus on improving participants' understanding of infertility and sexual health issues, equipping them to effectively manage cases using evidence-based approaches. It will also address societal stigmas and misconceptions surrounding infertility and sexual health, providing participants with the tools to educate and counsel patients.

Qila Bala Hisar: Peeping through annals of history

PESHAWAR (APP): Carrying a documented history of 2500 years and being among the oldest living cities of South Asia, Peshawar always bore strategic credentials due to its geographical location. Being a gateway to the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, Peshawar also enjoyed pivotal strategic importance for invaders and warriors who marched through the historical Khyber Pass to the subcontinent for establishing their dynasties and monarchies.

These rulers used to construct forts and garisons to gain military strength in the region as their power strongholds for safety of their forces and people against external aggression.

Qila Bala Hisar (The Bala Hisar Fort) is a glaring example of this legacy and catches view of every visitor entering Peshawar City from the East. Located opposite to Jinnah Park (old Cunningham Park) on main GT Road, this edifice impresses every viewer with its huge structure.

Spreading on 15.4 acres area and built of red bricks, the 92 feet high Bala Hisar reminds visitors of great rulers various dynasties, who stayed here before marching to the subcontinent via Khyber Pass for strategic and economic gains.

An amalgamation of Mughal architecture, the fort's old main entrance directly faces the Grand Trunk (GT) road that leads to Afghanistan and Central Asia on the West, Pushkalavati (Charsadda) in the North and Hund and Taxila on the East. Several branches of the past Bara River used to flow through interior Peshawar with one among them probably near Bala Hisar Fort.

"Most of invaders including Afghans Muslim rulers, Mughals, Ghauris, Ghaznavis and Tughlaq etc had to conquer Bala Hisar before proceeding to Punjab and other parts of subcontinent," said Dr. Abdul Samad Khan, Director Archeology and Museums Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

"Recent excavations at Gor-Kathri Peshawar ascertained the city's history dating back to 2,500 years and one can estimate that the fort could have also been constructed during those times," Samad said.

He further states that in 11th century AD, Raja Jaipal, a ruler of Hindushahi dynasty was defeated in Peshawar's vicinity and commander Mahmud Ghaznavi garisoned the fort with his army to monitor security situation in this region.

Renowned historian, Dr A.H. Dani has also mentioned in his book 'Peshawar-Historic City of Frontier (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)' that when Huien Tsang, a Chinese traveller visited Peshawar in 630 AD, he spoke of a 'Royal Residence,' that might be Bala Hisar.

Dr. Dani says, a channel of old Bara River surrounded by a high spot was perhaps the present elevated fort. The Chinese word "Kung Shing" is used for its significance and is explained as forti-



PESHAWAR: Advisor to CM on Forest and Wildlife Pir Musawwar Khan talking to media after inaugurating fish aquarium and auditorium at Peshawar Zoo.

Benazir's memory will forever live in people's hearts: Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Thursday expressed that the memory of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto will forever remain etched in the hearts of the people.

In a statement at the eve of 17th martyrdom anniversary of Benazir Bhutto, Governor Kundi said, "On December 27th, we are reminded of the martyrdom of a great leader who sacrificed her life, leaving a beacon of light for the people of Pakistan."

He emphasized that her sacrifice continues to inspire and guide the nation, and her legacy will never be forgotten.

The sacrifice of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto taught us that everything can be sacrificed in the love for the country, he added.

Governor Kundi emphasized that the memory of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto will always remain alive in our hearts.

He said that December 27th marks a tragic chapter in Pakistan's history, when Benazir Bhutto, with her blood, tried to write the country's destiny.

He further said that after her martyrdom, we realized that her dream, struggle, and determination continue to empower us to move forward.

Today, we remember her sacrifice and pledge to follow her path, striving to give Pakistan the position it deserves, said Faisal Karim Kundi.

He called December 27th a grievous tragedy that deprived Pakistan of its unparalleled leader.

Governor Kundi reiterated that the martyrdom of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto was not just a sacrifice of one individual, but became an integral part of Pakistan's destiny.

Abbas Majid Marwat assumes charge as RPO Kohat

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A Task Force, constituted by the Secretary of Higher Education Department (HED), Peshawar held a key meeting here Thursday to support the establishment of an Advisory Board and Common Facilitation Center (CFC) by the Minerals Development Department. The meeting was held at the National Centre of Excellence in Geology (NCEG), University of Peshawar.

The meeting was convened by Dr. Abdul Mateen, Chairman of the Department of Mineral Resources Engineering at P a k - A u s t r i a Fachhochschule Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology, Haripur.

The session focused on a detailed discussion regarding the tasks assigned to the Task Force, which include providing essential technical input to the Secretary of Mines for developing a PC-II proposal aimed at establishing a Mine and Minerals Company for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Other key topics discussed were the advisory role on the structure, function, mandate, and organogram of the proposed Common Facilitation Center (CFC), as well as defining its composition, roles, and responsibilities in the PC-II proposal.

The Task Force explored the identification of resources and technical experts necessary for the successful establishment of the CFC.

The members of Task force Prof. Dr. Liaqat Ali, Director, National Centre of Excellence in Geology (NCEG), Prof. Dr. Ishaq Ahmad, Chairman, Department of Mining Engineering, UET Peshawar, Prof. Dr. Annisa Qamar, Chairperson, Department of Physics, University of Peshawar, Dr. Safer Ahmad Arbab, Department of Physics Islamia College Peshawar, Mr. Asad Ur Rehman, Deputy Director, Minerals, DG MM, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated in the meeting.

Other notable attendees were Syed Minhajuddin Shah, Ex-Chairman, All Pakistan Commercial Export Association (APCEA), Ali Hassan, Consultant, APCEA, Sartaj Ahmad Khan, Coordinator, APCEA and Dr. Saad Khan Assistant Professor, NCEG.

The Task Force is set to submit its final recommendations to the Secretary of the Minerals Development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in the coming weeks.

Meeting discusses to establish of advisory board

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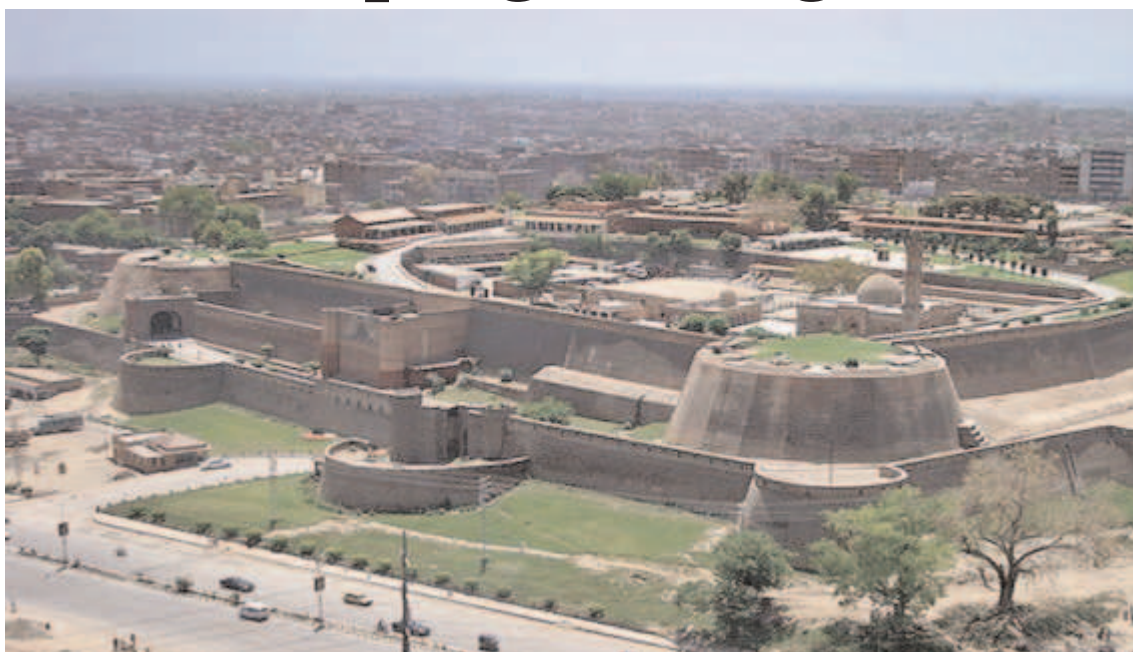
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had destroyed this fort due to fear of reorganization of warring tribes and local armies.

"When he was staying in it, Hamyun decided to rebuild the fort and use it for his conquest of India," Bakhtzada said. "This fort had also been a key settlement for successive rulers like Hindu Maharajas, Ghauris, Ghaznavis, Tughlaqs, Mughals and Sikhs as well as a residence of Afghan king, Ahmed Shah Durrani and his son Taimur Shah Durrani.

After the death of Taimur Shah in 1793 AD, Sikhs captured Peshawar and Bala Hisar in 1834 after the battle of Nowshera and Hari Singh Nalwa also used it as a royal residence for Maharaja Ranjeet Singh during Sikh rule. Sikhs also tried to rename it as Samagarh but the name remained unpopular.

Sikhs, however, had destroyed a major portion of fort but Sher Singh, on orders of his father Ranjeet Singh, constructed the fort again with unbaked bricks. The only inscription available today in Bala Hisar reads, 'Victory to Porak.' After

he said Afghan Durrani rulers used it as their winter camp in early 19th century and named it "Bala Hisar" a Persian word meaning 'the high fort' and referred to renowned historian Abul Fazi as claiming that Bala Hisar was redesigned and rebuilt by Mughal emperor Zaheeruddin Babar in 1526. However, after overthrowing King Humayun by Shershah Suri, Afghans



In brief

Policeman killed in Nowshera Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Unidentified culprits shot and killed a policeman who was spending the night at his sister's house. The police have registered a case and started an investigation. In this regard, Noor Islam, son of Abdul Hanan, a resident of Aba Khel Nowshera Kalan, filed a report stating that he was in the Masjid for Fajr prayers when he received information that his son, Irfan, who had gone to spend the night at his sister's house in Samandar Ghari Nowshera Kalan, was found unconscious. Noor Islam stated that he, along with other relatives, rushed to the scene and found his son, Irfan, lying dead. Irfan had been shot and killed by unknown individuals using firearms. The reason for the murder is not yet known. Meanwhile, a person injured in a firing incident between two groups over a minor altercation succumbed to his injuries at the hospital. The death toll from the incident has now risen to three. Among the injured was Naem, son of Raees, who was undergoing treatment. Unfortunately, he succumbed to his injuries, bringing the total number of fatalities in the incident to three.

Tehsil press club elects cabinet F.P. Report

KARAK: Tehsil Press Club Takht Nusrati registered annual elections have been completed. Muhammad Rauf unopposed as president, Hufzur Rahman elected General Secretary, elections were held under the supervision of Tehsil Bar Association President Shafiullah Advocate, according to details of Tehsil Press Club Takht Nusrati. The elections for the year 2025-26 were conducted in a transparent manner under the supervision of Tehsil Bar Association President Shafiullah Advocate and under the chairmanship of Convener Election Shadnawaz, Secretary Election Tauseef Ahmed. Convener Shad Nawaz announced the election results in the presence of Tehsil Bar Association President Shafiullah Advocate and other Tehsil Administration Officers, according to which Muhammad Rauf Khattak was unopposed as President, Hufzur Rehman, General Secretary, Manoor Khan Vice President, Umar Hayat Finance Secretary, Lal Siddique Tabsum Giant Secretary, Qaiser Haleem Information Secretary while Amir Siyah was elected Office Secretary.

Two tourists die in mishap F.P. Report

NEELUM: Two tourists including a woman died and a child injured when a car fell into River Neelum near Sanduk area of Azad Kashmir. According to rescue officials, the victims, Malik Ali Nayyar and Hajra Aslam, were residents of Sialkot. Rescue officials and locals were busy in rescue and relief operation. So far, there was no report about retrieving the bodies.

151 illegal immigrants held

QUETTA (INP): Pakistan Coast Guards arrested 151 illegal immigrants during an operation from Balochistan border. The arrested persons were traveling illegally without any legal documents and passage. After initial investigation, all these persons have been handed over to the FIA authorities for further investigation and other legal actions.

Empowering women at work Seminar highlights challenges and achievements

F.P. Report

MULTAN: The Lodhran Pilot Project (LPP), under the USAID-funded Subh-e-Nau, Local Works Pakistan project, successfully organized a seminar titled "National Day for Pakistani



Working Women" at Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU) Multan. Held in collaboration with the Women Development Department Punjab, the seminar spotlighted the theme: "Empowering Women at Work: Challenges, Achievements, and the Way Forward."

The seminar brought together 62 participants, including youth, civil society organizations (CSOs), working women champions, academia, and govern-

ment representatives, to discuss pressing issues such as workplace harassment, gender inequality, and work-life balance, while celebrating the contributions of Pakistani women to the nation's progress.

A panel discussion titled "Challenges Faced by Working Women in Pakistan" was a centerpiece of the event, featuring prominent speakers from various sectors. Ms. Rohma, Chairperson, Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee at BZU, emphasized the need for anonymous reporting channels, peer support networks, and strict enforcement of anti-harassment measures. Ms. Ushna Tariq, Gender Monitoring Specialist,

Women Development Department Punjab, highlighted the lack of gender-sensitive workplace policies and transparency in gender equality data. She underscored the department's efforts, including gender audits, working women's hostels, and day-care facilities, to create more inclusive workplaces.

Dr. Abdul Saboor, Chief of Party, Subh-e-Nau emphasized the cultural and structural barriers impeding women's workforce participation. He called for fostering resilience, collaboration, and supportive networks to empower women and shape a more inclusive future. Speaking on the significance of December 22, marked as National Working Women's Day in Pakistan, Dr. Saboor further added, "This day is an opportunity to celebrate the pivotal role women play in Pakistan's economy and society while addressing the barriers they face in achieving equitable opportunities."

Quaid turns global history by creation of Pakistan

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: A renowned activist of Tehreek-e-Pakistan, most senior journalist Rana Muhammad Yousaf Waheed has said that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a versatile and committed personality. His greatest achievement was changing the course of history by changing the direction of geography and establishing Pakistan, the largest Islamic state in the world at that time.

Quaid-e-Azam simultaneously fought against the British Government and the Hindu majority and won the war through purely constitutional and democratic means without any arms or army. Seeing the unique and great achievement of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, thinkers, intellectuals and politicians around the world are amazed and are forced to

accept him as a great leader after being convinced of his right thinking, principles and consistency.

In his special statement, Rana Muhammad Yousaf Waheed said that the Quaid-e-Azam, who changed the map of the subcontinent only by his religious insight and high legal ability and ability, ruled the hearts of the Muslims of India. For more than thirty years, Quaid-e-Azam strove hard for fundamental rights and a dignified way of life for the Muslims of the subcontinent. In fact, his biography is the story of the renaissance of the Muslims of the subcontinent and their glorious emergence as a nation, he added.

He urged that the need today is that every individual should play his role for the betterment of the country and the nation by keeping a capable personality and character like Quaid-e-

Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in front so that the real dream of the Quaid can be fulfilled.

On the other hand, on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the district administration and PML-N the party claiming to be the successor of Quaid-e-Azam could not hold any ceremony, while the administration officials forgot the day of the Quaid. Engaged in Christmas celebrations organized by the Christian community.

Patriotic circles have expressed their surprise at the complete neglect of Quaid Day during the PML-N regime when it is in power at the center and in Punjab and said that the silence and indifference shown on the occasion of Quaid Day. The soul of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah must have been hurt by this.

RPO directs to prioritize public facilitation at offices

F.P. Report

MINGORA: Regional Police Officer (RPO), has stated that the law and order situation in the division is satisfactory. The protection of lives, property, honor, and dignity of citizens is the top priority and no compromises will be made in this regard.

He emphasized that no one is above the law, and actions are being taken to eradicate crime and narcotics in the region. Police stations and checkpoints are treating visitors with respect, and instructions have been issued to all police personnel to ensure this.

RPO appealed to the

public to cooperate with the police in eliminating crime. He warned that those involved in crime and taking the law into their own hands will be dealt with firmly. The people of Swat and Malakand Division are patriotic and peaceful, and their sacrifices for peace will not be overlooked. Cooperation between the public and police is essential for lasting peace.

Meanwhile, Shaukat Yousafzai, a founding leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and former provincial minister, has welcomed the establishment of Swat Town Ship in the Swat Valley, calling it a gift for the people of Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa. He praised the residential project, situated in the midst of beautiful mountains, as a unique and attractive development that will draw people in.

Yousafzai emphasized that Swat's natural beauty already attracts tourists, and the addition of modern residential projects like Swat Town Ship will further enhance the region's charm. He expressed these views during a visit to Swat Town Ship in Odigram, where he spoke with senior journalists Ghafoor Khan Adil, Shah Asad Ali, and Murad Ali Khan. Notable journalist Zia-ul-Haq was also present on the occasion.

DPC Wana commits for journalists' welfare

F.P. Report

WANA: The District Press Club Wana convened a general body meeting under the chair of president Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Wazir to discuss and finalize matters related to membership. In a unanimous decision, the general body approved the membership of five new individuals, namely Saeed-ur-Rehman Wazir, Roshan Khan Wazir, Umar Wazir, Mubashir Wazir, and Waseem Sajjad Wazir. A condition was

attached to the membership approval, stipulating that the new members would not be eligible to cast votes in the upcoming elections. The decision is believed to ensure that the new members first actively engage in the press club's activities and familiarize themselves with their responsibilities before participating fully in its electoral processes.

During the meeting, President Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Wazir announced the dissolution of the club's

cabinet and the formation of a three-member election committee for the 2025 elections. The committee comprises Ahmad Noor as chairman, with Shahzadin and Naik Muhammad as members.

The election committee has released the schedule for the upcoming elections. Voting is set to take place on December 30, 2024. Candidates intending to contest the elections can submit their nomination papers between December 26 and December

Matta square in Swat named after Shaheed constable Mushtaq Ahmed

F.P. Report

MINGORA: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government has named Matta square after Shaheed police constable, Mushtaq Ahmed. According to Swat

police spokesman here Thursday, the famous square was associated to recognize the supreme sacrifice of the Shaheed.

The spokesman said the action was taken due to efforts of district police

Swat Nasir Mahmood. SP Upper Swat Shaukat Khan said it was a token tribute to the brave police cop, who laid down life in line of duty. Later, the SP unveiled the plaque of the Shaheed Mushtaq Square Matta.



ABBOTTABAD: DIG Hazara, Nasir Mahmood Satti being briefed during his visit to Basha and Dasu Dam site.

Superintendent suspended for facilitating timber mafia Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat suspended the superintendent of at office on charges for facilitating the smuggling of building timber and ordered immediate inquiry against him. Additional Deputy Commissioner (G) Kohat has been appointed as an inquiry officer and has been directed to submit a report with recommendations within 3 days.

Meanwhile, the Commissioner Kohat also made a surprise inspection of Tanda Dam Kohat in the guise of an ordinary tourist. He, on this occasion issued instructions to suspend the staff on duty and take immediate legal action against them for pathetic cleanliness conditions and negligence in the safety of tourists. He also ordered immediate action against the owner of the boat for not keeping life jackets in the said dam.

Commissioner Kohat has sought an immediate explanation from the XEN Irrigation on this serious negligence by tomorrow and in case of unsatisfactory reply, action will also be taken against him. He also issued directions to all the Deputy Commissioners and the District Police Officers of the entire division to take stern legal action against the timber mafia and those who damaging forests and negligent in cleaning and protecting the tourists at tourist spots. He argued the tourists to keep a vigil eye on their children so that no child falls into the dam.

Commissioner Kohat further said that martyr Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was jailed during the mar-

Farmers to be equip with modern tools F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SING: District Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner in which various issues related to the development of the agricultural sector and provision of facilities to the farmers were considered, on Thursday.

Deputy Director of Agriculture Toba Tek Singh, Dr. Noshair Ali Khan gave a detailed briefing on wheat cultivation strategy, green tractor scheme, availability of fertilizers, livestock card and use of pesticides in the meeting. The participants were informed that the use of modern technology and quality seeds is being ensured for maximum production of wheat.

The Deputy Commissioner directed to ensure the distribution of tractors under the Green Tractor Scheme in a transparent manner. He said that no hindrance in the supply of fertilizers to the farmers will be tolerated and special attention will be paid to the quality of the fertilizers. Regarding the Livestock Card, the farmers will be provided with modern facilities related to animal health and food. Strict instructions were issued to the Department of Agriculture to ensure effective use of pesticides and their quality.

Addressing the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner said that agriculture is the backbone of the country's economy and for its development. The government is taking all possible steps. All resources will be utilized to solve farmers' problems and increase agricultural production.

BB martyrdom a backstab for democracy

F.P. Report

HUB: Provincial Minister of Industry, Trade and Agriculture Mir Ali Hassan Zehri paid tribute to the first democratically elected female Prime Minister of the Islamic world and prominent world leader Shaheed Benazir Bhutto and said that "Daughter East" is not only a historical figure but also a living movement and beacon. He said that the 17th anniversary of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto will be celebrated with devotion and respect. Fatima will be recited for martyr Bibi across the country including Hub district. Workers from different parts of the country will lay wreaths at the shrine of Benazir Bhutto and recite Fatima.

Grand meetings and rallies will be held on this occasion and the speakers will express their views regarding Shaheed Bibi. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that the Bhutto family has an important position in the country's politics and the history of the Bhutto family is full of sacrifices for democracy. He said that the Bhutto family has cultivated democracy by sacrificing their lives. Shaheed Bibi Benazir Bhutto always fought for democracy and positive politics in the politics of Pakistan.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri further said that martyr Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was jailed during the mar-

tial law period but did not compromise on democracy and proved that she is the owner of a strong nerve. The role of Martyr Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was very important for democracy and this cultivation of democracy continues today in the form of President Asif Ali Zardari, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Asifa Bhutto and other leaders and workers. He said that Pakistan Party workers, President Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari are following the steps taken by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto for the restoration and promotion of democracy.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said more that Shaheed Bibi played a great role in the evolution of the status of women in Pakistan. Some of the other changes made by the first and only woman prime minister in Pakistan's political arena include the creation of the Ministry of Women's Development and the appointment of women to the Supreme Judiciary. These initiatives were intended to have a long-term impact by placing women in powerful and influential roles.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri further said that during her lifetime, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's charisma, leadership skills, compassion and intelligence were the qualities that distinguished her even from the most powerful

men. Martyr Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto is still today and will always be the flame of hope that burns in the heart of every Pakistani woman because of her dedication to uplift the status of women in Pakistan. He said that according to Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's mission, the struggle will continue for a free and sovereign Pakistan, an empowered parliament and constitutional rule.

He said that the mission of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed was to end poverty, unemployment and economic misery from the country. Accomplishing this mission is the first priority of Pakistan Peoples Party. He said that December 27 is the darkest day in the country's history and the martyrdom of Benazir Bhutto was the murder of Pakistan's bright future. If the workers and farmers are prosperous, then Pakistan will be prosperous. Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's patriotism, enduring struggle and steadfast leadership will always remain indelible in the hearts and minds of the Pakistani nation. He further said that Peoples Party is determined to make the dream of martyr Ms. Benazir Bhutto a reality that Pakistan should be a high example for the world as a prosperous, progressive, egalitarian and strong democratic federal state.

People warned not to purchase Nawab of Dir lands

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Former two-time provincial minister and prominent Pakistani politician Khawaja Muhammad Khan Hoti on Thursday warned sellers and purchasers of lands of the late 'Nawab of Dir', Shah Jehan Khan, of legal actions in case they did not stop the practice.

Speaking at a crowded news conference at the Timergara press club, Mr Hoti said that her mother was the real daughter of the Nawab of Dir and she had her legal and sharite inheritance right to get share in his property. Husband of Nawabzadi Bacha Sultana, Muhammad Zahir Shah Khan, grandson of the late Nawazada Muhammad Nawaz Khan and son of Sher Shah Khan were also present on the occasion.

Hoti pointed out that they had got a stay order from the Peshawar High Court on Aug 8, 2026 and the case had been under

trial for years due to delaying tactics of the respondents. Responding to a query, he said that they had filed the case against other legal heirs of Nawab of Dir when his mother was alive, who had the right to get her share in the property.

Hoti said that according to Islamic sharia the share of a daughter in the deceased's property was equal to the share of two sons in case of multiple siblings. He said that there were reports that some elements of the land mafia were selling and purchasing the lands in question. He warned those people to give up the practice; otherwise they would be deprived of the lands in case the petitioner party wins the case. He said the persons involved in selling and purchasing the land-in-question, were committing contempt of court and he would likely proceed against it.

Muhammad Zahir Shah, the legal attorney for four

daughters and one son, said that the Nawab of Dir inherited a total of 143,856 kanal of lands from Chakdara to Lowari Top, out of which 39960 kanal were donated to the state while Mr Hoti's mother had the right to get her share in rest of the 103,896 kanal of lands. The legal attorney asked all people in Lower and Upper Dir to stop purchasing the disputed lands.

DRC performance: The Dispute Resolution Council of Jandol chairman Fazal Mabood Jan and other members on Thursday presented their one-year performance, stating that the forum received 117 applications from the public, out of which 63 were decided. They said that 39 decisions were sent for court orders, while decisions on 15 applications were still pending. The DRC chairman said that 23 disputes were pending since the year 2023, which have been resolved with the help of DRC members.

DC calls for improvement in health facilities

F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: A meeting of the District Steering Committee on Health Thursday was held under the chairmanship of DC Abbottabad Sanaullah Khan to review the performance of the health department and implement measures for improvement.

DMO IMU Health, Syed Sohaib Shah, presented a detailed briefing on the department's performance and shared updates on the execution of decisions from the previous meeting. Deputy Commissioner Sanaullah Khan directed officials to ensure the appointment of

staff in all healthcare facilities, including DHQ Hospital, Basic Health Units, Type-D and RHC facilities, and Family Welfare Centers. He also emphasized the importance of taking strict action against absentee staff and ensuring a consistent supply of medicines. The DMS of DHQ Hospital reported on the hospital's operations.

The DC instructed officials to enhance the hospital's performance, ensuring staff attendance, maintaining cleanliness, and improving emergency, dental, and treatment services for patients. He further emphasized improving facilities and patient care at

the Women and Children Hospital, particularly in emergency services and admissions. Additionally, directives were issued to enhance service delivery across all departments in DHQ Hospital, focusing on emergency and dental services.

The meeting was attended by Regional Director General Health Hazara Division Dr. Israr Ahmed, DMO IMU Health Syed Sohaib Shah, DMS DHQ, Deputy/Acting District Health Officer Dr. Shehzad Iqbal, Health Coordinator Dr. Ashfaq, Dr. Yasir Khan, Dr. Waseem, and representatives from the Population and Health Departments.



NASA probe attempts closest ever approach to the sun

NEW YORK: NASA's Parker Solar Probe is expected to make history by flying into the sun's outer atmosphere, called the corona, on a mission to help scientists learn more about Earth's closest star.

"No human-made object has ever passed this close to a star, so Parker will truly be returning data from uncharted territory," Nick Pinkine, mission operations manager at Johns Hopkins Applied

Physics Laboratory, said in a United States space agency blog. Parker was on course to fly 6.1 million kilometres (3.8 million miles) from the sun's surface at 11:53 GMT. With the spacecraft out of contact, it will be before mission operators confirm its health after the close flyby.

Moving at up to 6 9 2 , 0 0 0 k m / h (430,000mph), fast enough

to fly from Washington, DC, to Tokyo in under a minute, the spacecraft will endure temperatures of up to 982 degrees Celsius (1,800 degrees Fahrenheit), NASA said on its website. If the distance between Earth and the sun were the equivalent of the length of a 100-yard (91.4-metre) American football field, the spacecraft should have been about 4 metres (4.4 yards) from the end zone at the moment of its closest approach - known as the perihelion. When the probe first passed into the solar atmosphere in 2021, it found new details about the boundaries of the sun's atmosphere and collected close-up images of coronal streamers, cusp-like structures seen during solar eclipses.

Since the spacecraft launched in 2018, the probe has been gradually circling closer towards the sun,

using flybys of Venus to gravitationally pull it into a tighter orbit with our solar system's star. One instrument on board the spacecraft captured visible light from Venus, giving scientists a new way to see through the planet's thick clouds to the surface below, NASA said.

By venturing into these extreme conditions, Parker has been helping scientists tackle some of the sun's biggest mysteries: how solar wind originates, why the corona is hotter than the surface below and how coronal mass ejections - massive clouds of plasma that hurl through space - are formed. Flyby is the first of three record-setting close passes with the next two - on March 22 and June 19 - expected to bring the probe back to a similarly close distance from the sun. — Aljazeera

Nepal hosts hot air balloon festival

KATHMANDU (AFP): With Nepal's snowy Himalayan peaks as a backdrop, the sky above Pokhara transformed into a vibrant canvas of colours for the country's first hot-air balloon festival. Tourism is a major earner for Nepal, which saw over a million foreign visitors this year after a post-pandemic bounceback, and investments are being made in hotels and airports to cater to travellers.

"We felt that we must bring a balloon festival like this to Nepal," Sabin Maharjan, an organiser of the event, told AFP. Hot-air balloons from more than 10 countries participated in the festival. "A ride here can be very exciting as you can see mountains, hills and lakes," Maharjan added.

"All passengers tell us that they are very happy -- such a festival will boost our tourism." The balloons created a mesmerising display against a stunning sight of the snow-capped Annapurna range. "It is spectacular," American balloon pilot Derek Hamcock, 67, said. "As soon as you go above the small range here you see all the Himalayas. Unbelievable, every time you see them it is unbelievable."

Balloons shaped as a rat and a frog from were among those joining in the fun, slowly drifting with the breeze. "You never know where you are going," said Diego Criado del Rey, 29, a balloon pilot from Spain. "So it is pretty much you and the nature -- not fighting, but being together. You go where the nature tells you." Nepal's Civil Aviation Authority issued a notice for the skies over Pokhara for a duration of nine days to allow balloon flights. Although more than two centuries have passed since France's Montgolfier brothers made the first manned flight, ballooning can still capture the imagination.

Syria's FM tells Iran not to spread chaos

CAIRO/DUBAI (Reuters): Syria's newly appointed foreign minister, Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, told Iran not to spread chaos in Syria but to respect the Syrian people's will and the country's sovereignty.

In a post on X, Shibani said: "Iran must respect the will of the Syrian people and the country's sovereignty and security. We warn them from spreading chaos in Syria and we hold them accountable for the repercussions of the latest remarks." He did not specify the remarks he was referring to. In a televised speech, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on Syrian youth to "stand with firm determination against those who have orchestrated and brought about this insecurity".

Hundreds escape Mozambique prison amid election protests

MOZAMBIQUE (BBC): More than 1,500 prisoners have escaped from a prison in Mozambique, taking advantage of ongoing political unrest triggered by disputed election results, police say. Thirty-three people were killed and 15 injured in clashes with guards, police chief Bernardino Rafael told a press conference.

About 150 more fugitives have since been recaptured, he added. Protests erupted in response to Mozambique's highest court confirming that the ruling Frelimo party, in power since 1975, had won October's presidential elections. Mr Rafael said groups of anti-government protesters had approached the prison in the capital Maputo. Prisoners used the unrest to knock down a wall and escape, he said.

Mozambique has been rocked by unrest since disputed elections in October. Official results showed the ruling Frelimo's candidate for president, Daniel Chapo, winning. Fresh protests erupted, when the constitutional court ruled that Chapo had won the election, while revising his margin of victory downwards. Initial results in October said Daniel Chapo



gained a 71% share of the vote to his main rival Venâncio Mondlane's 20%. The court has now ruled that he won 65% to Mondlane's 24%. A BBC reporter found Maputo was like a ghost town on Christmas Eve, with almost all businesses shut and people staying at home to avoid being caught up in the worst unrest in the city since Frelimo's first rise to power in 1975.

Frelimo's offices, police stations, banks and factories have been looted, vandalised and set ablaze around the

country. At least 21 people have been killed in the unrest, the interior minister said. Mondlane, who has since fled Mozambique, had been calling on his supporters to demonstrate against what he said was a rigged vote. In a weekend social media message, he said there could be a "new popular uprising" if the result was not overturned. About 150 people have been killed in three months of protests since the elections.

Dozens not thousands killed on Mayotte by Cyclone Chido: French PM

PARIS (BBC): French Prime Minister François Bayrou believes dozens of people died when Cyclone Chido hit the French Indian Ocean territory of Mayotte on 14 December, rather than thousands as some have feared. Bayrou told BFMTV he thought the "alarmist and sometimes terrifying numbers put forward won't be borne out in reality".

The confirmed death toll on Mayotte so far is 35 but, in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, local prefect François-Xavier Bieuville feared that it would "definitely be several hundred" and could reach thousands. The prefect told France Info radio that investigations in the field were progressing well that "allow us to think that we will corroborate this figure of 35". Defending his initial remarks, Bieuville insisted "I have never been alarmist, I was simply unable to give the number of

victims".

Officials said it had been difficult to determine the scale of fatalities in the wake of the disaster 10 days ago, due to many areas of Mayotte being inaccessible and the fact that victims were buried within 24 hours in accordance with Islamic customs. There is also uncertainty about the true population of Mayotte, a French Indian Ocean territory. Officially it has 320,000 residents, but authorities estimate about 100,000 to 200,000 undocumented migrants may also be living there.

"I think [the number of dead] will be in the dozens and not in the thousands," the prime minister told BFMTV. The archipelago is one of the poorest parts of France, with many of its residents living in shanty towns. Cyclone Chido was the worst storm to hit the territory in 90 years, bringing winds of up to 260 km/h

(160mph) and flattening areas where people lived in shacks with metal roofs.

France held a day of national mourning in the wake of the cyclone. President Emmanuel Macron visited the territory last week, and was heckled by angry locals demanding more aid in devastated areas. Some survivors went for a week without water, communication or electricity. Authorities restored water in the main points of the territory, Bieuville said. "Even if this water is still sometimes a little difficult to deliver, our fellow citizens have water." He also said there was no fuel shortage any more and cars could now be filled up.

The prime minister had earlier said that a field hospital would also be operational. Cyclone Chido moved on to continental Africa after hitting Mayotte, killing 120 people in Mozambique and 13 in Malawi.

US census data shows how M Eastern and Hispanic residents differ in identity

WASHINGTON (AP): As the US Census Bureau gets public feedback about how it should tally people into new race and ethnicity groups, the agency has released new research reflecting how US residents from different backgrounds regard their racial and ethnic identities.

Earlier this year, the US government changed how it categorizes people by race and ethnicity to more accurately count residents who identify as Hispanic and of Middle Eastern and North African heritage. Before this year, the categories hadn't been changed in 27 years. Under the revisions, questions about race and ethnicity that previously were asked separately on forms will be combined into a single question. That will give respondents the option to pick multiple categories at the same time, such as "Black," "American Indian" and "Hispanic." Research has shown that large numbers of Hispanic people aren't sure how to answer the race question when that question is asked separately because they understand race and ethnicity to be similar and they often pick "some other race" or do not answer the question.

A Middle Eastern and North African

category also was added to the choices available for questions about race and ethnicity. People descended from places such as Lebanon, Iran, Egypt and Syria had been encouraged to identify as white, but now will have the option of identifying themselves in the new group. Results from the 2020 census, which asked respondents to write in their backgrounds on the form, suggest that more than 3.1 million US residents identify as Middle Eastern and North African, otherwise known as MENA.

New research released this month by the Census Bureau showed that more than 2.4 million people, or around 80%, who wrote that their background was MENA did so under the white category in the question about their race on the 2020 census questionnaire. Almost 500,000 people, or more than 16%, who wrote that they were MENA identified themselves as "some other race," and almost 139,000 MENA people, or 4.5%, identified as Asian. Almost 50,000 MENA write-ins, or 1.6%, did so under the Black race category. Among MENA subgroups, people of Lebanese and Syrian backgrounds had the highest percentages of people identifying their race as white, and people

who identified as North African, Berber and Moroccan had the highest rates of marking their race as Black. People with Omani, Emirati and Saudi backgrounds identified at the highest rates as Asian, the report said.

In a separate report also released this month, the Census Bureau said there was a noticeable variation regarding racial identity among different US Hispanic groups in the 2020 census. "Some other race" and American Indian and Alaska Native responses were most common among people from Central America.

White and "some other race" responses were most prevalent among residents from South America. Black alone responses and "Black and some other race" answers were most common among people from the Caribbean, the report said. There also was variation by region and state. The Northeast and West - particularly California, Maryland and New York - had the highest share of Hispanic respondents reporting that they were "some other race" alone. Identifying as white alone or "white and some other race" was most common among Hispanic respondents in the South.

Taiwan's presidential hopeful Ko charged with bribery

TAIPEI: Taiwan's former presidential candidate Ko Wen-je has been charged for allegedly accepting bribes and misusing political donations. Ko was indicted by prosecutors following probes into alleged corruption in the redevelopment of a shopping centre in Taipei during his time as mayor of the Taiwanese capital and campaign finance irregularities during his 2024 presidential run. The Taipei District Prosecutors Office said in a statement that it was seeking

a sentence of 28 and a half years in prison for Ko, who is accused of accepting \$17.1 million (\$522,392) in bribes and embezzling donations of more than \$768 million. Prosecutors also announced charges against several members of Ko's Taiwan People's Party (TPP) over the misuse of political donations.

Ko, who served as mayor of Taipei from 2014 to 2022, previously denied wrongdoing in a real estate development case following his

arrest in August, though he acknowledged the misreporting of campaign funds. A Taipei court ruled the following month that Ko, a surgeon by training, should be released from custody as prosecutors had not met the standard of there being a "high possibility" he committed a crime. Ko, who came third in January's presidential election with about 27 percent of the vote, had been widely seen as a contender for the presidency in 2028. — Aljazeera

'Broken': Domestic violence impacts women, children in Gaza

GAZA: The face of Samar Ahmed, 37, shows clear signs of exhaustion. It is not just because she has five children, nor that they have been displaced several times since the start of Israel's brutal war on Gaza 14 months ago and are now living in cramped, cold conditions in a makeshift tent in the al-Mawasi area of Khan Younis. Samar is also a victim of domestic violence and has no way to escape her abuser in the cramped conditions of this camp.

Two days ago, her husband beat her around the face leaving her with a swollen cheek and a blood spot in her eye. Her eldest daughter clung to her all night following that attack, which happened in front of the children. Samar does not want to break up her family - they have already been forced to move from Gaza City, to the Shati camp in Rafah and now to Khan Younis - and the children are young. Her eldest, Laila, is just 15. She also has 12-year-old Zain, 10-year-old Dana, Lana, seven, and Adi, five, to think about.

On the day that Al Jazeera visits her, she is trying to keep her two younger girls occupied with schoolwork. Sitting together in the small tent, which is made from rags, the three have spread out some notebooks around them. Little Dana is huddled up close to her mother, seemingly wanting to give her support. Her younger sister is crying from hunger and Samar seems at a loss as to how to help them both. As a displaced family, the loss of privacy has added a whole new layer of pressure. "I lost my privacy as a woman and a wife in this place. I don't want to say that my life was perfect before the war, but I was able to express what was inside me in conversation with my husband. I

could scream without anyone hearing me," Samar says. "I could control my children more in my home. Here, I live in the street and the cover of concealment has been removed from my life."

A loud argument between a husband and wife drifts through from the tent next door. Samar's face turns red with embarrassment and sadness as bad language fills the air. She does not want her children to hear this. Her instinct is to tell the children to go out and play, but Laila is washing dishes in a small bowl of water and the argument next door brings her own problems back into sharp focus. "Every day, I suffer from anxiety because of the disagreements with my husband. Two days ago, it was a great shock for me that he hit me in this way in front of my children. All our neighbours heard my screams and crying and came to calm the situation between us."

"I felt broken," Samar says, worried the neighbours will think she is to blame - that her husband shouts so much because she is a bad wife. "Sometimes, when he screams and curses, I stay quiet so that those around us think he's screaming at someone else. I try to preserve my dignity a little," she says. Samar tries to preempt her husband's anger by attempting to solve the problems facing the family herself. She visits the aid workers every day to ask for food. She believes it is the pressures of the war that have made her husband this way.

Before the war, he worked in a small carpentry shop with a friend and this kept him busy. There were fewer arguments. Now, she says: "Because of the severity of the disagreements between me and my husband, I want-

ed a divorce. But I hesitated for the sake of my children." Samar goes to psychological support sessions with other women, to try to release some of the negative energy and anxiety building inside her. It helps her to hear that she is not alone. "I hear the stories of many women and I try to console myself with what I am going through, through their experiences."

As she talks, Samar gets up to start preparing food. She is fretting about when her husband will return and whether there will be enough to eat. A plate of beans with cold bread is all she can rustle up right now. She can't light the fire because there is no gas. Suddenly, Samar goes silent, fearful that a voice outside belongs to her husband. It does not. She asks her daughters to sit down and look at their maths problems. She whispers: "He went out shouting at Adi. I hope he is in a good mood."

Later on, Samar's husband, Karim Badwan, 42, sits beside his daughters, crammed inside the small tent they are living in. He is despairing. "This is not a life. I can't comprehend what I'm living. I'm trying to adapt to these difficult circumstances, but I cannot. I've turned from a practical and professional man into a man who gets so angry all the time." Karim says he is deeply ashamed that he has hit his wife on several occasions since the war began. "I hope the war ends before my wife's energy runs out and she leaves me," he says. "My wife is a good woman, so she tolerates what I say." A tear rolls down Samar's bruised face as she listens.

Karim says he knows what he is doing is wrong. Before the war, he never dreamed he would be capable of harming her. "I had friends who used to beat their wives. I used to say: 'How

does he sleep at night?' Unfortunately, now I do it. "I did it more than once, but the hardest time was when I left a mark on her face and eye. I admit that this is a huge failure in terms of self-control," Karim says, his voice trembling. "The pressures of war are great. I left my home, my work and my future and I am sitting here in a tent, helpless in front of my children. I can't find a job and when I leave the tent, I feel that if I talk to anyone I will lose my temper."

Karim knows his wife and children have endured a great deal. "I apologise to them for my behaviour, but I keep doing it. Maybe I need medication, but my wife does not deserve all this from me. I am trying to stop so that she doesn't have to leave me." Samar's despair is compounded by the loss of her own family who she left in the north to flee the bombing there with her husband and his family. Now, she is desperately lonely. Her greatest fear is that she will completely burn out and become unable to care for her family, as she worries her husband already has. The responsibility for finding water and food, caring for the children, and thinking about their future, has all taken its toll and she lives in a constant state of fear. As the eldest child, Laila is developing severe anxiety from the fighting between her father and mother and she fears for her mother. She says: "My father and mother quarrel every day. My mother suffers from a strange nervous state. Sometimes she shouts at me for no reason. I try to bear it and understand her condition so that I don't lose her. I do not like seeing her in this state, but the war did all of this to us."

Laila still sees Karim as a good father and blames the world for allowing this brutal war to go on for so

long. "My father shouts at me a lot. Sometimes he hits my sisters. My mother cries all night and wakes up with swollen eyes from sadness over what we are living." She sits in her bed for long hours thinking about their lives before the war and her plans to study English. "I try to be strong for my mother." The family is not alone. In Gaza, there has been a marked rise in domestic violence with many women attending psychological support sessions offered by aid workers in clinics. Kholoud Abu Hajir, a psychologist, has met many victims since the start of the war at clinics in the displacement camps. However, she fears there are far more who are too ashamed to talk about it. "There is a great secrecy and fear among the women about talking about it," she says. "I have received many cases of violence away from group sessions - women who want to talk about what they are suffering and ask for help." Living in a constant state of instability and insecurity, enduring repeated displacement and being forced to live in tents crowded very closely together have deprived women of privacy, leaving them with nowhere to turn.

"There is no comprehensive psychological treatment system," Abu Hajir tells Al Jazeera. "We only work in emergency situations. The cases we deal with really require multiple sessions, and some of them are difficult cases where women need protection. There are very severe cases of violence that have reached sexual assault, and this is a dangerous thing." The number of divorces has risen - many between spouses who have been separated by the Israeli armed corridor between the north and the south.

The war has taken a terrible toll on women and children, particularly, Abu

Hajir says. Nevin al-Barbari, 35, a psychologist, says it is impossible to give children in Gaza the support they need in these conditions. "Unfortunately, what children are experiencing during the war cannot be described. They need very long psychological support sessions. Hundreds of thousands of children have lost their homes, lost a family member, and many of them have lost their entire family."

Being forced to live in difficult - and sometimes violent - family circumstances has made life immeasurably worse for many. "There is very clear and widespread family violence among the displaced in particular ... Children's psychological and behavioural states have been affected very negatively. Some children have become very violent and hit other children violently." Recently, al-Barbari came across the case of a 10-year-old child who had hit another with a stick, causing severe injury and bleeding. "When I met this child, he kept crying," she says. "He thought that I would punish him. When I asked him about his family, he told me that his mother and father have a big fight every day and his mother goes to her family's tent for days." He said he missed his home, his room and the way his family used to be. This child is a very common example of thousands of children.

It will be a long road to recovery for these children, al-Barbari says. "There are no schools to occupy them. Children are forced to bear great responsibilities, filling water and waiting in long lines for food aid. There are no recreational areas for them. There are so many stories that we do not know about, that these children are living every day." — Aljazeera

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Big-time merger of Honda and Nissan

IT is official. What has been speculated for some months now is now a fact. Honda, the second largest Japanese automaker and Nissan, the third largest, have announced that they would be merging the two companies.

The whole process would be complete by 2026. Nissan as the larger shareholder will have a majority in the combined board post-merger. Nissan is the largest shareholder in the smaller Mitsubishi carmakers. Mitsubishi said that it would be considering being a part of the megamerger.

The Honda-Nissan merger would create the third largest automaker in the world after Toyota and Volkswagen. In a press conference held on Friday, the chief executives of all the three companies, Honda, Nissan and Mitsubishi, announced the merger plan and explained the reasons for the decision.

Honda CEO Toshihiro Mibe said, "The rise of Chinese automakers and new players has changed the car industry quite a lot. We have to build up capabilities to fight with them by 2030, otherwise we'll be beaten." That is a candid confession from the Japanese automakers who have dominated the global car scene for more than half-a-century, and literally broke the monopoly of American and European carmakers.

The merger move can be seen as the Japanese showing enough alacrity in the face of the changing situation, and responding to it. The merger is expected to yield combined sales of \$191 billion and a profit of \$19 billion.

The merger has ramifications for Honda's and Nissan's international tie-ups. French automakers Renault said that it would discuss with Nissan the changes brought about by the merger. Honda's Mibe said that Nissan's arrangements with Renault would continue and so would Honda's with the American carmaker General Motors.

There are two challenges that the two Japanese auto majors have to face after the merger. It is the production of electric vehicles (EVs) or hybrids because that is the future because of the pressure to curb carbon emissions. America's Tesla and China's BYD are seen as the lead players, and in Japan there are smaller car manufacturers who have displayed agility with the new technologies needed to make the EVs. Honda and Nissan want to move into the EV market in a big way and with a strong base.

Meanwhile, Honda has made it clear that the merger with Nissan was not because of the losses that Honda was making. As a matter of fact Honda has recovered from its losses and its two-wheelers are still dominating the market.

The carmakers, especially the fossil-fuel dependent vehicle manufacturers, are moving out of their comfort zones of producing the petrol- and diesel-run cars. It is not the case that Tesla and BYD will make the other car manufacturers redundant. The demand for cars will continue, and in place of ICE vehicles, it will now be EVs, and neither Tesla nor the Chinese EV-makers can meet the global demand on their own.

So there is time for the car manufacturers to switch to the new technology of EVs and keep their share of the global car market. Tesla and Chinese EV-makers have shown what the future looks like. The others have no other option but to change and adapt.

It should not come as a surprise that major changes are taking place in the way industries are being run. They have run in a certain way for the last 150 years, based on fossil fuels like coal and oil. The crisis of climate change has made it necessary to change the mode of production, especially the energy sources that were in use till now. Clean and renewable energy is the demand of the day.

There are many countries, governments and industries which are still resistant to the idea of decarbonising the economy, but it cannot be resisted for too long. Switching to green energy is inevitable. And the carmakers are moving in the right direction.

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December 27: A metaphor for sacrifice for the country and people

Sharjeel Inam Memon



SOME moments in a nation's history are remembered for centuries. December 27, 2007, stands as a deeply tragic day in our national history, marked by the martyrdom of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto in a brutal act of terrorism. This date has become a symbol of sacrifice for the country and its people.

When Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto decided to return to her homeland after eight years in exile, her friends and relatives strongly urged her not to, warning of the dangerous situation and threats to her life. Several foreign governments shared intelligence reports with her, and Pakistan's intelligence agencies also conveyed that her return was fraught with peril. Party leaders and those in her close circle advised her against returning to Pakistan until the very last moment.

Shaheed Bibi was fully aware of the risks and was convinced that certain forces were determined to eliminate her. Yet, she remained resolute in her decision. Before returning, she wrote her last will and testament, specifying her final resting place within the grounds of Shaheed Bhutto's mausoleum. To those urging her to reconsider, she had a single, unwavering response: Pakistan's security was at

stake. "If I do not return at this critical juncture," she would say, "history will remember us as cowards. I cannot abandon my country and my people in their time of need."

She often reiterated her belief: "We are a people of reasoning, of ideas and emotions. We know how to live, and we know how to die." Very few individuals in history have embraced death with such courage and conviction.

When Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan on October 18, 2007, the entire nation seemed to converge at Karachi airport to welcome her.

A sea of people gathered in support of her vision for a peaceful democratic revolution, echoing her belief that Pakistan's survival lay in democracy.

The overwhelming support unsettled the forces opposed to Pakistan and its people.

On the same day, these hostile forces struck their first blow against Shaheed Bibi through a brutal terrorist attack on Shahra-e-Faisal near Karsaz, Karachi. Although she survived the devastating bomb blasts, more than 200 of her supporters sacrificed their lives for the cause of Pakistan's survival and the restoration of democracy.

The Karsaz tragedy made it evident that Shaheed Bibi's life was under constant threat from those opposing her mission. On October 19, during a press conference at Bilawal House in Karachi, she was asked if she would continue her campaign despite the threats.

Her resolute reply was: "Those forces want me to abandon my campaign and leave. They do not want

true democracy to be restored in the country. But if democracy is not restored, the dangers to Pakistan will only increase. I will stay with my people."

Upon her return to Pakistan, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto brought with her a manuscript she had written, later published under the title Reconciliation. In one poignant passage, she wrote:

"I had endured the torment of my father's arrest, imprisonment, and murder and knew that such wounds of the soul never truly heal. I was willing to do anything to spare my children the pain I had suffered from my father's death, but this was the one thing I could not do."

In her book Reconciliation, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto explains why she returned to her homeland despite being fully aware of the threats to her life. She wrote, "Pakistan is in danger of Talibanization as well as balkanization." She further described the perilous state of the nation at that time, saying, "Pakistan is a bundle of dry fuel, which can catch fire very quickly."

Recognizing the grave dangers posed by the growing power of extremist and separatist groups, Shaheed Bibi sacrificed her life to save Pakistan. Throughout her career, she bravely engaged in politics during some of the most critical and dangerous periods in the country's history, enduring immense personal suffering for the sake of her people.

Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto stands as a singular leader who fought against two military dictatorships-those of General

Zia-ul-Haq and General Pervez Musharraf.

By restoring democracy, she countered the threats posed by extremist and separatist forces that endangered the nation's security.

Under authoritarian regimes, Pakistan faced significant challenges: the country was divided during the dictatorships of General Ayub Khan and General Yahya Khan, while the regimes of Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf embroiled Pakistan in global power struggles. These wars crushed democratic and federalist forces, allowing extremist and separatist movements to gain strength.

On April 10, 1986, when Shaheed Bibi first returned to Pakistan, and again on October 18, 2007, the country's security was in jeopardy. In 2007, religious and sectarian extremist forces dominated politics through terrorism, and the government's writ had eroded in regions like Swat and the tribal areas, where even the Pakistani flag could not be raised. Despite these risks, Shaheed Bibi returned to her homeland, risking her life to confront these challenges head-on.

If she had not returned during those critical times, the situation in Pakistan today might have been unimaginable. The democracy we see in Pakistan now, the weakening of extremist, fascist, and separatist forces, and the strengthening of federal democratic ideals-symbolized by milestones like the 18th and 26th Constitutional Amendments-all testament to Shaheed Bibi's unwavering commitment and ultimate sacrifice.

Writer is Minister for Information, Transport and Mass Transit, Government of Sindh

Buddhist heritage of Pakistan: A bridge to peace and harmony

Abdur Rehman

PAKISTAN, predominantly a Muslim country, has a rich history and heritage of many other religions, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Among these religions, Buddhism left a rich archaeological and civilisational heritage. Buddha was born in present-day southern Nepal. He travelled through the subcontinent and visited present-day Pakistan during his meditation journey. Consequently, Buddhism flourished in present-day Pakistan, spanning over a millennium. This period left a rich heritage in Pakistan, including philosophy, art, culture, architecture and stupas. This heritage spreads from northern Pakistan to southern Afghanistan. This insight explores how Pakistan's Buddhist heritage can bridge peace and harmony between Pakistan and Buddhist nations.

Buddhism thrived in the Gandhara region, which now encompasses modern-day Peshawar, Swat, and Taxila, from the 2nd century BC to the 8th century AD. This era saw the birth of a remarkable cultural legacy, evident in its architecture and a unique blend of Buddhist and Greek elements. The ruins of Takht-i-Bahi in Swat, dating back to the 1st century (Figure 1), and the Buddhist statues at the Lahore Fort, which contains Buddhist carvings and inscriptions, are a tes-

tament to this fascinating blend. The archaeological sites at Taxila further enrich this cultural tapestry.

Buddhism is the fourth-largest religion and dominant religion in at least eight countries. Seven countries have more than fifty per cent Buddhist population, which include Cambodia (96%), Thailand (92%), Myanmar (79.8%), Bhutan (75%), Sri Lanka (70%), Laos (66.8%) and Mongolia (53%). According to a Gallup survey 2016, around 58 million Buddhist pilgrims want to visit religious sites. Out of these 58 million, five per cent want to visit Pakistan, which is almost 2.9 million people who want to visit Pakistan. However, according to the foreign ministry, only 1500 people visit Buddhist sites in Pakistan annually.

The economic potential of these heritage sites is substantial. In 2022, the World Bank reported that Pakistan attracted US\$16 billion in tourist spending, which can reach US\$30 billion by 2033. It generated a revenue of US\$3.7 billion in 2024, and US\$5.533 billion in revenue is expected by 2029. According to Business Recorder, only these Buddhist pilgrims have the potential to generate US\$900 million to US\$1.3 billion annually. Figure 3 shows the annual expected revenue growth in the tourism industry in Pakistan (including reli-

gious tourism).

Business Recorder has also claimed that Pakistan can almost double its revenue from tourism. Tourism contributes about 10% to the GDP and employs one in ten people worldwide. However, in 2022, the travel and tourism sector contributed 5.9% to Pakistan's GDP.

The restoration of damaged sites and infrastructure development are necessary to attract tourism. In this regard, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Government has taken many initiatives, like the restoration of the Landi Kotal Stupa and a master plan to restore and preserve Takht-i-Bahi. The government is also working on digitally preserving these stupas and sites in 3D virtual form in collaboration with the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS).

However, these efforts only preserve the heritage; its marketing to attract tourists must be further enhanced. Promoting Pakistan's religious tourism sites has remained absent from the country's social and electronic media due to content creation on more commercially viable niches generating engagement and advertising revenue.

It needs a comprehensive strategy. Uxi Mufti observes that religious tourism sites often fail to attract influencers' attention despite their cultural and historical significance

due to their perceived limited monetary potential. To attract more tourists, Pakistan needs to follow a comprehensive strategy.

*Pakistan can leverage social media influencers from Buddhist-majority countries to promote its Buddhist heritage by collaborating with content creators in their native languages, such as Chinese influencers sharing in Mandarin clips.

*Pakistan can also collaborate with domestic and international television and film industries by incorporating Buddhist stories and showcasing archaeological sites and present-day locations.

*The Government needs to develop modern accommodation facilities near these sites, install multilingual signage and information boards to cater to diverse tourists and train local guides.

Pakistan can develop a comprehensive public-private partnership approach to promote Buddhist heritage tourism. By integrating government resources with private sector innovations like digital mapping, augmented reality, venture capital investments, cross-border tourism strategies, and multimedia storytelling, the country can transform historical sites into economically viable destinations that attract diverse audiences through sophisticated technological and marketing approaches.

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NATO needs to 'shift to a wartime mindset'

Yossi Mekelberg

ON the occasion of his first major speech as NATO chief, Mark Rutte, a former Dutch prime minister, did not mince his words, calling on members to "shift to a wartime mindset and turbo charge our defense production and defense spending."

Cynics would probably say that this was a new secretary-general taking a "rather safe than sorry" approach, warning of existential dangers, or even soliciting bigger budgets. But this is no time for cynicism or looking for ulterior motives, but for recognizing that this was a genuine battle cry for Western countries in the face of military threats coming from different directions.

For too long, the West, members of whom comprise this international security organization, has been hanging on to the post-Cold War euphoria of its "total victory" over the Soviet bloc, in both military terms, and more significantly from an ideological-perceptual view. A combination of military superiority and value-based triumph has led Western countries to erroneously imagine that they are invincible.

From the early days of the post-Cold War era in the 1990s, there have been profound military-security challenges, among them Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the wars in the Balkans, genocide in Rwanda, and many other flashpoints. Moreover, leading powers, mainly Russia and China, have gradually become disgruntled and begun to challenge a unipolar international system dominated by the US.

Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, NATO members preferred to believe that they could procrastinate on investing in defense to meet these growing global threats, and simply enjoy the dividends of peace by investing in their economies and improving their living standards and public services. But Rutte's speech presented a strong case for ending the denial of danger, rightly reminding the organization's member states that their paying no heed to Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 and in the Crimea in 2014, and their refusal to accept the likelihood of Putin launching an all-out war on Ukraine, was signaling their weakness to Moscow, with disastrous consequences.

NATO has also paid scant attention to Russia's many years of aiding and abetting the Assad family's brutality in Syria—a regime that has only recently collapsed, but which for nearly 14 years has been responsible for more than half a million deaths and immeasurable suffering for the rest of the population.

The message is twofold. First, while Russia is spending 7 to 8 percent of its GDP on defense, which also amounts to a third of its budget, and as China is quickly catching up when it comes to its own defense expenditure, the average spend for NATO members in Europe and Canada is estimated at just 2 percent of their GDP, which is insufficient to meet future threats.

These figures are a significant increase on only a few years ago, mainly due to a moment of epiphany provided by the onset of Putin's current war against Ukraine, but also to more than just a nudge from the US during the first Trump administration, an issue that was one of his articles of faith back then, and one that he is likely to pursue with even more zest in his second term.

To be sure, these figures are somewhat deceptive in terms of military preparedness, as a large proportion of countries' defense budgets tends to be allocated to pensions and other items that do not directly contribute to combat power.

The second challenge to NATO members is to accept that the world has entered a period of long-term instability, with increasing threats to Western values and ways of life. This situation requires an increase in military capabilities and

preparedness that should be complemented with diplomacy in its widest sense, including investment in soft power.

Modern wars are increasingly becoming of the hybrid type, and although kinetic wars, as in Ukraine or the wars in Gaza and Lebanon, have proved to be still a large facet of warfare, it is cybersecurity and cyberdisinformation, the introduction of AI, migration, and regular and irregular forces, that all require close attention in terms of new skills and preparation.

The cost of military platforms is also soaring exponentially, and with Western economies growing sluggishly, the diverting of resources to defense expenditure, whose benefits are not easy to measure and demonstrate, while public services are yearning for additional resources, has become a polarizing issue in many societies.

As NATO's new secretary-general underlined in his remarks, the threat to Europe is no longer theoretical or abstract but now sits on its doorstep: "Hostile actions against Allied countries are real and accelerating. Malicious cyber-attacks on both sides of the Atlantic. Assassination attempts on British and German soil. Explosions at an ammunition warehouse in Czechia. The weaponization of migrants crossing illegally into Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland. Jamming to disrupt civil aviation in the Baltic region."

Any delay in building capabilities to respond to these types of threats will only encourage Putin, and others, to undermine NATO's member states.

As a result of the war in Ukraine, since February 2022 much of the focus has understandably been on Putin's threat to Europe, but the challenges originating from China and Iran and this pair's collaboration with Russia are also a major concern. With Donald Trump elected for a second term, tensions with Beijing are almost guaranteed to rise, but at the same time his return to the White House, considering his prickly relations with NATO in his first term, do not necessarily suggest easy relations with NATO.

Trump sees the rest of NATO's members as free-riders at the expense of the US, although this has changed considerably and most countries are now meeting the expectation of spending 2 percent of their GDP on defense. Still, after four years of ironclad commitment by the Biden administration to its NATO allies, it remains to be seen if a second-term Trump and his hawkish appointees to key foreign and defense posts will be more amenable to playing the leading role in NATO, including in terms of providing a nuclear umbrella.

NATO as a collective security instrument has come full circle since its formation in 1949, when the fault lines between the two rival US and Soviet blocs were very clear and demonstrated the need to defend Europe and the rest of the world from Soviet aggression. But in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO became a collective security mechanism in search of a purpose, and its members on more than one occasion disagreed on how to respond to crisis situations, and acted unilaterally instead of collectively.

The war in Ukraine and the challenges emanating from China are contributing to the 21st century model of NATO as defender of the West and its values, and the decisions by Finland and Sweden to join the organization after decades of sitting on the fence have demonstrated a general fear of Russia.

But this still leaves open the question of whether member states are capable of meeting all of the current challenges by developing a clear collective security vision supported by diplomacy and the allocation of adequate resources, as they were urged to do by the organization's new secretary-general.

History-making probe attempts closest-ever approach to the sun

THE Parker Solar Probe was set to zoom by the sun on Tuesday during a record-breaking flyby, coming within 3.8 million miles (6.1 million kilometers) of the solar surface during humanity's closest approach to a star.

The uncrewed spacecraft was expected to fly at 430,000 miles per hour (692,000 kilometers per hour), which is fast enough to reach Tokyo from Washington, DC, in under a minute, according to NASA. The speedy flyby would make the probe the fastest human-made object in history, the agency shared December 16 during a NASA Science Live presentation on YouTube.

The mission has been building up to this historic milestone since it launched on August 12, 2018 — an event attended by the probe's namesake, Dr. Eugene Parker, an astrophysicist who pioneered the solar research field of heliophysics.

Parker was the first living person to have a spacecraft named after him. The astrophysicist, whose research revolutionized humanity's understanding of the sun and interplanetary space, died at age 94 in March 2022. But he was still able to witness how the spacecraft could help solve mysteries about the sun more than 65 years after the mission was originally envisioned.

The probe became the first spacecraft to "touch the sun" by successfully flying through the sun's corona, or upper atmosphere, to sample particles and our star's magnetic fields in December 2021.

Over the last six years of the spacecraft's seven-year mission, the Parker Solar Probe has collected data to enlighten scientists about some of the sun's greatest mysteries.

Heliophysics have long wondered how the solar wind, a constant stream of particles released by the sun, is generated as well as why the sun's corona is so much hotter than its surface.

Scientists also want to understand how coronal mass ejections, or large clouds of ionized gas called plasma and magnetic fields that erupt from the sun's outer atmosphere, are structured.

When these ejections

are aimed at Earth, they can cause geomagnetic storms, or major disturbances of the planet's magnetic field, that can affect satellites as well as power and communication infrastructure on Earth.

Now, the time has come for Parker's closest and final flybys, which could complete the answers to these enduring questions and uncover new mysteries by exploring uncharted solar territory.

"Parker Solar Probe is changing the field of heliophysics," said Helene Winters, Parker Solar Probe's project manager from Johns

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Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory, in a statement.

"After years of braving the heat and dust of the inner solar system, taking blasts of solar energy and radiation that no spacecraft has ever seen, Parker Solar Probe continues to thrive."

A blisteringly close flyby of a fiery star

Parker's flyby at around 6:53 a.m. ET on Christmas Eve was planned as the first of the spacecraft's final three closest approaches, with the other two expected to occur on March 22 and June 19.

The spacecraft was expected to get so close to our star that if the distance between Earth and the sun were the length of an American football field, the spacecraft would be about 4 yards from the end zone, according to NASA.

Ashley Strickland

At this proximity, the probe would be able to fly through plumes of plasma as well as within a solar eruption if one releases from the sun.

The spacecraft was built to withstand the extremes of the sun and has flown through coronal mass ejections in the past with no impact to the vehicle, said Parker Solar Probe project scientist Nour Rawafi.

The spacecraft is equipped with a carbon foam shield that is 4.5 inches (11.4 centimeters) thick and 8 feet (2.4 meters) wide. On Earth before launch, the shield

approach, around midnight between Thursday and Friday, Parker will send a signal called a beacon tone back to mission control to confirm the success of the flyby, Rawafi said.

The beacon tone is a limited piece of data that relays the overall state of the spacecraft, he said.

The immense set of data and images gathered during the flyby won't become available to mission control until Parker has moved away from the sun in its orbit, which will occur about three weeks later in mid-January, Rawafi said.

Perfect timing to see an active sun

solar cycle, the sun's magnetic poles flip, causing the sun to transition from calm to active. Experts track increasing solar activity by counting how many sunspots appear on the sun's surface. And the sun is expected to remain active for the next year or so.

The sun's increasing activity became obvious this year during two major displays of auroras on Earth in May and October, when coronal mass ejections released by the sun were directed at our planet. The solar storms are also responsible for generating auroras that dance around Earth's poles, known as the northern lights, or aurora borealis, and southern lights, or aurora australis. When the energized particles from coronal mass ejections reach Earth's magnetic field, they interact with gases in the atmosphere to create different colored light in the sky.

"Both of those storms caused auroras to be visible down to the very bottom of the United States," Young said. "But the May storm was an especially strong storm. In fact, we think it could be a 100- to possibly 500-year event, and that caused auroras very close to the equator, which is extremely unheard of. It was a worldwide event that millions and, hopefully billions, of people, were able to see, and it may not happen again."

The data gathered by Parker Solar Probe could enable scientists to better understand solar storms and even how to predict them, Young said.

"The sun is the only star that we can see in detail, but we can actually go to and measure it directly," Young said. "It's a laboratory in our solar system that allows us to learn about all the other stars in the universe and how all those stars interact with the billions and billions of other planets that may or may not be like our own planets in our solar system."

With that in mind, Rawafi said he hopes that the sun puts on a spectacular show during the probe's close approaches, enabling scientists to gain insights into the sun's activity.

"Sun, please do your best," Rawafi said. "Give us the strongest event you can do, and the Parker Solar Probe can deal with it."

— CNN

Iran had a rough 2024, and 2025 may not get any easier

Arash Azizi

matically isolated from the West.

In June, Canada joined the US in listing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organisation. In response to the execution of an Iranian-German political prisoner, Berlin closed three Iranian consulates in October. Earlier in the year, it shut down a landmark Iran-backed mosque in Hamburg that had been active since the 1950s. Germany also joined France and the US in imposing new sanctions on Tehran for its support for Russia's war in Ukraine.

Domestically, Mr Khamenei and others in the establishment appeared to have realised that continued repression would not bode well for their government. In February, only 40 per cent voted in parliamentary elections, lowest in the Islamic Republic's history.

An helicopter crash in May changed that to a degree, when it led to the death of Iran's then hardliner president (and Khamenei loyalist), Ibrahim Raisi. This sudden demise gave Tehran an opportunity to bring the reformist and centrist factions in from the cold. After two rounds of presidential elections (which featured, once more, the lowest presidential election turnout in Iran), the public elected Masoud Pezeshkian, the first reformist head of government in nearly two decades.

Dr Pezeshkian ran on a more modest programme than had his reformist predecessors, such as Mohammad Khatami, who had been president from 1997-2005 and had promised to democratise the country.

In contrast, the new President has promised little more than good governance and limited reforms in areas such as internet freedom and the mandatory hijab for women.

Dr Pezeshkian's administration is filled with veterans who had previously been involved in negotiations with the US. He has pledged to return to engagement with western powers, with the purpose of easing the country's diplomatic isolation and providing economic relief to its people.

Having experienced a rough start to his presidency, Dr Pezeshkian has his work cut out for him. The hardliner-domi-

nated Parliament recently passed a draconian hijab bill that runs counter to his pledge. On Tuesday, the Cyberspace High Council, most of whose members are not accountable to Dr Pezeshkian, finally accepted lifting of restrictions on WhatsApp and Google Play, yet this is just a drop in the bucket. Meanwhile, Iran is facing energy shortages and power cuts with little precedence in its modern history.

However, as tough as 2024 has been for Iran, the most important challenge to Dr Pezeshkian – and his country more broadly – begins in the new year with the inauguration of US president-elect Donald Trump.

Mr Trump has pledged to double down on his "maximum pressure" policy against Iran. According to recent reports, many in the Israeli establishment seek to resume attacks on Iranian territory. It remains unclear whether Mr Trump would give such attacks his go-ahead, but he certainly could use the threat to add more pressure on Tehran.

Yet as menacing as Mr Trump's second term appears to be, the next four years could also provide Tehran with an opportunity. The president-elect has repeatedly stated his preference for a deal with Iran, which could materialise if Tehran shows flexibility. There are already media reports in Japan that Iran's leadership might ask Tokyo to meditate between Tehran and Washington.

If the Iranian government wants a deal with Mr Trump, it will need to cut its losses and acknowledge the fact that its quixotic promise to "destroy Israel" has delivered little but isolation and misery for its people.

It would have to recognise its setbacks and accept a deal commensurate to the balance of power in the region. It would also need to counter its own domestic hardliners who rail against both a deal with the West and any concessions to popular demands in the country.

Yet the stakes are high enough to motivate many within Iran's establishment to pursue a more conciliatory path. And so, while the new year could prove challenging for the country, it might also end up being one of historic change and reform.

MENA's transformative role in climate adaptation

CLIMATE change continues to be a firm fixture on the agendas of governments in the Middle East and North Africa due to the profound impact it has on the region's economies, communities and ecosystems. Cities and areas across the MENA region are at the center of multifarious climate risks, highlighting the urgent need for ambitious adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Experts are sounding the alarm on the necessity of climate action plans to mitigate the effects of climate change on the region, where vulnerabilities are intensifying by the day. The MENA region is prone to extreme heat, with a World Bank study forecasting that temperatures will soar as high as 56 degrees Celsius if global temperatures rise by 4 C above pre-industrial levels. This would translate to summer heat in parts of Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq intensifying by up to 8 C by 2100, highlighting the dire implications of inaction for one of the world's hottest regions.

Furthermore, data derived from 2018 figures published by the Food and Agriculture Organization paints a gloomy outlook for water resources. The MENA region is currently the most water-stressed area globally, with about 60 percent of the population residing in areas experiencing severe water stress. According to projections made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an increase in temperature of up to 2 C could lead to devastating impacts, with freshwater

availability in the region declining by between 15 percent and 45 percent. Consequently, this climate-driven water scarcity is projected to negatively impact the region's gross domestic product growth, potentially causing a substantial decrease of 6 percent to 14 percent by 2050.

The MENA region is also facing heightened risks from rising sea levels. Nearly a quarter of the region's coastal GDP and a fifth of its urban coastal areas are highly susceptible to these changes. By 2030, some 100 million residents could be exposed to coastal flooding, threatening critical infrastructure, including 43 major port cities.

Due to these multiple uncertainties, climate change is likely to weaken regional food systems and domestic agricultural productivity, thereby severely aggravating the food insecurity situation in the region and pivoting communities to increased reliance on food imports, which are frequently subject to price and supply fluctuations. The World Bank estimates that 132 million people will be plunged into poverty due to severe climate events jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of low-income communities.

Moreover, extreme weather events will pose significant public health risks, with an estimated 40 percent of lost working hours being due to heat stress by 2030. This will also exacerbate existing health burdens, leading to a number of heat-related illnesses and deaths, particularly among vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, it is estimated that the rates of climate migration will increase substantially due to the effects of climate change.

Such perilous projections accentuate the urgency for

The key outcomes of COP28, through the UAE Consensus and across the Presidential Action Agenda, included the unprecedented and noteworthy decision to shift away from fossil fuels in energy systems, emphasizing the importance of doing so in a manner that is fair, systematic and inclusive of all affected communities. Additionally, an agreement was set to accelerate the global energy transition, reflected in tripling renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency by 2030, while also significantly reducing non-carbon dioxide greenhouse gas emissions. Another milestone agreement was the launch of a global initiative to end deforestation by 2030. Additionally, emissions are targeted to peak by 2025 in alignment with the 1.5 C climate pathway, focusing on both sustainable development and poverty eradication. COP28 also sparked significant momentum toward advancing climate adaptation finance, going beyond the initial goal of doubling funding. Other declarations addressed the growing need to design and implement policies that maximize public health benefits from climate change mitigation and prevent dire health impacts, in addition to providing ample support to vulnerable agricultural producers impacted by climate change.

regional governments to adopt sustainable climate adaptation strategies in order to mitigate the effects of climate change. That is why last year's COP28 climate change conference was a pivotal milestone toward accelerating the progress toward a more sustainable future in the region.

The UAE's presidency of COP28 was instrumental in shaping the global climate agenda, culminating in the UAE Consensus, which outlines comprehensive agreements to tackle climate challenges, in addition to a set of declarations to advance climate actions globally. On the first day of COP28, a landmark agreement was

made to activate the Fund

for Responding to Loss and Damage, for which \$853 million has been pledged thus far. It aims to arrange funding solutions for devel-

oping countries that are vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. The key outcomes of COP28, through the UAE Consensus and across the Presidential Action Agenda, included the unprecedented and noteworthy decision to shift away from fossil fuels in energy systems, emphasizing the importance of doing so in a manner that is fair, systematic and inclusive of all affected communities. Additionally, an agreement was set to accelerate the global energy transition, reflected in tripling renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency by 2030, while also significantly reducing non-carbon

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The MENA region has been making significant strides in the area of climate action, demonstrating its commitment to aligning the region's contributions to the global climate agenda. At COP28, the UAE and the

Gates Foundation announced a joint \$200 million investment aimed at leveraging artificial intelligence and technology to tackle climate change's impact on global food systems.

This funding supports several key initiatives, which harness the power of AI to enhance agricultural services for smallholder farmers in low- and middle-income countries, in addition to finding solutions to protect palm trees from pest threats and bolstering agricultural resilience through climate vulnerability diagnostics, mitigation-adaptation assessments and high-quality weather forecasting technologies.

At COP29 last month, the UAE announced the Mangrove Alliance for Climate Strategy, which is designed to accelerate global mangrove conservation efforts and emphasize the UAE's commitment to restoring 100 million mangroves by 2030. In tandem, the UAE also unveiled the Global Energy Efficiency Alliance, with the goal of doubling global energy efficiency rates by 2030.

The Middle East Green Initiative, led by Saudi Arabia, is the largest afforestation program in the world and it aims to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by expanding

green spaces across the Kingdom and other MENA countries. Its ambitions include the planting of 50 billion trees across the region and restoration of 200 million hectares of degraded land.

In another pioneering example, the Saudi Electricity Company has partnered with King Abdullah University of Science and Technology to launch a groundbreaking research project at the Rabigh Power Plant. This initiative, overseen by the Ministry of Energy, focuses on testing innovative carbon capture technology that utilizes freezing techniques to capture carbon and treat various pollutants. The process achieves a carbon purity of up to 99 percent, marking a significant step forward in the country's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Meanwhile, Oman is taking significant strides toward becoming a global leader in green hydrogen production. It aims to scale up the production of green hydrogen, with investments projected to reach up to \$140 billion by 2050, supporting a production capacity of 7.5 million to 8 million tonnes per year.

The National Climate Change Plan 2030 recently unveiled by the government of Qatar outlines more than 300 initiatives designed to bolster the country's climate adaptation efforts.

The strategy sets a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2030. It also focuses on restoring 30 percent of natural habitats affected by cli-

mate change, conserving 30 percent of land and coastal areas and protecting 17 species that are either endangered or endemic to the region.

Considering the many collective efforts expended by MENA countries, several critical aspects must be considered for continued progress. Monitoring and tracking the effectiveness of climate initiatives through big data is essential for evaluating commitments to meeting climate targets. Additionally, greater investment in green technologies and infrastructure, alongside strengthening cooperation with innovators from the private sector or research centers, will be key to unlocking many new solutions powered by emerging technologies.

Collaboration with subject matter experts can also provide the necessary expertise to address the many complex challenges facing the region, in addition to transferring skills to developing a sizable and competent green workforce. Regulations should also support climate action agendas with the aim of enforcing efficiency targets and mitigation measures.

As the region faces some of the most severe impacts of climate change, the necessity for transformative climate policies has never been more pressing. The momentum seen since COP28 has been pivotal to securing a greener, more resilient future, but sustained efforts will be necessary to meet both regional and global climate targets.

— Arab News



PSX stays bearish, loses 1,991 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bearish trend on Thursday, losing 1,991.49 points, a negative change of 1.77 percent, closing at 110,423.32 points as compared to 112,414.81 points on the last trading day.

A total of 628,026,201 shares were traded during the day as compared to 880,598,305 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs33.582 billion against Rs54.455 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 450 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 113 of them recorded gains and 284 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 53 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Fauji

Foods Limited with 93,341,113 shares at Rs16.39 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 49,879,145 shares at Rs1.72 per share and TRG Pak Limited with 46,907,628 shares at Rs70.45 per share.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs198.81 per share price, closing at Rs7,430.81, whereas the runner-up was Mitchells Fruit Farms Limited with Rs17.44 rise in its per share price to Rs266.05.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs232.60 per share closing at Rs20,767.41 followed by Nestle Pakistan Limited with Rs198.10 decline to close at Rs9,001.90.

Rupee gains 10 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Thursday appreciated by 10

paisa against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.37 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.47.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs277.90 and Rs279.40 respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 05 paisa to close at Rs289.39 against the last day's closing of Rs289.44, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen went down by 01 paisa and closed at Rs1.76, whereas a decline of 66 paisa was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs348.81 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs349.10.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and

the Saudi Riyal decreased by 03 and 01 paisa which closed at Rs75.78 and Rs74.12, respectively.

Gold rates up by Rs1,400 per tola

The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,400 and was sold at Rs274,000 on Thursday against its sale at Rs272,600 the previous day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs1,200 to Rs234,911 from Rs233,711 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs215,335 from Rs214,235, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The prices of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs3,350 and Rs2,872.08 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$14 to \$2,628 from \$2,614, the Association reported.



MULTAN: Labourer unloading potato bags from a delivery truck at Vegetable Market.

SBP injects over Rs575b into market

KARACHI (APP): The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) injected Rs575.8 billion in the market through Open Market Operation (OMO) reverse repo purchase on Thursday.

The SBP, as per results issued here, conducted Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) on December 26, 2024 for 8-day tenor and accepted an amount of Rs575.8 billion offered through 3 bids.

The central bank received 3 quotes for 8-day tenor cumulatively offering an amount of Rs575.8 billion at the rate of return ranging from 13.07 to 13.10 percent. The SBP accepted the entire offered amount at 13.07 percent rate of return.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Five ships namely, Star Gazer, Hoegh Gandria, Energy Centaur, Eva Hansa and uninning scheduled to load/offload Rice, LNG, Gas oil, Palm oil and Coal, berthed at Multi-Purpose Terminal, Elengy Terminal, Oil Terminal, Liquid Terminal and Bulk Terminal during last 24 hours respectively.

Meanwhile three more ships, African Baribird, Maritime Kelly Anne and Nymph Thetis scheduled to load/offload Cement and Palm oil also arrived at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim during the same period.

A total of eleven ships were engaged at POA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them three ships, GSF Genesis, Maersk Cabo Verde and Kasia-I left the port on Monday morning and other ship Darya Jaya is expected to sail on today afternoon.

A cargo volume of 175,945 comprising 123,561 tonnes imports cargo and 52,384 tonnes export cargo was handled at the Port, including containerized cargo carried in 3,567 Containers (541 TEUs Imports and 3,026 TEUs export) during the last 24 hours.

Fifteen ships at outer anchorage of the port, out of them a container vessel GFS Ruby & three more container vessels, San Francisco, Kyoto Express and Xpress Altair are expected to take berths at Container Terminal 1 & 2 on Thursday.

US holiday retail sales raise 3.8%

NEW YORK (Reuters): US retail sales rose 3.8 percent Nov. 1 and Dec. 24, as intense promotion to drum up sales in what was expected to be a highly competitive holiday season for retailers prompted last-minute shopping among consumers.

The sales jump was well above a 3.1 percent increase last year, handily beating Mastercard's forecast in September of a 3.2 percent rise, with the last five days of the season accounting for 10 percent of all holiday spending.

Major retailers including Walmart, opens new tab, Target, opens new tab and Amazon.com, opens new tab ramped up promotions and value messaging to attract customers amid a shorter-than-usual holiday season with just 23 days before Christmas.

Sesame output grew by 455% in 5 years

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for National Food Security and Research, Rana Tanveer Hussain on Wednesday said that sesame production has increased by 455 percent during last five years, reaching 1.119 million tons annually.

While addressing the International Investment Conference on Sesame, the minister said that sesame exports have grown by 327%, amounting to 0.760 million tons per year.

The minister highlighted sesame as a high-value cash crop with significant export potential and praised the achievements of Pakistan in

the sesame sector over the past five years.

He further noted that the total value of sesame exports has surged by 366%, reaching \$1.073 billion annually, making Pakistan the third-largest sesame exporter globally.

Rana Tanveer emphasized that the inclusion of sesame in the National Oilseeds Enhancement Program (NOEP) has transformed it from a neglected crop to a major contributor to Pakistan's economy.

He pointed out that sesame's success is a result of collaboration between the Ministry of National Food Security and

Research and provincial agriculture departments.

The minister urged all stakeholders to focus on value addition, improved processing technologies, and the exploration of new global markets for sesame products, including refined sesame oil.

He called upon the Ministry of Commerce to play a vital role in promoting Pakistan's sesame products in international markets. "Strengthening sesame production will not only reduce edible oil imports but also bolster Pakistan's economy by generating valuable foreign exchange," he added.

Pasakhi-5 Well in Hyderabad: OGDCL revives and enhances oil production

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Oil & Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Pakistan's largest exploration and production company, has successfully revived and enhanced oil production from the Pasakhi-5 well, located in Hyderabad district of Sindh. The well is part of the Pasakhi Development & Production Lease (D&PL), with OGDCL holding a 100% working interest.

As part of a strategic

optimization initiative, OGDCL deployed a rig to install an artificial lift system (ESP) at the well to enhance oil production. Previously, the well was producing 480 barrels of oil per day (BPD) on natural flow. Following the installation, oil production from the well has increased significantly to 900 BPD, marking an impressive increase of 420 BPD.

OGDCL's initiative aligns with its broader strategy to optimize energy output and ensure sustainable

energy supply, contributing to Pakistan's energy security and economic growth. By leveraging innovative technologies, the company is striving to enhance operational efficiency and unlock the full potential of the nation's hydrocarbon resources.

The company is committed to driving progress in the oil and gas sector, exploring new opportunities, and ensuring a reliable energy supply for the country's industrial and economic development.

‘ICCI focuses on strengthening Industry-academia linkages’

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a significant step towards fostering collaboration between academia and industry, Dr. Anis, Vice Chancellor of Riphah International University, visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI).

The meeting served as a platform for an engaging discussion on strengthening academia-industry linkages to bridge the gap between educational institutions and the corporate sector.

The session was attended by prominent members of the ICCI, including senior executives, industry experts, and key faculty members from Riphah

University.

Both sides emphasized the critical role of academia-industry collaboration in enhancing research, innovation, and employability of graduates.

Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Acting President ICCI welcomed the Vice Chancellor and appreciated Riphah University's dedication to academic excellence and societal contribution.

He underscored the significance of joint ventures, internships, and research initiatives that can bring meaningful outcomes for both sectors.

Dr. Anis highlighted the importance of aligning aca-

demetic curricula with the evolving requirements of the industry.

He stressed that universities must not only focus on theoretical knowledge but also equip students with practical skills, entrepreneurial mindsets, and exposure to real-world challenges.

Nasir Mehmod Chaudhry, Acting Senior Vice President of ICCI, emphasized the need for continuous dialogue between academia and industry.

He stated that fostering a culture of collaboration would not only address skill gaps but also drive innovation and competi-

tiveness in the market.

During the meeting, both parties agreed to establish a formal framework for collaboration.

Key areas of focus included research partnerships, capacity-building programs, internships, and organizing joint seminars and workshops.

This initiative is expected to create new opportunities for students, promote innovation, and contribute to national economic growth.

The meeting concluded with a mutual commitment to maintain regular communication and work towards implementing the discussed initiatives effectively.

UAE, China lead Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports in October

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports surged in October, with the UAE and China emerging as the Kingdom's top trading partners, showcasing its ongoing efforts to diversify the economy under Vision 2030.

Outbound shipments to the UAE reached SR5.86 billion (\$1.56 billion), a rise of 54.2 percent compared to the same month last year, according to the latest report by the General Authority for Statistics.

Mechanical and electrical equipment topped the list of exports to the UAE, valued at SR3.11 billion, followed by transport parts worth SR713.5 million and chemical products at SR503.8 million.

China was the second-largest destination for Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports during the month, receiving shipments worth SR2.35 billion. Chemical products accounted for SR826.3 million of these exports, followed by plastic and rubber goods valued at

SR795.1 million. Mineral products worth SR300.5 million were also exported to China in October.

Strengthening the non-oil sector is a cornerstone of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which aims to reduce the Kingdom's reliance on crude revenues. The initiative has been a key driver of economic policy since its launch in 2016, and officials have pointed to tangible progress in this direction.

Speaking at the World Economic Conference in Riyadh last month, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Economy and Planning, Faisal Al-Ibrahim, highlighted that the non-oil sector now accounts for 52 percent of the Kingdom's real gross domestic product. He further noted that non-oil economic activities have been growing at an annual rate of 20 percent since the Vision 2030 reforms began.

This diversification push has been underscored by recent economic indicators. Saudi Arabia's Purchasing

Managers' Index, which measures business activity in the non-oil private sector, rose to 59.0 in November from 56.9 in October.

A PMI reading above 50 indicates expansion, and November's figure represents the fastest pace of growth since July.

European markets also featured prominently among Saudi Arabia's export partners. Belgium imported SR820.7 million worth of non-oil products, while Egypt and Turkey received SR808.8 million and SR767.9 million, respectively.

Overall, Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports reached SR25.38 billion in October, reflecting a 12.7 percent year-on-year increase compared to the same period in 2022.

Maritime routes continued to play a vital role in facilitating the Kingdom's non-oil trade, handling shipments worth SR15.41 billion in October. King Fahad Industrial Sea Port in Jubail was the top exit

point, processing exports valued at SR3.77 billion, followed by Jeddah Islamic Sea Port at SR3.53 billion.

Other key ports included Jubail Sea Port, which handled outbound shipments valued at SR1.86 billion, and King Abdulaziz Sea Port, which processed SR2.36 billion worth of exports.

Land routes accounted for SR5.20 billion of non-oil exports, while air shipments contributed SR4.75 billion. Among airports, King Khalid International in Riyadh and King Abdulaziz International in Jeddah handled exports valued at SR2.25 billion and SR2.38 billion, respectively.

While non-oil exports experienced robust growth, Saudi Arabia's imports declined by 3.8 percent year on year to SR72.01 billion in October. Machinery and equipment topped the list of imported goods, comprising 25.7 percent of total imports and reflecting a 6.9 percent annual increase.

European central banks cut rates in 20124

BRUSSELS/LONDON (APP): European central banks cut their rates this year, albeit slowly, as inflation declined towards each country's targets.

After rapid rate hikes over the previous two years in the face of high inflation, the first monetary easing steps were taken in the second half of 2024, though not collectively by all European central banks.

Many countries' central banks remained cautious even though core inflation had returned to more reasonable levels.

The European Central Bank (ECB) had raised its key interest rates at 10 consecutive meetings beginning in July 2022.

At the beginning of 2024, the ECB's refinancing rate was at a record high of 4.5 percent and its marginal lending facility rate at 4.75 percent.

In June, the ECB lowered its key interest rates for the first time in five years, cutting all three policy rates by 25 basis points in a bid to stimulate the eurozone economy through cheaper borrowing costs.

The landmark decision was followed by continuing rate cuts, and the bank ended the year with four in total, lowering its deposit facility rate to 3 percent, refinancing rate to 3.15 percent, and marginal lending facility rate to 3.4 percent. The decision came after slow economic growth in the eurozone and inflation going down towards the 2 percent target.

Analysts say the bank may cut its rates to 1.5 percent by the end of 2025, while the market expectation is for a total cut of 100 basis points next year.



CENTURION : Kamran Ghulam played a brilliant knock scoring 54 off 74 balls to steer Pakistan out of crisis.

Dane Paterson five-for, Corbin Bosch's four rock Pakistan

CENTURION (ESPNCricinfo): An 81-run stand between Kamran Ghulam, who scored an entertaining half-century, and Mohammad Rizwan dragged Pakistan out of the hole they were put in during the morning session. But five wickets for Dane Paterson meant South Africa continued to chip away at Pakistan to retain their stranglehold on the day, reducing them to 209 for 9 by tea.

Rizwan and Ghulam had been building up the partnership the other side of lunch, and continued in similar vein. But with the clouds menacingly moving right overhead, the luckless Kagiso Rabada was brought in for another excellent but fruitless spell. It produced the most engaging cricket of the day, with both KGs - Rabada and Ghulam - locking horns on more than one occasion. Rabada grew increasingly frustrated with Ghulam's stubborn resistance and got close enough to tell him, with Ghulam responding in less than family-friendly terms to go back to the bowling crease.

With the crowd engaged, Ghulam edged one to the slips that Marco Jansen shelled, and brought up his half-century, but South Africa would not be denied. Ghulam dragged Paterson, only to top edge him to fine leg, where none other than Rabada stood to take the catch that sent a full SuperSport Park into a frenzy.

One wicket brought more for South Africa before lunch, and so it proved again. Rizwan nicked off in Corbin Bosch's next over, before Salman Ali Agha and Aamer Jamal set about another rebuild. With ten minutes to tea, the duo were closing in on another 50-partnership, but one more South African burst would prove the knockout blow.

South Africa had put down a couple of chances in the slips off the outside edge, so Bosch found the inside edge of Jamal as he chopped on, before a surprise bouncer from Paterson saw the back of Agha. With Naseem Shah swiftly dispensed with, Mohammad Abbas and Khuram Shahzad plugged

along to frustrate South Africa, ensuring they will start the final session bowling again.

South Africa had started the day by doing to Pakistan what they always do to Pakistan at Centurion, blitzing them with the ball in the second hour of the first session. Bosch and Paterson cashed in after a superb opening hour of bowling from Rabada and Jansen, which openers Shan Masood and Saim Ayub rode their luck to survive.

The story of the opening session changed the moment Temba Bavuma threw the ball to debutant Bosch. He began with a loosener well outside off stump. Masood, who had been forced to deal with an unerring fourth-stump line all of the first hour, had his eyes light up as he slashed at it, with a thick outside edge carrying to Jansen at third slip to give him a first-ball wicket.

All of a sudden, the good balls that kept missing edges started to find them. Paterson nipped one away from Ayub, who was uncharacteristically defensive, accumulating a painstaking 14 off 35

balls. It kissed the outside edge, and both openers were back in the pavilion. Paterson wasn't done, though because Babar Azam, returning to the side, also had a prod at one well outside off stump, the tentativeness of his stroke revealing his lack of confidence; it was meat and drink for the slips again.

With Pakistani defenses going haywire, Saud Shakeel went for the other extreme, looking to take every ball on, but it was just six deliveries before that strategy ran out of road. He gloved a hook through to the wicket-keeper, with South Africa successfully reviewing to send him on his way back.

It will be all the more frustrating for Pakistan after a magnificent first hour of South African bowling went unrewarded. With Rabada and Jansen nipping it around, it was obvious why Bavuma had opted to put Pakistan in. But somehow, they had gritted out a way to off the two leading bowlers.

The two who followed them, though, would go on to show they are side-kicks to no one.

Konstas shines on Australia debut but India rally

MELBOURNE (ESPNCricinfo): Teenager Sam Konstas hit a pulsating half-century on his Australia debut on a thrilling opening day of the fourth Test against India in Melbourne.

The 19-year-old opener, Australia men's youngest Test batting debutant since 1953, smashed 60 from 65 balls, featuring six fours and two sixes.

Konstas was also involved in a heated confrontation with India's Virat Kohli, clashing shoulders with the India pace bowler beating the bat four times in his first over, before departing to a standing ovation after being trapped lbw by Ravindra Jadeja.

Fellow opener Usman Khawaja rediscovered his form, hitting a first half-century in 12 innings before departing for 57 after lunch.

Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith then put on 83 for the fourth wicket as Australia pressed home their advantage in the evening session.

But Labuschagne's departure for 72 led to Australia losing three wickets for just nine runs, with the lively Bumrah removing Travis Head and Mitchell Marsh in quick succession.

Akash Deep then took the late wicket of Alex Carey for 31 with the new ball, before the hosts closed out the day on 311-6.

A crowd of more than 87,000 packed into the MCG for the traditional Boxing Day Test, which took place under cloudy skies but sweltering temperatures pushing close to 39 degrees.

The five-match series is level at 1-1, with both sides needing to win the series 3-

1 to guarantee a place in the World Test Championship final.

It has been quite the rise for Konstas, who has only played 11 first-class matches and made his debut for New South Wales in 2023, less than two months after his 18th birthday.

Pitched straight into the action after skipper Pat Cummins won the toss and chose to bat, Konstas was engaged in a fascinating early battle with Bumrah, with the India pace bowler beating the bat four times in his first over.

Konstas got off the mark at the start of Bumrah's second, before attempting a reverse ramp shot with just the 11th ball he had faced in Test cricket, much to the delight of the Melbourne crowd.

The teenager continued to show no fear, ramping Bumrah for four, six, four in the same over and attempting to charge Mohammed Siraj, prompting some choice words and a fiery stare from the India quick.

He then clashed shoulders with former India skipper Kohli at the end of the 10th over, with the players exchanging words before Khawaja and the two umpires calmed the situation down.

Konstas was unruffled, smashing Bumrah for 18 in the next over and geeing up the crowd to keep up the noise, before reaching his fifty with two off Siraj.

An eventful 90-minute innings came to an end when he fell to Jadeja, but left the field to a rapturous reception.

Australia will be further encouraged by the return to form of Khawaja and Labuschagne, who both hit

their highest scores of the series so far.

Steve Smith also looks well set on 68, though Carey's late wicket leaves the Australia tail exposed and sets up a potentially pivotal first session on day two.

One of the images of the day was Kohli, 36, barging into Konstas after the Australian had clubbed the India bowlers around the ground.

Kohli appeared to change direction to make contact with Konstas, who was walking down the pitch to speak to his opening batting partner Khawaja.

Speaking to host broadcaster Seven Network, former Australia captain Ricky Ponting says Kohli was probably to blame.

"That man [Kohli] might have a few questions to answer," Ponting said.

"When you're out there batting, the batsman owns the wicket. The crease is his. Especially between overs like that."

Konstas played down the incident at the end of the day, saying: "I was just doing my gloves and I think he accidentally bumped me. But that's just cricket, the tension."

The International Cricket Council can suspend players for "inappropriate physical contact" if deemed serious enough, though it is not yet clear whether either player will face any further action.

That incident summed up what was set to be a chastening day for India, who grew visibly frustrated as the Australian top order collectively found form.

But that late burst of wickets, led by the irrepressible Bumrah, dragged the visitors back into the

game.

Labuschagne was looking well-placed to reach three figures before he charged spinner Washington Sundar, recalled in place of Shubman Gill, and clipped the ball straight to Kohli at mid-off.

Travis Head, scorer of two centuries in his previous three innings, departed for a duck after shouldering arms to a Bumrah delivery that nipped back and clipped the top of his off stump.

Two overs later Marsh attempted a heave across the line but could only edge through to Carey for Bumrah's third wicket of the day and 24th of the series.

Deep then made the most of a late burst with the new ball with a beauty of a delivery that feathered Carey's edge.

"The biggest crowd I've ever played in" - what they said

Australia batter Sam Konstas: "It was quite surreal with the big crowd, the biggest crowd I've ever played before."

"I just played with freedom and backed myself. Lucky to get a few runs. A bit disappointed with the way I got out but hopefully we have got a bit of momentum for tomorrow."

India batting coach Abhishek Nayar: "A lot of credit to the way Sam played. The intent he showed sort of put us on the back foot."

"But it took a lot of character for our bowlers to stick in there. It wasn't the easiest conditions to bowl. At times like that it is important to stick to your plans and post-lunch we came back really strong."

Haaland penalty saved as Man City held by Everton

MANCHESTER (BBC): Erling Haaland had a second-half penalty saved by Jordan Pickford as Manchester City's crisis continued with a laboured Premier League draw against Everton at Etihad Stadium.

Pep Guardiola's side, once all-conquering, are in unfamiliar territory amid a staggering fall-off, with just one win now in their past 13 games in all competitions.

The result leaves the champions sixth in the table, three points adrift of Nottingham Forest in fourth and 11 behind leaders Liverpool, with those two sides still yet to play on Thursday.

City almost made the perfect start in the third minute but Josko Gvardiol's towering header cannoned back off the post - and the hosts were rewarded for their dominance shortly after.

They grabbed a deserved opener in the 14th minute as Bernardo Silva latched on to Jeremy Doku's pass and managed to bobble home a finish into the far corner courtesy of a deflection off Jarrad Branthwaite.

It should have been two

when Phil Foden fed a pass to the onrushing Silva inside the box, but the Portugal international sent his first-time attempt wide of the post on this occasion.

But with their first clear-cut chance of the game, Everton drew level in the 36th minute through Iliman Ndiaye's marvellous strike, taking a touch from Abdoulaye Doucoure's cross and sending a delightful finish with the outside of his boot into the far corner.

City had the chance to regain the lead seven minutes into the second half when left-back Vitalii Mykolenko chopped down Savinho inside the area, but Pickford dived the right way to keep out Haaland's spot-kick. City pushed for the winner but failed to prise open the Everton backline and were left to suffer again, with their last victory coming on 4 December against Forest.

Guardiola led City to the club's greatest moment by claiming the Champions League in 2023 to seal the Treble, but he, his players and the supporters will be content just to win another game at the moment.

The ex-Barcelona and

Bayern Munich boss suggested before the match that a top-four finish was "at risk" in their current form, and Thursday's performance suggests they face a tough battle to achieve that feat.

City have competed in Europe's elite club competition for 14 consecutive campaigns and at the start of this term most would have taken it for granted for them to extend that run, but the season has not panned out in such a way and their remarkable decline continues.

Their previous slick play has turned slow and ponderous, which made it easier for Everton to sit back and play against, and their confidence ebbed away after conceding another soft goal with the defence watching on.

It started well as Silva's darting run caught Everton napping and his deflected effort gave City the lead, but they were unable to build on that early goal despite numerous chances.

After scoring the first, Silva's failure to find the net from around 15 yards out proved to be costly as Everton recovered.

Savinho's thunderous volley was kept out by

Pickford's sprawling stop at the start of the second half, while and Mateo Kovacic flashed a strike narrowly wide before Haaland's gilt-edged chance. The prolific Norwegian, who has 13 league goals this season, was outpsychsed by Pickford for the penalty and though City recycled the ball and Haaland headed in, the flag went up for offside.

Guardiola sent on Kevin de Bruyne and Ilkay Gundogan in an attempt to change his fortunes, but the side were met with a smattering of jeers at the full-time whistle, having now gained only five points since the start of November.

Glass half-full or half-empty for Everton?

Everton had kept three straight clean sheets coming into this game and although their backline was breached, they have now managed credible consecutive draws against Arsenal, Chelsea and here against City.

Whether their glass is half-full or half-empty at present depends on perspective.

Boss Dyche will point to his side being difficult to beat, having lost only two of their past 13 top-flight matches - but on the other hand, they have won only three of their 17 games so far this season.

This draw leaves them in 15th place, edging five points clear of the relegation zone, and it came through Ndiaye's exquisite effort, which was thoroughly enjoyed by the travelling supporters.

They could have snatched it late on when Orel Mangala's deflected strike wrong-footed Stefan Ortega but the ball drifted the wrong side of the post, leaving Everton the happier side with the result but without a victory against City in their past 16 meetings.



SAN FRANCISCO, CA: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers shoots the ball during the game against the Golden State Warriors at Chase Center in San Francisco, California.

Kohli fined 20% of match fees after heated altercation with Konstas

MELBOURNE (ESPNCricinfo): Virat Kohli has been fined 20% of his match fees and awarded one demerit point after his heated altercation with Australia's 19-year-old debutant Sam Konstas during the fourth Test at the MCG. The incident occurred after the tenth over of the morning when Kohli and Konstas bumped shoulders while moving across the pitch between overs.

Both players immediately looked back for a heated exchange of words, before Konstas' opening partner Usman Khawaja and umpire Michael Gough interrupted to cut the altercation short.

Kohli was sanctioned for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct that relates to "inappropriate physical contact with a Player, Player Support Personnel, Umpire, Match Referee or any other person (including a spectator during an International Match". No formal hearing was required as Kohli accepted the sanctions.

Replays that emerged later in the session showed that Konstas had turned around from the crease after the last ball of the tenth over, and was walking straight towards the other end while looking at his gloves, whereas Kohli - while tossing the ball in his hand - was looking straight ahead and went from way outside the pitch right towards Konstas and bumped into him.

"I think the emotions got to both of us," Konstas later told Channel 7 in the second session. "I didn't quite realise; I was doing my gloves, then [there was] a little shoulder charge. But it happens in cricket."

"Have a look where Virat walks. Virat's walked one whole pitch over to his right and instigated that confrontation. No doubt in my mind whatsoever."

Ricky Ponting - A U S v I N D pic.twitter.com/zm4rjG4X9A

Konstas made his Test debut with a stunning half-century off just 52 balls, by taking on Jasprit Bumrah, the best bowler of the series, who had dismissed Nathan McSweeney four times in six innings in the

first three Tests. Konstas replaced McSweeney for this Test, and struggled to 5 off 21 after being beaten several times before moving to 27 off 38 at the time of the altercation with Kohli.

By then, Konstas had reverse-scooped Bumrah for a six over the slips which had followed a more straightforward scoop that had fetched him four runs after moving across and flicking the ball over the wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant.

Konstas finished on 60 off 65 balls with six fours and two sixes, having scored 34 from 33 against Bumrah and 20 from 19 off Mohammed Siraj.

Tests between India and Australia have been high-intensity, and known to throw up such altercations and controversies, especially involving Kohli. He had once collided - when he was captain - for an altercation with the opposite captain Tim Paine in 2018-19, and had a duel with Mitchell Johnson while scoring a stunning century in Adelaide in 2014.





In brief

ANF recovers 149 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in 7 operations recovered over 149 kg drugs worth over Rs 40 million and arrested 4 drug dealers, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman. He informed that 30 heroin-filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of a passenger going to Jeddah at Peshawar International Airport. In another operation, 31 intoxicated tablets were recovered from a parcel near a park in Islamabad and a suspect was arrested. 150 grams ice was recovered from a parcel sent to Australia through a courier office in Karachi. In an operation, 90 kg opium and 10 kg heroin hidden for smuggling were recovered in Chagai district, Balochistan. In 5th operation, 45 kg hashish was recovered from an uninhabited area of Coastal Line Pasni in Balochistan. 3 kg hashish was recovered from a suspect in Hyderabad. In 7th operation, 1 kg heroin and 500 grams ice were recovered from the possession of a motorcyclist intercepted near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza Attack. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Parveen death anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): Thursday (December 26) marks a poignant day in Pakistan's literary calendar as the nation observed the 30th death anniversary of its cherished Parveen Shakir, the illustrious poetess affectionately known as the "Poet of Fragrance," whose contributions to Pakistani literature remain unparalleled. Born in Karachi on November 24, 1952, Parveen Shakir became a prominent figure in the literary landscape after successfully passing the competitive examination for civil service, PTV news channel reported. Parveen Shakir started writing from a young age, she wrote both prose and poetry and also contributed in writing columns in Urdu newspaper, and fewer were written in English dailies. In 1977, she made her literary debut with the publication of her first poetry collection, 'Khushbu' (Fragrance), which garnered exceptional acclaim within literary circles. Her popular poetry work includes Sad-barg, Khud Kalami and Inkar which were compiled in the book Mah-e-Tamam. Parveen Shakir died in a road accident in Islamabad in 1994 at age of forty-two.

34,600 cusecs water released

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 34,600 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 38,100 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1470.93 feet and was 72.93 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 17,700 cusecs and 15,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1132.25 feet, which was 83.25 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 4,800 cusecs and 4,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 19,700, 26,700, 20,900 and 1,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,600 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 4,700 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Minister chairs meeting on 100MW solar power plant

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday chaired a meeting regarding the installation of a 100-MW solar power plant in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), an area that remained neglected and faced long-duration electricity load-shedding.

The meeting was attended by the GB Chief Secretary, Chief Minister of Kashmir Affairs & GB, Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Planning, Chief of the Energy Ministry of Planning and senior officers concerned, according to a news release.

Addressing the meeting, Ahsan Iqbal termed the severe power shortage in

Gilgit-Baltistan as criminal negligence and said that the 18-hour load shedding was creating a sense of deprivation among the people.

He stated that in such circumstances, no investor would be willing to invest in the area.

During his recent visit to China, the minister mentioned that he invited Chinese companies to install solar systems in Gilgit-Baltistan. He directed the Power Division to immediately initiate work on solar energy and complete a transparent bidding process to select the best company for the purpose.

Ahsan Iqbal further said that off-grid solar power was the best source of providing electricity and

emphasized that immediate steps should be taken for this project.

He also directed that a clear time-line and matrix be set to increase power generation in GB, instructing that the solar project be included in PC-1 and a comprehensive strategy be prepared for its generation and operation.

He stressed the need for the early completion of energy projects in Gilgit-Baltistan under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP).

The meeting appreciated the early completion of the Naltar 16 MW Hydropower Project, calling it a 'welcoming' and 'important step' toward resolving the energy crisis.

Minister visits Palestinian Embassy to reaffirm help

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The Federal Minister for Science, Technology, and Federal Education, Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, accompanied by Coordinator General of COMSTECH, Prof Dr Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary, visited the Embassy of Palestine here in Islamabad on Thursday to reaffirm support.

During the meeting with Dr Zuhair Zaid, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Pakistan, he reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering support for the Palestinian cause.

Prof Dr Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary highlighted COMSTECH's initiatives aimed at supporting Palestinian youth, including the provision of 5,000 scholarships and fellowships.

He elaborated on COMSTECH's commitment to fostering educational opportunities for Palestinians and strengthening their access to quality education.

Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui reiterated the government and people's steadfast support for Palestine. Sharing insights from his recent visit to Oman, he revealed discussions with educational ministers from other countries about joint actions to assist Palestine in the education sector.

He assured that Pakistan is committed to extending practical support for the rehabilitation of educational institutions in Palestine.

To further strengthen these efforts, Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui stated

that he has already proposed convening an extraordinary meeting of education ministers from the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) member countries in Islamabad to devise a comprehensive long-term plan for supporting Palestine.

Ambassador Dr Zuhair Zaid, expressed heartfelt gratitude to the government, COMSTECH, and the people of Pakistan. He acknowledged their steadfast support, emphasizing that these efforts will never be forgotten by the Palestinian people.

This visit reflects Pakistan and COMSTECH's continued commitment to standing in solidarity with Palestine and contributing to its educational and institutional development.

PR plans new express Karachi-Lahore train

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Railways is planning to launch a high-speed express train between Lahore and Karachi, similar to the Green-Line Express that operates between Islamabad and Karachi via Lahore, a state-run news agency reported.

An official in the Ministry of Railways told media that the primary goal of this new train service is to provide passengers with advanced amenities and an enhanced travel experience.

Currently, the official said the teams from relevant

departments are working on preparations for the launch of this modern train, which is expected to begin by the end of January next year.

In order to reduce the need for imports, according to the official, Pakistan Railways is committed to enhancing passenger services by employing innovative technologies to construct coaches domestically.

He said that in order to provide passengers with a clean and comfortable atmosphere, the department is trying to improve the

quality and hygiene of the meals.

Read More: Pakistan Railways to induct 80 High-Capacity freight wagons in 2024

With stops at important locations like Rawalpindi, Lahore, Khanewal, Bahawalpur, Sukkar/Rohri, Hyderabad, and Drigh Road, the Green-Line Express, which was launched by the then-prime minister at Islamabad's Margalla Railway Station in 2015, currently takes roughly 20 hours to travel from Islamabad to Karachi Cantonment Station.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Science & Technology Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui along with Coordinator General COMSTECH Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary visited Embassy of Palestine.

Distt admin targets street beggars; arrests 67

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has intensified its efforts to curb street begging, and conducted targeted operations, led by Assistant Commissioners (ACs) from various areas. As a result, the administration managed to arrest 67 beggars over the past few days.

According to a spokesperson for the ICT administration, AC Rural apprehended 13 individuals, while AC City detained 12 professional beggars.

Similarly, AC Industrial Area, with the support of district administration

teams, arrested six beggars.

In another operation, AC Shalimar rounded up 14 individuals, while AC Rural targeted areas notorious for organized begging and arrested 11 more beggars.

Furthermore, AC Secretariat apprehended eight beggars, and AC City detained three more, sending all of them to jail.

On this occasion, DC Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon, directed all assistant commissioners to maintain daily operations against professional beggars, ensuring that public spaces remain clear of such activities.

The DC also urged citizens to support the administration's efforts by discouraging practices that enable begging mafias.

Authorities emphasized that this campaign is not a one-time effort but part of a sustained initiative.

The DC highlighted the need for coordinated actions to address the issue comprehensively, with a focus on rehabilitation and deterrence where necessary.

The district administration has appealed to the public for cooperation in reporting areas where begging is prevalent.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting State-of-the-Art Immigration and Passports Headquarters.

NAHE concludes NFDP at UVAS

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE), Higher Education Commission (HEC), successfully concluded the National Faculty Development Program (NFDP) for the Interim Placement of Fresh PhDs (IPFP). The closing ceremony marked the culmination of an intensive three-week training designed to empower early-career academics with essential professional competencies.

According to a report by the Higher Education Commission, Dr Muhammad Younus Rana, Vice Chancellor, UVAS, Lahore was chief guest in the closing ceremony. He praised NAHE's pivotal role as HEC's dedicated capacity-building arm in advancing the professional development of higher education faculty across Pakistan.

Distinguished speakers included Dr. Aneela Zameer Durrani, Dean, Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, Dr. Amir Ghafoor Bajwa, Director, University Diagnostic Laboratory and Dr. Muhammad Asif, Director, Veterinary Academy.

During the ceremony, the speakers highlighted the significance of NAHE's initiatives in enhancing the quality of teaching, research, and academic leadership. They emphasized the vital role of professional development in preparing educators to meet the evolving challenges of higher education and foster student success.

NAHE is already executing various programs for Faculty Development. Faculty development is essential for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in higher education settings.

By improving the capabilities and effectiveness of university faculty, institutions can better contribute to multiple SDGs. Faculty development aligns with and supports various SDGs including SDG-4 (Quality Education), SDG-5 (Gender Equality), SDG-8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG-10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG-13 (Climate Action) and SDG-16 (Peace, Justice and strong Institutions).

By investing in faculty development, educational institutions can significantly advance the SDGs, ensuring quality education for all and fostering innovation, and promotes sustainable development across various sectors.

The program concluded with the distribution of certificates by the honorable Vice Chancellor, recognizing the participants' commitment to self-improvement and academic excellence.

This cohort of 32 participants underwent a rigorous curriculum encompassing effective teaching methodologies, research grant writing, and professional ethics.

NAHE's efforts in organizing training reflect its dedication to fostering academic excellence, a core objective under HEC's vision for higher education in Pakistan.

The faculty development program serves as a cornerstone for equipping fresh PhDs with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for impactful academic careers.

Police achieves 75% reduction in crimes

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Territory Police has marked a significant achievement, reporting a 75% reduction in serious crimes in 2024 compared to the previous year.

This milestone was shared during the annual review meeting led by Inspector General (IG) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Operations Syed Ali Raza in the federal capital, an official told APP.

Serious crime statistics

According to official data, serious crimes in Islamabad decreased from 269 cases in 2023 to 200 in 2024. This significant decline is attributed to the proactive measures and strategic planning implemented by the Operations Division.

DIG Syed Ali Raza emphasized that the police's vigilant efforts, including targeted operations and improved intelligence systems, have played a pivotal

role in enhancing the city's security.

Arrests and recoveries

The Operations Division made 24,387 arrests in various criminal cases throughout the year, recovering stolen goods valued at over Rs. 2.38 billion. The crackdown on criminal elements also led to the dismantling of 657 gangs involving 1,531 individuals. Vehicles recovered included 429 cars and 763 motorcycles.

Drug control efforts

Under the "Nasha Ab Nahi" campaign, the Islamabad Police registered 1,723 cases and apprehended 1,811 individuals involved in drug trafficking. This included 45 suspects targeting educational institutions. Recovered contraband included 417 kg of hashish, 533 kg of heroin, 24 kg of crystal meth (ice), and 18,931 bottles of alcohol.

Specialized units and new initiatives

The introduction of spe-

cialized units such as Margalla Patrol, Ababel Squad, and City Watchers has contributed significantly to crime prevention. These units are tasked with ensuring constant surveillance and rapid response to incidents.

Achievements and challenges

The Islamabad Police managed security at 1,628 law and order events during the year, with commendable dedication despite numerous challenges. Tragically, four officers embraced martyrdom in the line of duty, while 29 were recognized for their bravery and awarded medals.

"Protecting the lives and property of our citizens remains our foremost responsibility. Our teams are working relentlessly to make Islamabad a model of safety," DIG Ali Raza remarked, expressing his gratitude to the force for their unwavering commitment.

‘Yunus Emre Institute-Pak Chapter’ established

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Shaikh, inaugurated the Yunus Emre Institute Pakistan Chapter here at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) on Thursday.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by the presence of the Ambassador of Türkiye to Pakistan, the Vice Chancellor of AIOU, and a distinguished gathering of academia, diplomats, and cultural enthusiasts.

Speaking on the occasion, Qaiser Ahmed Shaikh underscored the transformative power of education in nation-building, citing examples such as China, which lifted 700 million people out of poverty through education.

He said it is heartening to see that 50% of university students in Pakistan are female, however, the fact that 26 million children are still out of school is a stark reminder of the challenges we face.

The Minister said insti-

tutions like AIOU are making significant contributions toward bridging this gap and fostering educational inclusivity. He praised the establishment of the Yunus Emre Institute at AIOU as a milestone in strengthening cultural and educational ties between Pakistan and Türkiye.

He said the Yunus Emre Institute has a global reputation for promoting Turkish language, culture, and the shared Turkish-Islamic heritage.

He said this collaboration with AIOU will undoubtedly deepen the historic bonds between our two nations and open new avenues for cultural and academic exchange.

The Ambassador of Türkiye expressed his gratitude to the AIOU for hosting the Institute, which will introduce Turkish culture and language to Pakistani students and scholars.

"This partnership is a testament to the enduring friendship and shared values between Türkiye and Pakistan," he remarked.

The Vice Chancellor of AIOU highlighted the university's commitment to fostering global partnerships and inclusive education.

He expressed optimism that the Yunus Emre Institute would enrich the academic and cultural environment of the university and enable students to explore Turkish heritage and its profound influence on Islamic civilization. The Yunus Emre Institute, operating under the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Türkiye, has branches in over 80 countries.

The newly established branch at AIOU is expected to become a hub for cultural and linguistic exchange, furthering the mission of unity and mutual understanding between Pakistan and Türkiye.

The event concluded with a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony, followed by a tour of the Institute's facilities, showcasing its state-of-the-art resources for language and cultural education.

Rawalpindi Police arrest 5 drug peddlers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Thursday arrested five drug peddlers, two liquor suppliers and four illegal arm owners from different areas of the district.

According to a police spokesman, the Taxila Police during an operation held four drug peddlers with more than 04.5 kilograms hashish. The arrested accused included Usman, Jawad, Faizan and Amanullah.

Similarly, the Ratta Amral Police arrested accused Waqar on the recovery of 1.44 kilograms hashish.

The Gujar Khan Police, likewise, nabbed accused Qaiser with 10 litres of liquor, while the Civil Lines Police recovered 5 litres of liquor from accused Waseem.

Meanwhile, four

accused were arrested for having illegal arms and ammunition. Accused Imran and Abid were held by the Taxila Police and Ali Rehman by the Gujar Khan

Police on the recovery of 30 bore pistol each, while the New Town Police recovered a 9 mm pistol with ammunition from accused Ammar Razaq.

Police bust street criminal gang; arrest two

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have busted a street criminal gang by arresting two of active members of Mubashir gang allegedly involved in street and other crimes and recovered cash Rs 118,500, five snatched mobile phones, weapons and other items from their possession.

According to a police spokesman, New Town police held two street criminals namely Mubashir and Farhan and recovered Rs 118,500, five stolen mobile phones, weapons and other items.

A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is under process. The accused have been shifted to jail for identification parade, he added.

Superintendent of Police, Rawal, Muhammad Haseeb Raja said that police are making efforts to net other members of the gang.

Bilawal, Zardari pay rich tribute to Shaheed BB

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has paid a glowing tribute to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto on her 17th martyrdom anniversary, commemorating her unparalleled sacrifices, unwavering leadership, and enduring legacy for Pakistan. He emphasized that her life was an embodiment of courage, resilience, and hope for millions of Pakistanis, rooted deeply in the vision of her father, Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founding leader of the PPP.

In a press release issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP said "Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was not just a political figure but a beacon of hope for the marginalized, the oppressed, and the forgotten. Her unwavering commitment to her father's vision of an egalitarian and prosperous Pakistan remains an inspiration for all of us. Like Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, she believed in the power of the people and the importance of empowering workers, farmers, and the underprivileged as a cornerstone for national progress. Her philosophy of reconciliation, consultation, and understanding diverse perspectives laid the foundation for a forward-looking Pakistan," he said.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari reaffirmed his resolve to carry forward her legacy. "Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto envisioned a Pakistan where every citizen would have equal opportunities and access to resources, irrespective of their background. We are determined to follow her philosophy of human liberty and democratic norms, continuing our fight against terrorism, extremism, and any forces that threaten Pakistan's stability," he stated.

Chairman also reiterated his commitment to addressing international

issues, including the unresolved matters of Palestine and Kashmir. "Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was the Islamic world's first elected female prime minister, and her statesmanship serves as a guiding principle for addressing global challenges and advocating for the rights of oppressed nations. We remain steadfast in our stance on these vital issues," he said.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari called on the nation to unite in overcoming challenges to democracy and constitutional governance. "Her life serves as a lesson in resilience and dedication to a cause greater than oneself. The best way to pay tribute to her is to realize her vision of a democratic, progressive, and inclusive Pakistan where the dignity of every individual is upheld," he urged.

Concluding his message, the PPP Chairman appealed to party workers and the nation to renew their commitment to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's principles of democracy, tolerance, and social justice. "Her life and sacrifice are enduring testaments to her struggle for a just and equitable society. It is our responsibility to realize her dream of a Pakistan free from political, social, and economic exploitation. The time is near when Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's vision of a just Pakistan will become a reality," he said.

Today, we are observing the 17th martyrdom anniversary of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. On this day, we honour a leader who embodied the very spirit of hope, resilience, and unwavering commitment to the ideals of democracy and justice. She was a trailblazer who dreamt of a Pakistan where the rights of all citizens, irrespective of colour, class and creed, would be protected, and the power of the people would reign supreme.

Benazir Bhutto once said, "Democracy is the best revenge". These words were not just a defiant

response to tyranny and dictatorship but reflected her profound belief in the transformative power of the people. She envisioned a Pakistan where every child could access education, where women could progress as equals, and where justice was not a privilege but a right. Throughout her life, she raised her voice and worked for the uplift of the downtrodden segments of society and women's empowerment.

Her life was a journey of immense courage and a source of inspiration and strength for us. Facing adversity and persecution, she remained steadfast in her struggle against dictatorships for the restoration and strengthening of democracy and the protection of people's political, economic and social rights. Benazir famously declared, "The fight against injustice and cruelty is the fight of my life." She lived and died fighting for this cause, and is still alive in the hearts of millions of people. She firmly believed: "You can imprison a man, but not an idea. You can exile a man, but not an idea. You can kill a man, but not an idea."

As President of Pakistan, I reaffirm my commitment to advancing her vision of a peaceful, progressive and democratic Pakistan. Her ideas live on, urging us to rise above differences and build a Pakistan that is united, inclusive, and just. So, let us not merely mourn her loss but commit to follow her enduring legacy.

Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and our family sacrificed their lives for the cause of democracy and Pakistan. It is my firm belief that we, as a nation, need to draw inspiration from her vision to steer the country out of its current challenges. Let us work together to ensure that her dream of a peaceful, progressive, and democratic Pakistan becomes a reality. Her legacy is eternal, her courage unmatched, and her vision our guiding star. Pakistan Khappay!



RAWALPINDI: Security officials escorting vehicle of KP Chief Minister, Ali Amin Gandapur, arrived at Adiala jail to meet PTI founder, Imran Khan.

Hamid Raza seeks judicial commission for May 9

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Sunni Ittehad Council chief Sahibzada Hamid Raza has called for a judicial commission to investigate the events of May 9 and Nov 26.

He said Nov 26 incident was an attack on the people of Pakistan. Speaking to the media after meeting PTI founder Imran Khan at Adiala Jail, Raza stated that negotiation must conclude by Jan 31, 2025.

Raza emphasised two demands: forming a commission of senior Supreme Court judges to probe May 9 incidents and releasing CCTV footage of Nov 26 incident, which he called an attack on democracy. He also sought release of all political detainees arrested after May 9.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has announced challenging the military court convictions of its workers and supporters, terming the trials of "civilians in the military courts a blatant violation of justice".

10 killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza

GAZA (Reuters): At least 10 people were killed and more than a dozen wounded in Israeli strikes on Gaza early on Thursday, medics with the Gaza health authorities said. Five people were killed and 20 wounded in an Israeli airstrike on a house in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood, the medics reported. They warned the death toll could rise as many remained trapped under the rubble.

In a separate incident, five journalists were killed when their vehicle was struck in the vicinity of Al-Awda hospital in Nuseirat in central Gaza, the enclave's health authorities said. The journalists worked for the Al-Quds Al-Youm television channel. Palestinian media and local reporters said the vehicle was marked as a media van and was used by journalists to report from inside the hospital and Nuseirat camp.

There was no immediate Israeli comment on the reported strikes. On Wednesday, Palestinian militant group Hamas and Israel

traded blame over their failure to conclude a ceasefire agreement despite progress reported by both sides in past days. Meanwhile, a Palestinian TV channel affiliated with a militant group said five of its journalists were killed Thursday in an Israeli strike on their vehicle in Gaza, with Israel's military saying it had targeted a "terrorist cell."

A missile hit the journalists' broadcast truck as it was parked in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, according to a statement from their employer, Al-Quds Today. It is affiliated with Islamic Jihad, whose militants have fought alongside Hamas in the Gaza Strip and took part in the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the war.

The channel identified the five staffers as Faisal Abu Al-Qumsan, Ayman Al-Jadi, Ibrahim Al-Sheikh Khalil, Fadi Hassouna and Mohammed Al-Lada'a. They were killed "while performing their journalistic and humanitarian duty," the

statement said. "We affirm our commitment to continue our resistant media message," it added.

The Israeli military said in its own statement that it had conducted "a precise strike on a vehicle with an Islamic Jihad terrorist cell inside in the area of Nuseirat." It added that "prior to the strike, numerous steps were taken to mitigate the risk of harming civilians." According to witnesses in Nuseirat, a missile fired by an Israeli aircraft hit the broadcast vehicle, which was parked outside Al-Awda Hospital, setting the vehicle on fire and killing those inside.

The Committee to Protect Journalists' Middle East arm said the organization was "devastated by the reports that five journalists and media workers were killed inside their broadcasting vehicle by an Israeli strike." "Journalists are civilians and must always be protected," it added in a statement on social media.

Saif denies reports of 100 deaths in Kurram

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Adviser Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif on Thursday termed the news of deaths of at least 100 children in the restive Kurram Agency due to unavailability of medicines totally fake.

In a statement, the adviser said all

kinds of medicines were being provided to the people of Kurram, suggesting that people shouldn't lend an ear to fake news surrounding medical facilities in the area. It must be noted that communal violence that had been going on in Kurram for months, resulted in deaths of more than 100 people and closure of several roads leading to the district. Saif lashes out

at federal govt for remaining tight-lipped over Kurram massacre

A few days earlier, Khyber Saif on had also lashed out at the federal government for remaining tight-lipped over escalation in the restive Kurram Agency. In a statement, the adviser blamed the government for treating Kurram Agency as if it was part of Afghanistan, not Pakistan.

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SHE WAS BENAZIR

The first woman Prime Minister of the Islamic world, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto exemplified that true leadership is not merely the realisation of aspirations, but is forged through immense sacrifice and unwavering resolve. Today, we honour her monumental contributions and reaffirm our commitment to bringing her visionary ideals to fruition.

17TH MARTYRDOM ANNIVERSARY



Pakistan
Peoples
Party