

**Hike in PoL prices proposed
F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: An increase in the prices of petroleum products has been proposed following a change in the prices of crude oil in the international market. There was a proposal to increase the price of one liter of petrol by 11 paise. If approved, one liter of petrol, which hitherto cost Rs252.10, would now cost Rs252.21. Similarly, they informed, a hike by Rs3.62 had been suggested in the price of high-speed diesel.



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Modernization of health sector and curbing polio

PM emphasises use of technology

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday in a meeting with Polio Eradication Team emphasized the importance of increasing the use of technology across all health sectors, including polio eradication, to modernize public health monitoring systems and achieve better outcomes.

The prime minister met with the polio eradication team to discuss the ongoing efforts to eliminate polio from Pakistan. The meeting included Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed Bharath, the Prime Minister's Coordinator for National Health, Ayesha Raza Farooq, the Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication, Federal Secretary of National Health Nadim Mehmood, National Coordinator of the National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC) Anwar-ul-Haq, WHO Deputy National Team Lead Dr. Sogair, and Senior Advisor of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Dr. Mohammad Safdar, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

During the meeting, Prime Minister Sharif shared that he had received a letter from Bill Gates, the Chairman of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in which Gates praised the ongoing efforts in Pakistan's polio eradication campaign. He lauded the tireless work of the polio workers in the country.

The Prime Minister expressed his gratitude to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other national and international partners for their support, which has been instrumental in advancing health initiatives and collaborative efforts to eradicate polio in Pakistan. The Prime Minister also directed the formulation of a structured roster for visiting high-risk polio-affected areas during the campaign to ensure even more effective results.

Despite these efforts, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif highlighted

Shehbaz hails PML-N's legacy

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Monday extended his heartfelt congratulations to the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on the occasion of the party's founding day. Reflecting on the party's historical significance, the prime minister emphasised the pivotal role of the All India Muslim League and its leaders, including Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in the creation of Pakistan, a Prime Minister's Office news release said. In his message, the prime minister stated, "The formation of the Muslim League 118 years ago reignited the desire for an independent homeland for Muslims. Through persistent struggle, the Muslims of the subcontinent were granted the gift of a separate and free nation, Pakistan." He further added, "In line with the vision of Pakistan's founding fathers, it is our collective responsibility to work together for the country's progress and prosperity." Prime Minister Sharif also highlighted the contributions of Pakistan Muslim League (N) under the leadership of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, noting that the party has been dedicated to the country's development for over three decades.

the unfortunate rise in the number of polio-affected children in the country, calling for even greater collective efforts to address the issue. He reiterated the importance of ensuring the security of polio workers, emphasizing that their safety cannot be underestimated and called for all possible measures to be taken in this regard. The prime minister was briefed on the latest developments in the polio eradication campaign, with a focus on the significant role played by local communities in making the initiative successful.

New Gwadar International Airport to bring prosperity to area: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that the New Gwadar International Airport will bring prosperity in the area, and it will also create new job opportunities.

Extending gratitude to China for constructing an international standard airport equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, the prime minister said the airport was an example of Pakistan-China great friendship. The prime minister, chairing the meeting on matters related to the New Gwadar International Airport directed the rele-

vant authorities to chalk out a strategy to make the new airport a busy transit point.

He also directed to improvement of the road system linking the New Gwadar International Airport with other areas of the country, especially the province. Additionally, the prime minister also ordered to ensure fool proof security arrangements for the new airport. During the meeting, the prime minister was informed that flights from Gwadar to Muscat would be started from January 10, 2025, whereas talks with regard to starting the domestic and international flight operations by the airlines of Pakistan, China, Oman and United Arab Emirates from Gwadar were underway.

Similarly, the current duration of flight operation of Pakistan Airlines (PIA) between Karachi and Gwadar will soon be increased to three times per week. It was informed in the meeting that the Gwadar Airport was the largest airport in the country in terms of area which will be capable of handling A-380 airplanes whereas 400,000 people will travel through the airport annually.

these shelter homes as permanent feature of the provincial government's welfare initiative. He also directed for the immediate operationalization of all non-functional shelter homes across the province.

Similarly, the Chief Minister announced the distribution of wheelchairs to disable students in higher educational institutions in the first phase, and directed the quarters concerned to collect the necessary data for this initiative. The meeting also decided in principle to establish of old-age homes for senior citizens in Peshawar with the aim to facilitate the senior citizens with accommodation and recreational facilities.

Furthermore, the launch of an "Orphan Card" was also decided in principle under which orphan children at the school level will receive a monthly stipend of Rs. 5,000. A similar initiative for elderly widows, through the issuance of "Ration Cards," was also agreed by the chair under which it is proposed to provide monthly sustenance of Rs. 5000 to the old age widows.

The Chief Minister instructed authorities to develop a comprehensive working plan for these proposed welfare initiatives within a week. He emphasized the government's commitment to supporting vulnerable and underprivileged segments of society in line with the vision of the founding chairman PTI Imran Khan. He added that the provincial government would utilize all available resources to ensure the welfare of destitute and vulnerable segment of society which is a cornerstone of an Islamic welfare

state. The meeting was attended by Provincial Minister for Social Welfare Syed Qasim Ali Shah, senior officials of the Social Welfare Department, Commissioner Peshawar, Deputy Commissioner Peshawar, and other relevant officials.

Clarification

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: It has been observed that various reporters from different news channels and newspapers are trying to attribute their reports concerning the state of affairs in District Kurram to officers of the Divisional Administration Kohat and District Administration Kurram. They have been informed time and again that the divisional and district administration or any other government functionary in Kohat Division are not legit to offer comments or share information on this matter and rather the relevant authorities at the provincial level are authorized to share government opinion.

To make certain the accuracy and reliability of information, the KP Govt advises that any information-whether in print, electronic, or digital, -concerning the Kurram issue no longer be attributed to the Divisional Administration Kohat, District Administration Kurram, or any government officer in Kohat Division. Any news item pertaining to Kurram issue attributed to any officer/ official of the Divisional Administration Kohat and District Administration Kurram may be considered as false, fake and un-authentic.

KP govt included Panahgah into provincial govt's permanent budget

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An important meeting of Social Welfare Department held here on Monday with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair, took a number of decisions with regard to the welfare of the unprivileged and deserving segments of the society. The meeting deliberated on the utilization of Zakat and dowry funds, along with other welfare initiatives of the provincial government, resulting in several key decisions.

It was decided in the meeting to organize collective wedding ceremonies for deserving girls under the Dowry Fund initiative. These events will be held at the divisional level, with plans to facilitate the weddings of over 4,000 deserving girls across the province. The government will bear the expenses of the deserving girl's wedding ceremonies, and each bride will receive a cash grant of Rs. 200,000.

The Chief Minister directed the concerned authorities to finalize arrangements for these events promptly and ensure transparency, guaranteeing that only deserving individuals benefit from the program. It was further decided that following the divisional-level programs, similar events will be extended to the district level.

In another major development, the Chief Minister directed the inclusion of shelter homes' (Panahgah) operational budgets into the provincial government's permanent budget to ensure their sustainability, and run

Ex-US president Carter, trailblazing champion of Palestinians' rights, dies

NEW YORK (APP): Jimmy Carter, the first and only US president to identify Israeli apartheid and an advocate of Palestinians' political rights, died Sunday at the age of 100. Despite serving only one term, the former peanut farmer from the US state of Georgia cast a long shadow during his post-presidential career. This included winning the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2002 for The Carter Center's work in fighting the Guinea worm disease in Africa and tracking elections across the world.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a prominent Muslim advocacy organization, paid tributes to Carter, saying he was a "champion for many just causes, including Palestinian freedom and was a friend of the Muslim community. In a statement, CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad said: "President Carter was a friend of the American Muslim community and a champion for many just causes, including Palestinian freedom. Even when President Carter faced

vitriolic attacks from anti-Palestinian groups for his prescient book 'Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid,' he stood firm.

"He was a humanitarian role model, and we pray that a new generation of political leaders will take inspiration from his legacy," Carter, who lived long enough to become the oldest president in US history, "died peacefully Sunday, Dec. 29, at his home in Plains, Georgia, surrounded by his family," the Carter Center announced in a statement. No cause of death was immediately given, although Carter had spent almost two years under hospice care at his home after being treated for a form of skin cancer. He celebrated his 100th birthday at his home in October.

"My father was a hero, not only to me but to everyone who believes in peace, human rights, and unselfish love," said Chip Carter, the former president's son, in a statement provided by the Carter Center. "My brothers, sister, and I shared him with the rest of the world through these com-

mon beliefs. The world is our family because of the way he brought people together, and we thank you for honoring his memory by continuing to live these shared beliefs."

There will be public observances in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., followed by a private interment in Plains, Georgia, the Carter Center said. The Carter Center said in February 2023 that he had "decided to spend his remaining time at home with his family and receive hospice care instead of additional medical intervention." "My father was a hero, not only to me but to everyone who believes in peace, human rights, and unselfish love," said Chip Carter, the former president's son, in a statement provided by the Carter Center.

"My brothers, sister, and I shared him with the rest of the world through these common beliefs. The world is our family because of the way he brought people together, and we thank you for honouring his memory by continuing to live these shared beliefs." There will be public obser-

vances in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., followed by a private interment in Plains, Georgia, the Carter Center said.

Today some right-leaning politicians still deride the Carter years but as the decades passed, his humanitarian efforts and simple lifestyle began to shape a new legacy for many Americans. After leaving the White House, he became the first and only president to return full-time to the house he lived in before politics – a humble, two-bedroom ranch-style home where he lived with his wife of 77 years, Rosalynn Carter. The former first lady, 96, died on Nov. 19, 2023. Carter chose not to pursue the lucrative after-dinner speeches and publishing deals awaiting most former presidents, telling the Washington Post in 2018 that he never really wanted to be rich.

Instead, he spent his remaining years trying to address global problems of inequality and disease. He also teamed up with Nelson Mandela to found The Elders, a group of glob-

al leaders who committed themselves to work on peace and human rights. Carter's journey to the White House began in the small town of Plains, Georgia, where he was born October 1, 1924.

After serving as an officer in the US Navy, where he helped develop the post-World War II nuclear submarine fleet, Carter returned to his hometown in 1953 to run the family peanut-farming business. He entered politics in the 1960s, serving two terms as a Georgia legislator before becoming the state's 76th governor from 1971 to 1975. In the 1976 presidential election, Carter, a Democrat, ran against Republican incumbent Gerald Ford, who assumed the presidency after Richard Nixon resigned in the wake of the Watergate scandal. Carter narrowly defeated Ford to become president.

The high point of Carter's presidency came in 1978. Carter brought Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to the Camp David presiden-

night crackdown and release of "political prisoners".

Toshakhana-II case: List of gifts received by Imran as PM presented in court: The list of over 100 gifts received by Imran Khan during his tenure as was submitted to the court during a hearing of the Toshakhana-II case at Adiala Jail.

Special Central Judge Shah Rukh Arjumand presided over the hearing, attended by Imran Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi, and their legal team, including Barristers Gohar, Salman Akram Raja, and Faisal Chaudhry. During the session, Cabinet Division Section Officer Benyamin

recorded his statement, while Bushra Bibi's counsel, Arshad Tabrez, conducted partial cross-examination, which would continue in the next hearing.

Similarly, Imran Khan's lawyer, Salman Safdar, is also set to cross-examine the witness in the upcoming session. The witness presented a detailed list of 108 gifts received by Imran Khan as prime minister, along with two registers from the Toshakhana records and documents outlining the official procedures followed by private appraisers. The court adjourned the hearing until January 2, 2025.



tial retreat in rural Maryland to negotiate a peace treaty. "When I became president, there had been four wars between Arabs and Israelis in the previous 25 years, with the Egyptians in the leadership supported by the Soviet Union," he said. "They were the only country that could really challenge Israel militarily. And we had success in getting a treaty between Israel and Egypt ... not a word of which has ever been violated."

**Another polio case reported
F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: An astounding increase has been noticed in the number of polio cases reported from different parts of the country in the year, 2024 as 68th case of the virus was reported on Monday, says in media reports. Regional Reference Laboratory housed in NIH confirmed that the new case had been reported from Dera Ismael Khan from where 10 children had been diagnosed with the virus so far.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Special Representative to Afghanistan, Muhammad Sadiq Khan called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

21 die in Punjab road accidents

F.P. Report

ATTOCK: At least 21 people were killed and 24 others injured in two road accidents in Attock and Naushahro Feroze on Monday. Rescue officials said a passenger bus was travelling to Rawalpindi from Mianwali when it overturned near Fateh Jang in Attock district. 12 people lost their lives in the accident while 15 others were shifted to a hospital with injuries.

Traffic authorities said the driver lost control of his bus due to a tyre burst before it met with the accident. In Naushahro Feroze, a passenger van and a trailer collided near Morro, leaving six people dead on the spot.

Rescue officials said nine people, who suffered injuries in the accident, had been shifted to a hospital for treatment. Authorities said all those who died in the Naushahro Feroze accident belonged to same tribe as they were returning after attending a wedding event.

Meanwhile, three people were injured after a van overturned on national highway near Azam Chowk in Bahawalpur. The injured were shifted to the Bahawal Victoria Hospital for treatment. In a separate incident, three people were killed and other injured after a tractor rammed into a motorcycle near Wazirabad.

Robbers loot foreign tourists

F.P. Report

SUJAWAL: A Polish tourist couple met with an unfortunate incident near the Sujawal-Badin Bypass road. Jakub and Mary, who are on a world tour by bicycle, were En route to Tharparkar district after visiting historical sites in Thatta district when they were intercepted by four unidentified men who robbed them of their mobile phones and other valuables.

The couple embarked on their world tour around seven months ago and had visited 10 countries before reaching Thatta on Saturday night. They visited the Makli Necropolis and Shah Jahan Mosque and were on their way to Tharparkar via the Sujawal-Badin Bypass road when they encountered the incident.

Govt, PTI set to hold negotiations on Jan 2

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A meeting between the government and major opposition party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) negotiation committees was scheduled for January 2, with National Assembly speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq set to preside over. The meeting, slated to take place at 11:30am, will see the PTI negotiation committee presenting the list of demands.

Notices for the session have been issued to all members of the negotiation committees, signaling the latest step in the ongoing dialogue process. It is to be recalled that following a meeting with PTI founder Imran Khan at Adiala Jail, Barrister Gohar had informally briefed the media at the jail gate, stating that the PTI chairman had been updated on the ongoing negotiations and instructed that the process be concluded within a defined time-frame.

PTI chairman highlighted the need for swift progress, adding that the initial meeting of the negotiation committees was informal and preliminary, with some members absent. He noted that in the next round of talks, the PTI committee would present its demands to the government representatives.

Barrister Gohar also mentioned that efforts were underway for the PTI negotiation committee to hold another meeting with the party chairman before the next session. He expressed positivity about achieving substantial outcomes through the discussion.

From the government's side, a nine-member committee comprising Deputy

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Aleema Khan, the sister of Imran Khan, said that the former prime minister has refused to strike any deal, asking "why he would enter any deal when he has already spent one-and-a-half years" in prison.

"The PTI founder said that his cases have been wrapped up and he was not making a deal [with the government] over this matter," said Aleema while speaking to media persons outside Adiala jail on Monday — where her brother is incarcerated. Aleema, who has recently been taking part in party's political matters, said that Khan has vowed to fight his cases and will not accept any offer to be placed under house arrest in Bani Gala.

The PTI founder, she said, has questioned how were the cases of those leaders who left the party were forgiven. "He said that the May 9 conspiracy was hatched to crush the party," said Khan's sister. Aleema said her brother has reiterated the demands of a judicial probe into May 9 riots and November 26 late-

Saif criticises Tarar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Adviser on Information, Barrister Dr. Saif, has accused Federal Minister Atta Tarar of copying the federal government's white paper and attributing it to KP's financial affairs. Reacting to Atta Tarar's recent remarks, Barrister Saif stated that Tarar often makes statements that expose his incompetence. He mocked Tarar's comments on KP's economy, claiming they had amused seasoned economists. Barrister Saif clarified that KP's total debt stood at PKR 725 billion, which matches the amount the federal government borrows on a monthly basis.



LAHORE: Visitors admire the calligraphy artwork on the concluding day of the exhibition organized by The Knowledge of Art Academy. —APP Photo

CM inspects Safe City initiative

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah during his surprise visit to the Safe City Authority headquarters in DHA, directed the Authority to integrate the Emergency Response Vehicles (ERVs) with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and Excise and Taxation Department systems to avail real-time access to identity and vehicle registration data, enabling swift action in case of emergencies.

Accompanied by Home Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar, the CM received a briefing from DG Sindh Safe City Authority Asif Aijaz Shaikh on the project's progress and capabilities on Monday evening.

The CM reiterated his government's commitment to enhancing Karachi's security infrastructure through advanced technology.

The ERVs, a key component of the Safe City project, are equipped with state-of-the-art features designed to improve emergency response times. These features include advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems capable of facial and license plate recognition, allowing for swift identification of suspects and vehicles involved in incidents, the CM was told. Mr Shah stressed the critical need for seamless data integration to maximize the ERVs' effectiveness.

He directed the DG Safe City to integrate the ERVs' systems with both the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and the Excise and Taxation Department. "This integration will provide real-time access to vital information such as individual identities and vehicle registration details, enabling immediate and targeted action during emergencies," he said and emphasised that this real-time data access was crucial for efficient emergency response.

The briefing also covered the broader plan to connect the entire Safe City infrastructure with NADRA and Excise systems, creating a comprehensive, interconnected surveillance and response network.

The CM ordered a phased rollout of the 23 ERVs planned for deployment across Karachi. The first phase will see five vehicles deployed immediately, with the remaining 18 to be operational within the next two months. He underscored the urgency of meeting this timeline, emphasising the importance of bolstering Karachi's security capabilities without delay.

Expressing overall satisfaction with the project's progress, the CM directed the Safe City Authority to expedite efforts to complete the entire Safe City project by 2025. He reiterated his administration's dedication to transforming Karachi into a "safe and smart city," leveraging cutting-edge technology to improve public safety and emergency response capabilities. The chief minister concluded his visit by reiterating the importance of diligent work and seamless project implementation within the specified timeframe.

LHC orders schools to renew registration

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Monday directed all schools in Punjab to renew their registrations after a month, warning of suspension for non-compliance.

Justice Shahid Karim issued the directive while hearing a set of petitions filed by Haroon Farooq and others regarding ineffective measures to control smog.

At the start of the proceedings, Secretary Schools Khalid Nazir Wattoo, CEO Education Nazir Hussain, and a provincial law officer appeared before the court.

The secretary schools

presented proposed regulations for private schools. The court was also informed of a new policy requiring schools to maintain buses as a prerequisite for registration.

Justice Shahid Karim emphasized the importance of the school bus policy and instructed the secretary to suspend the registration of schools failing to comply with it.

The court also expressed concern over the deteriorating environmental conditions and stressed the urgency of implementing measures to combat smog. "No further time

should be wasted on this matter," Justice Karim remarked, while appreciating the government's efforts to address the issue.

Furthermore, the court directed the director general of the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) to review city roads and prepare a comprehensive traffic plan. It also noted traffic rule violations on Multan Road, particularly near bus stations and housing societies, and urged strict enforcement of regulations.

The court subsequently adjourned the hearing for two weeks.

Certificate distribution ceremony held at SIUT

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Certificate distribution ceremony to a group of 190 volunteer students was held at the Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation, they successfully completed 30 hours week long community service program organized by the Institute.

The prime aim of organizing the bi-annual program was to impart the concept of community services among the students who are completing their matric/intermediate, O/ A level. The course of the program is designed in such a manner that when they enter in their practical life in the days to come, should they emerge as a conscientious members of the society.

In the week long program they were trained and exposed igniting the spark of compassion for the less fortunate members of our society.

The program was initiated in the year 2006 and held during summer and

winter vacations of educational institutions. Response has been overwhelming up till now, 7190 students have successfully completed the program.

During the program, participants were apprised the basic philosophy of SIUT which is aimed to mitigate the suffering of the masses without any discrimination of cast, color, creed and without any financial burden. SIUT offers completely free medical care to its patients.

The participating students were deputed in various units and wards of the hospital including transplant, dialysis, robotic surgery, nursing, radiology, radiotherapy, and related medical services where they interacted with the patients, doctors and paramedics and medical social welfare officers. They trained themselves with medical skills, such as vital signs measurements, first aid training, and CPR.

Multiple lectures on various medical topics includ-

ing biomedical ethics was an integral part of the program. Motivational talks were also delivered focusing on career building, emphasizing empathy and compassion for the underprivileged population.

Prof. Dr. Adib Rizvi, founder & director of SIUT, speaking on the occasion, said that it was very encouraging to see the young generation participating in the program. The lessons learned from these programs will go a long way in helping them become more responsible citizens.

Concluding was attended by parents participating students, members of the SIUT faculty and representatives of city educational institutions. Speaking on the occasion the representatives of students, parents and teachers lauded the whole concept and said it will go a long way in mitigating the sufferings of the masses and generating greater human values in our society.

NAB compensated 18,000 affectees: DG

LAHORE (APP): National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Director General (DG) Lahore Amjad Majeed Aulakh held a monthly open court at his office where a large number of victims attended to seek prompt resolution of their complaints.

The attendees included victims of financial investment frauds i.e. Prime Zone scandal, ForU Real Traders, Double Shah scandals, as well as complainants from housing societies scandals such as Elite Town, Sadaat Cooperative Housing Society, Zaitoon City and Fahad Town, Manawan.

While updating Prime Zone scandal victims on the progress, the DG revealed that NAB Lahore had forwarded corruption reference to the NAB Chairman for final approval after completing investigations on merit. He added that all suspects in the case were apprehended during the course of investigations and efforts are under way to repatriate the absconding prime suspect Imran from abroad via Interpol, however, evidence of embezzlement to the tune of Rs850 million has been collected, meanwhile, all known properties of the accused have been frozen.

Addressing complaints

against ForU Real Traders, the DG said that claims worth Rs. 1.6 billion from 2,300 affectees had been received so far; however, the process of issuing call up notices was underway on a fast-track basis. He emphasized that WhatsApp groups were also created to ensure prompt communication with all victims, following instructions from the NAB Chairman. Investigations revealed that the company had no operational business in Pakistan and solely relied on redistributing investors' funds as profit, constituting fraud.

Regarding complaints against Elite Town Housing Society, the DG NAB Lahore disclosed that the main accused Kashif was apprehended over allegations of defrauding 1,400 individuals of Rs1.4 billion. He announced the freezing of assets worth more than Rs2 billion belonging to the society's administration and anticipated significant progress in the upcoming months, ensuring compensation for the affected individuals.

On complaints about Sadaat Cooperative Housing Society, he instructed accelerating investigations into the allegations of alleged

embezzlement involving nearly 100 plots. He assured the victims of swift updates and investigations within the designated time frame. For Zaitoon City refund seekers, he issued instructions to officers concerned to process refunds promptly. Addressing a widow claimant in the Double Shah scandal, he directed re-verification of her claim with immediate submission of a progress report.

Speaking to the victims, the DG highlighted that more than Rs16 billion had been recovered in 2024 and losses of over 18,000 affectees compensated. He affirmed that complaints lodged during open courts receive immediate attention. He reiterated NAB's unique role as Pakistan's sole national Institution providing relief in fraud and embezzlement cases and vowed to continue this mission.

The victims expressed their best wishes for DG Amjad Majeed Aulakh on his transfer to NAB Headquarters, Islamabad as DG (Operations). However, he assured his continued efforts to provide swift relief to all victims during his tenure at NAB Headquarters.

CM, UAE envoy discuss collaboration in agriculture, IT, green energy

LAHORE (APP): UAE Ambassador to Pakistan Hammad Obaid Ibrahim Al-Zaabi met with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif to discuss economic cooperation, development projects and promotion of tourism in Punjab.

She agreed to a proposal to establish a working group between Punjab and the UAE to take bilateral cooperation to a higher level, and invited UAE investors to invest in Punjab. She assured special incentives and conducive environment for UAE investors.

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif appreciated UAE's support in Pakistan's socio-economic development. She said, "We value UAE's support in infrastructure, health, education and energy sectors." She added that Pakistan-UAE relations are based on mutual trust and respect. Maryam Nawaz highlighted that Pakistan and UAE share the same vision for regional stability and prosperity.

UAE Ambassador Hammad Obaid Ibrahim Al-Zaabi congratulated the Chief Minister on her successful visit to China, and praised her for the ongoing



development projects and her climate change-related initiatives. He said that the UAE wants to work on more projects in Pakistan. He also appreciated the Punjab government's commitment to promote sustainable development through public-private partnership.

'Maryam Ke Dastak' expanded to Punjab's 40 districts: On the directive of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the 'Maryam Ke Dastak' pro-

gram has been expanded to 40 districts across the province offering over 70 government services. This emerged during a progress review meeting presided over by PITB Chairman Faisal Yousaf, here on Monday.

'Maryam Ke Dastak' offers government services such as domicile certificates, FIR copies, birth certificates, learner's driving licenses, and e-stamping through the PITB-developed 'Dastak Doorstep Delivery App' and web portal.

Citizens can avail these services directly at their doorsteps, reducing the need to visit government

offices ensuring greater convenience, especially for women, the elderly, and working professionals. Citizens can also avail these services by calling the helpline at 1202.

On this occasion, Chairman Faisal Yousaf remarked, "The Maryam Ke Dastak initiative aims to improve service delivery through trained representatives, providing a more efficient and citizen-friendly experience. The program underscores the government's commitment to accessible, transparent, and technology-driven public service delivery."

IGP calls on Home Minister

KARACHI (APP): The Inspector General of Police (IGP) Sindh called on the Sindh Home Minister Ziaul Hasan Lanjar here on Monday.

They discussed the law and order situation in the province and ongoing sit-ins in different areas of the metropolis as well as the police measures in this regard.

The Home Minister directed the IGP to ensure dissemination of information regarding alternative traffic routes to the citizens.

He said that the new year is approaching, in this regard, not only the implementation of the integrated plan, but also the issues and measures like the protection of the citizens must be ensured.

Residential building fire controlled

KARACHI (PPI): Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab said today that upon receiving the report of a fire in a residential building along the Burns Road, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's fire brigade staff immediately took action and managed to control it.

According to a KMC statement, the fire brigade personnel remained at the site until the cooling process was completed, he said. "The fire brigade department demonstrated professional skills in controlling the fire and made every effort to minimize damage to citizens in this incident." Wahab advised the citizens to exercise extreme caution during the winter season, as fires spread rapidly in cold weather.

According to the records of the KMC Fire Brigade, the highest number of fire incidents occurred in the last three months of the year. Fires in both residential and industrial areas of the city were swiftly and effectively controlled. A rescue team also works alongside the fire brigade, and every possible effort is made to save the lives and property of the citizens.

PU awards 10 PhD degrees

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab University (PU) has awarded 10 PhD degrees to scholars in various subjects. According to a PU spokesman, degrees were awarded to Sabir Ali Siddique S/o Muhammad Siddique Zahid in the subject of Chemistry, Irshad Hussain S/o Haji Ahmad Bukhsh in the subject of Sociology, Faisal Javed S/o Javed Iqbal in the subject of Botany, Ashraf Hussain S/o Gulam Mehdi in the subject of Earth & Environmental Sciences and Zunaira Shoukat D/o Shoukat Ali in the subject of Microbiology & Molecular Genetics.

Govt committed to providing quality education: Khalid

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui has said that government is committed to improving the quality of education and using all possible resources for it.

Inaugurating the National College of Arts (NCA) Bachelor's Degree Show 2024 in Lahore on Monday, Dr. Maqbool commended the students for their innovative ideas and artistic efforts, emphasizing that such exhibitions offer students a platform to express their creativity. He also extended his congratulations to the NCA administration for organizing the successful event.

Dr. Maqbool acknowledged NCA's pivotal role in preserving and promoting Pakistan's cultural heritage. He noted that the institution, which has now completed 150 years of excellence in education, is a symbol of the country's commitment to fostering artistic talent.

The minister stressed that the federal government is dedicated to ensuring access to quality education for all citizens. He highlighted the need for collaborative efforts at both the federal and provincial levels, particularly following the 18th Constitutional Amendment, which transferred significant educational responsibilities to the provinces. He urged provincial governments to leverage available resources to bring out-of-school children into classrooms, ensuring no child is left behind.

Dr. Maqbool further remarked on the importance of equipping Pakistan's youth with knowledge, particularly in emerging fields such as biotechnology and artificial intelligence. He said, "The current century is the era of technological advancement. Nations that fall behind in these areas will struggle to develop. We must provide our youth with the tools of education to help them secure a better future."

In response to a question about political differences, the minister emphasised that democracy thrives on dialogue. He called on all political parties to come together in the national interest and engage in discussions within the framework of Parliament. "The beauty of democracy lies in dialogue. All political parties must unite on a single

platform for the national interest. Public issues should be addressed in Parliament, not on the streets. Our differences are important, but the unity and integrity of our country must come first," he said.

Dr. Maqbool also responded to queries about the country's economic situation, rejecting claims of an economic crisis. He argued that the real issue was not the economy itself, but a "crisis of intentions." He stressed that with determination and the right intentions, no force could prevent the nation from progressing. "Allah has blessed us with abundant resources. We must use these resources wisely to achieve national development," he said.

On the occasion, NCA Vice Chancellor, Professor Dr. Murtaza Jafri, highlighted the uniqueness of the institution's degree show. He described it as the most innovative and creative art exhibition in Pakistan, showcasing a wide range of disciplines, including Fine Arts, Visual Communication Design, Textile Design, Ceramics, Product Design, Architecture, Film and Television, and Musicology.

SZABMU conducts MDCAT test on court order

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Medical and Dental College Admission Test (MDCAT) retake exam has been conducted smoothly today on 30th December on the orders of the Honorable High Court by Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Medical University (SZABMU) for aspiring medical and dental students.

The MDCAT retake exam was held today with the highest standards of transparency and efficiency, ensuring a fair and impartial examination process. The examination took place simultaneously at 27 national and international centers, two international centers in Dubai (UAE) and Riyadh (Saudi Arabia) and twenty-five (25) in Pakistan in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Gilgit Baltistan, Rawalakot, Muzaffarabad, and Mirpur, accommodating over 12 thousand candidates.

Almost 60 candidates from Dubai (UAE), 64 Candidates from Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), 211 from Rawalpindi, 10428 from Islamabad, 329 from Gilgit Baltistan, 400 from Rawalakot, 447 from Muzaffarabad, 629 from Mirpur appeared in the exam. Under the technical support by the PM&DC, SZABMU implemented advanced measures to ensure a smooth and secure process. These included biometric verification, real-time monitoring, and stringent invigilation protocols to uphold the credibility and integrity of the examination.

The PM&DC also monitored and observed the retake exam with strict oversight throughout the examination process.

President PM&DC Prof. Dr. Rizwan Taj personally visited centers in Islamabad. Officers from PM&DC were also deputed to keep a keen check on the exam procedure.

PM&DC assures all stakeholders, including students, parents, and academic institutions, that the results will be processed and announced soon. Detailed information regarding the result declaration process will be communicated through the website of SZABMU in due course. PM&DC without any further ado will try to start the admission process so that further precious time of the students should not be wasted.

Notice

Shifting / Relocation of
Dubai Islamic Bank Pakistan Limited,
Swat Branch

All account holders of Dubai Islamic Bank are hereby notified that our branch located at
Ground Floor, Makan Bagh Chowk, Opp. Bank Al Falah, Mingora, Swat
will be shifting to the following new location
Ground Floor, Property Khata 11/5 Khatooni No.11, Khasra No 95, Mauza Gulkada Swat Sharif Road, Makan Bagh Chowk, Mingora Swat.
The branch operations at the new location are expected to commence by 31st January 2025.

For Further Information
Contact: 111-786-342

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Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police 2024 performance report:

270 terrorists killed, 802 apprehended

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police released its annual performance report for the year 2024, highlighting significant achievements in maintaining law and order, combating terrorism, and reducing crime.

During the year, 270 terrorists were killed in encounters with police and security agencies, while 802 terrorists, including 32 with bounties on their heads, were apprehended. Among them, 13 terrorists with bounties were killed.

The conviction rate in terrorism-related cases saw a remarkable increase, rising from 13 percent in previous years to an impressive 38 percent in 2024.

The report emphasized the sacrifices made by the police force, with 149 officers martyred and 232 injured in the line of duty. Over 211,828 First Information Reports (FIRs) were registered, leading to the arrest of 221,470 suspects. Anti-extortion operations resulted in the arrest of 132 individuals, while 13 kidnappers were also

apprehended. The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) launched multiple operations, resulting in the arrest and killing of key terrorist leaders and their accomplices, including those involved in significant attacks in Mardan, Peshawar, and southern districts.

In anti-drug operations, the police seized 28,097 kilograms of various narcotics, including 3,240 kilograms of methamphetamine, 1,695 kilograms of heroin, and 22,575 kilograms of hashish. Efforts to curb illegal arms trafficking resulted in the recovery of 36,676 rifles, 67,615 pistols, 1,530,556 cartridges, and several explosive devices, including suicide jackets and rocket launchers.

The police conducted 12,601 search and strike operations under the National Action Plan, leading to the arrest of 67,983 suspects and the recovery of 15,801 weapons and 454,525 rounds of ammunition. Additionally, 81,433 snap check points were set up across the province, during which 102,952 individuals were questioned, and

24,566 weapons and 552,837 cartridges were seized.

To combat street crime, Ababeel Squad and City Patrol Police responded to 58,740 emergency calls. Public awareness campaigns by the Traffic Police Education Team reached over 70,000 individuals through educational sessions in schools and universities, with thousands of pamphlets and helmets distributed.

The police enhanced its technological capabilities by establishing command and control centers in 23 districts and modernizing the Counter-Terrorism Department with forensic labs, data collection systems, and special SWAT teams. CTD police stations were set up in North Waziristan, Kurram, and Orakzai districts, while rehabilitation and de-radicalization centers were established in Khyber and North Waziristan.

The department also emphasized gender inclusivity by appointing female officers to key positions, setting up women facilitation desks in Peshawar, and

launching the province's first gender policy in collaboration with the UNDP. Training sessions were conducted for 250 female officers to address gender-based violence and ensure a safe environment for women in police stations.

Efforts to support police personnel included welfare initiatives amounting to over 444 million rupees. These funds were allocated for medical expenses, education scholarships, dowry funds, and other benefits. Additionally, 281 children of martyred officers were recruited under a revised quota increased from 5 percent to 12.5 percent.

Inspector General of Police Akhtar Hayat Khan lauded the police force for their resilience and professionalism in tackling terrorism and ensuring public safety. He reiterated the department's commitment to maintaining peace and eradicating terrorism from the province, emphasizing that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police remains ever-ready to face any challenges in the pursuit of a secure and prosperous region.



PEHSAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur chairing a meeting of Social Welfare Department.

Minister directs deptt to hold donors moot

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial Minister for Education, Faisal Tarkai here Monday directed his department to hold donors conference within a week to attract investment.

He said that all projects of attached organizations may be presented in the conference to attract investment. The Minister passed these directions during a meeting of Annual Development Program here at his office.

The Minister directed reconstruction and rehabilitation of earthquake affected schools and completion of all projects within stipulated time.

He further directed clearance of dues of teachers of education community and NCHD schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Muqam congratulates PPC's cabinet

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Minister for States and Frontiers, Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan Affairs Engr Amir Muqam here Monday congratulated the new elected office bearers of Peshawar Press Club.

In a statement here, the minister congratulated newly elected President M Riaz, General Secretary Tayyab Usman and others.

He expressed the hope that the new leadership of the press club would work tirelessly for welfare of the journalist community, promotion of constructive journalism and resolution of their problems.

He said journalism was voice of the people and reaffirmed the government cooperation to journalists.

Ihtisham ensures timely delivery of medicines to Sadda

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Health Ihtisham Ali has announced that additional emergency medicines have been dispatched from the Health Department's warehouse to Peshawar Airport for immediate delivery to Parachinar.

Detailing the supplies, he stated that 3,500 vials of insulin are being sent to Parachinar, while 1,500 vials of insulin are designated for Sadda. These essential medicines are part of a shipment worth 2 million PKR, which is being transported to Parachinar via helicopter today.

Ihtisham Ali reiterated the government's commitment to ensuring the uninterrupted supply of critical medicines to meet the urgent healthcare needs of the affected areas.

Ihtisham Ali visits Fountain House: Health Advisor Ihtisham Ali visited Fountain House, a specialized mental health hospital located in Hayatabad, to review the facility's operations and interact with patients.

During the visit, the Health Advisor, accompanied by hospital administration officials, toured various departments of the hospital. He discussed challenges related to operationalizing the facility and

issues arising from the merger with Sarhad Mental Hospital earlier this year.

Officials briefed Ihtisham Ali about the hospital's status, explaining that it has been under construction as a project since 2013. In January 2024, Sarhad Mental Hospital was merged into the facility, with the goal of transforming it into a Center of Excellence for Mental Health and a teaching hospital.

The Health Advisor emphasized the need to expedite administrative measures to officially designate the hospital as a teaching facility. He directed relevant authorities to take immediate steps in this regard.

Meeting reviews progress on Bajaur Industrial Estate

PESHAWAR (APP): A meeting held here with Special Assistant to KP CM on Industries and Commerce, Abdul Karim Tordher in the chair reviewed progress on the preparation of the design, master plan and draft PC-I of the new project of Bajaur Industrial Estate here at Small Industries Development (SIDB) on Monday.

Besides, the Managing Director (MD) SIDB Habib Ullah Arif and Deputy Managing Director (DMD) Nauman Fayyaz, other officials of the board also attended the meeting.

During the meeting, the Special Assistant to KP CM on Industries and Commerce stressed for keeping expansion and needs of the future in consideration in the planning of the project and should also focus on solarization to meet the energy requirement of the estate.

He called for the utilization of the road sides of the project for commercial purposes.

The Special Assistant further said that the project usher industrial development in the merged districts and strengthening of local business and industrial sectors.

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VC BOI KP expresses condolences on Azerbaijan Airlines tragedy



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Hassan Masood Kunwar, Vice Chairman of Board of Investment (BOI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, expressed his heartfelt condolences to the people of Azerbaijan following the tragic crash of Azerbaijan Airlines flight J2-8243.

In a statement, Kunwar extended sympathies on behalf of the Board of Investment (BOI) Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa, emphasizing the shared bond of brotherhood between Pakistan and Azerbaijan.

"This tragedy has deeply saddened us all. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families, and the entire nation of Azerbaijan during this difficult time," he said.

Hassan Masood Kunwar reaffirmed the unwavering solidarity of Pakistan with Azerbaijan and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed souls and strength for their families to bear the irreparable loss.

KP TEVTA, 5 paramedical institutions ink agreement

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP TEVTA) and five paramedical institutions has signed an agreement for promotion of technical education and skills enhancement of youth of merged tribal districts.

The agreement has been signed during an impressive ceremony here at Government Advance Technical Training Centre, Hayatabad.

The paramedical institutions that signed the agreement include Welfare Relief Committee and National Institute for Health and Management Sciences Peshawar, North West Institute of Health and Management Sciences Peshawar, Premier Institute for Health and Management Sciences Peshawar, Udyana Institute of Medical Sciences Abbotabad and Udyana Institute of Medical Sciences Swat.

As per the agreement, 360 students of merged tribal districts would be provided two-years professional educational training in nine different paramedical technologies by enabling them to get a dignified job in the health sector having plenty of job opportunities.

SACM chairs dept's first meeting

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Science, Technology, and IT, Shafqat Ayaz, chaired his first departmental meeting on Monday to review

its functions and performance. Secretary Science, Technology, and IT, Syeda Tanzeela Sabahat, provided a comprehensive briefing on the department's mission, vision, roles, responsibilities, ongoing initiatives, and future plans.

The SACM was informed that the Department is tasked with promoting Science and Technology and Information Technology in the province. Its mandate includes fostering e-Government initiatives across government departments, implementing the policies on Science and Technology, and advancing research, education, and public service delivery through IT.

During the briefing, the SACM was informed about the ongoing digital transformation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, driven by increasing mobile and internet connectivity.

KP govt extends winter vacations upto January 6

PESHAWAR (APP): The government of KP has extended winter vacations in Summer Zones of the province upto 6th January 2025. The vacation is extended for all the public and private sector educational institutions throughout the province with immediate effect, said a notification issued by the E&SE Department here on Monday.



PESHAWAR: Shopkeepers of Ganta Ghar Bazaar chanting slogans during a protest in favour of their demands.

Khan Klub: A historic building falls prey to commercialization

PESHAWAR (APP): Once a symbol of Peshawar's rich historical legacy, Khan Klub—constructed by Mughal rulers in 1800—has started losing its charm due to opening of shops of trade and commercialization.

Located on Ashraf Road near Hastnagri Bazaar, it was once a sanctuary for domestic and foreign tourists, renowned for its boutique-style architecture, tranquil ambience, and rich cultural heritage.

The building, with its fine Mughal craftsmanship and wooden artwork, attracted dignitaries and

foreign visitors, offering them a unique glimpse of Peshawar's historical significance.

However, in recent years, Khan Klub has deteriorated due to commercialization, having been converted into a storage facility and general stores. The building's intricate woodwork and architectural elegance have suffered from neglect, and its once-peaceful surroundings have been overtaken by dust, garbages and clutter.

The four-story structure, built on a modest five-marla plot, is now in a

state of disrepair and requires urgent attention to prevent its collapse.

Bakhtzada Khan, a senior research officer at the KP Archaeology and Museum Department, lamented the loss of Khan Klub's historical value, calling it "a home of centuries-old civilization."

He emphasized that the building's conservation is crucial for preserving Peshawar's cultural identity.

Khan Klub was once a preferred destination for foreign tourists, ambassadors, and dignitaries. Before 2001, booking a

room was a challenging but rewarding experience for visitors, who were drawn to the hotel's serene environment, traditional Peshawari music, and proximity to historical landmarks like the Balahisar Fort, Mohabat Khan Mosque, and the Qissa Khwani Bazaar.

He said guests enjoyed the local delicacies such as Peshawari Palao, Qehwa, and aromatic teas while being serenaded by live musical performances featuring the Rubab and Tabla.

In 1995, local businessman Inayatullah Khan,

with the support of Irish-American Martin Jay Davis, formally transformed Khan Klub into a full-fledged hotel. It quickly became the most popular choice for tourists seeking an authentic Peshawari experience.

Despite its decline, the building's owners have expressed a willingness to restore its upper floors for tourist use, provided the provincial government offers financial support for repairs.

Experts estimated that at least five million rupees are needed for the renovation and conservation of

the building, including restoring its exquisite artwork and intricate balconies, which have been severely damaged by earthquakes, torrential rains, and changing weather patterns.

Each of Khan Klub's eight rooms was once unique, offering guests a personalized experience. The "Garnet Room" offered stunning views of Peshawar's old city and the Koh-e-Shalman mountains, while the "Peridot Room" boasted a 12-foot ceiling and a balcony with views of the walled city.

The building also

housed a Mughal-era restaurant where guests could sit on takiya (pillows) while enjoying live traditional performances.

In a bid to preserve Peshawar's cultural heritage, the KP government has initiated several restoration projects, including the Cultural Heritage Trail, which includes renovations of key historical sites such as the Ghanta Ghar, the Bazaar-e-Kalaan, and the Sethi House, a building famous for its intricate woodwork.

The renovation of these sites is part of a broader

effort to protect 1868 ancient houses, monuments, and religious places in KP, including Khan Klub, which have been included in a protected list.

Despite these efforts, experts urge the KP Cultural and Tourism Authority, along with the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, to take swift action and provide financial support to the owners of buildings like Khan Klub to conserve these architectural treasures before they are lost to commercialization and neglect.



In brief

20 cabins burnt to ashes in Buner F.P. Report

BUNER: Almost 20 wooden cabins were burnt to ashes due to fire erupted in the bazaar adjacent to Pir Baba Shrine on Monday before dawn while many cabins were saved from burning by rescue efforts. According to the owners of the cabins, there was no damage to human while all of the luggage gutted even the cabins turned into ashes. The owners claimed that their cabins include mobile accessories, memory cards, load cards and computer sets for song transfer, while in many cabins, junk and food were for sale. They added, the are very poor. They have lost their jobs and livelihood. And demanded financial assistance from the provincial government to rebuild the cabins and restart it with the same amount items. According to him, a cabin owner reported the them, the rescue was called at 5 o'clock, but due to a network failure, the call was received by the rescue SWAT and when the nearest police station was contacted from where they rushed to call the rescue, there was too late. But the many cabins saved by the arrival of the rescue, they shared.

Dr. Fareeha qualifies exam F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Dr. Fareeha Afham, niece of senior journalist Rana Mudassar Iqbal, has passed professional conducted by Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) for working as medical practitioner. There was a wave of happiness over the success of the candidates who passed the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) examination. Fareeha Afham scored a remarkable success in this exam, after which she will have an opportunity to enter the medical or dental profession. This success is the result of hard work and dedication. After passing the PMDC exam, Dr. Fareeha Afham will now be allowed to practice in any medical or dental institution in Pakistan, which will start her professional life. The successful candidates are being congratulated by their families, friends and teachers. It should be noted that the talented Dr. Fareeha Afham obtained her MBBS degree from Seme Medical University of Kazakhstan (Russia). These days, Dr. Fareeha Afham performs house job duties in Allied Hospital 2, Faisalabad.

Police Inspector suspended F.P. Report

SUJAWAL: Police conducting raids at various locations to apprehend the muggers involved in the robbery of Polish tourists on the main Sujawal-Badin Bypass. The tourists, Kowalczyk Jakuo Tomasz (aka Jacob) and his spouse Scantamburlo Mae Elisabeth (aka Merry), were deprived of their cell phones, cash, and other valuables in broad daylight. Inspector Haq Nawaz Baran, the DIB In-charge of Sujawal, has been suspended for his alleged negligence in providing timely information about the Polish couple's visit. The couple is on a world tour by bicycle and had reached Thatta on Saturday after traveling for seven months. According to credible sources within the district police department, around 40 suspects have been arrested so far in an effort to recover the stolen items. An FIR has been registered at the Sujawal Police Station under sections 397 and 34 of the Pakistan Penal Code.

Swat Press Club elects new leadership



Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: The elections for the Swat Press Club and Swat Union of Journalists have concluded, marking a new chapter in the organizations' history. Niaz Ahmed Khan has been elected as President of the Swat Press Club, while Muhammad Shafiullah will serve as General Secretary. Syed Shahabuddin has been elected as President of the Swat Union of Journalists, with Ismat Ali Akhooon as Vice President.

The election process was overseen by Fahim Naeem, President of the District Bar Association Swat, along with

Hazrat Bilal and Suleman Yousafzai. Other newly elected office bearers of the Swat Press Club include Javed Iqbal Mirkhankhel as Senior Vice President, Shaikat Ali as Vice President, and Murad Ali as Deputy General Secretary.

The Swat Union of Journalists also saw the election of new office bearers, including Umar Farooq as Senior Vice President, Waqar Ahmad Swat as Vice President, and Abdullah Shirin as Deputy General Secretary. Senior journalists Fazal Rahim Khan, Ghafoor Khan Adil, and Shahzad Alam have been elected to the governing

body.

A formal oath-taking ceremony was held, where Fahim Naeem Advocate administered the oath to the newly elected cabinet members. Speakers at the ceremony emphasized the importance of unity and cooperation among journalists, pledging to work together for the welfare and well-being of journalists.

Tributes were also paid to the late Ghulam Farooq, a founding member of the Swat Press Club, and martyred journalists. The ceremony concluded with a prayer for unity, peace, and prosperity for all journalists and the country.

Jamrud Press Club elects new cabinet

Amjad Ali Afridi



JAMRUD: Jamrud Press Club (JPC) elected Sajid Ali and Muhammad Akbar Afridi as president and general secretary respectively for 2025.

According to details, the annual elections of JPC for the year 2025 have been completed. In the Jamrud Press Club, a contest was held between two candidates, Sajid Ali and Nawab Sher, for the post of president. Sajid Ali won the election with 19 votes and was elected as the president of Jamrud Press Club.

The elections for Jamrud Press Club for the year 2025 were held on Sunday at the Jamrud Press Club. According to a letter from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Department, Khyber Bar President Farhad Afridi attended the

election as an observer along with his companions and expressed satisfaction with the election process.

The other members of the Jamrud Press Club cabinet were elected unopposed earlier. These include General Secretary Muhammad Akbar Afridi, Senior Vice President Shafa'at Afridi, Vice President Ali Akbar Afridi, Joint Secretary Hukamran Afridi, Finance Secretary Dilawar Afridi, and Amirzada Wisal as Press

Secretary.

Sajid Ali, the newly elected president of Jamrud Press Club, said, "I thank all the members of Jamrud Press Club for participating peacefully in the election. He said, "Insha'Allah, we will work together with everyone to take steps for the welfare and betterment of Jamrud Press Club and its members, and we will fulfill our journalistic responsibilities to highlight the issues of our area in the best possible way.

District press club, Khyber elects office bearers

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: The annual election of district press club, Landi Kotal for the year 2025 was held under the supervision of the head of District Bar Association as per notification of Directorate of Information and Public Relation.

Aman Ali Shinwari was elected as President and Hijrat Ali Afridi was chosen General Secretary of the press club. Out of 14 members, 13 voters utilized their right of vote and Aman Ali Shinwari got 11 votes while his opponent Abdul Azam Shinwari received 02 votes.

In the same way Hijrat



Ali Afridi got 10 votes whereas Jibran Khan bagged 03 votes. People from different walks of life including President Khyber Bar Association Farhad Advocate visited the press club and examined the electing process of the media persons of district press club.

Earlier, the election started at 09:00 am and

continued without interruption till 02:00 pm. The election committee comprised Ahmad Nabi, Rahat Shinwari and Mian Sajid. The newly elected cabinet members highlighted the role of journalists being played in the society and pledged to continue their struggle for the wellbeing of the journalist community as well as for the locals.

Bajaur festival concludes with much funfair

F.P. Report

KHAR: The two-day Bajaur Festival attracted crowds as the spectacular event concluded here on Monday. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA), Tourism Wing of Merged Districts, Bajaur Scouts, and the district administration had jointly organised the event to boost tourism and cultural activities in the merged districts.

Project Director for the

Merged Districts Ishtiaq Khan was the chief guest while General Manager Culture Ajmal Khan, General Manager Tourism Sajjad Hameed, District Sports Officer Taj Wazir, officials of district administration, police and Bajaur Scouts attended the event.

The festival showcased various sports competitions such as cycling races, kabaddi, tug-of-war, martial art, magic shows, poetry recital sessions, local music, traditional Sufi, Waziri,

Khattak and Attanr dances, comedy skits, and a play area for children were also part of the gala besides food and handicraft stalls.

On the last day, the festival featured the final rounds of the cycling race and martial art competitions along with cultural dance performances, local band performances, comedy shows, and poetry recital sessions by local poets. A 7-kilometer cycling race was held, in which local youth participated.

Minister reviews progress on ongoing works F.P. Report

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam Advocate has along with the Chairman DDAC Kohat Shafiullah Jan MPA visited the under construction site of Liaquat Memorial Women and Children Hospital Kohat on Monday and reviewed the ongoing reconstruction work there. Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram and authorities concerned of the C&W and Health departments were also present on this occasion.

On the site, Law Minister Aftab Alam and Shafi Jan MPA were given a detailed briefing on progress of the project. It may be noted that the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has already approved the additional cost for the reconstruction of the hospital.

The Minister during the briefing, made it clear that now there is no obstacle left in the construction of the hospital, so any kind of slowness or negligence on this important project of public interest cannot be tolerated. He added that Insha'Allah the under-construction building of Liaquat Hospital will be completed in any case and further delay on it is not tolerable.

Mardan press club elects new cabinet F.P. Report

MARDAN: Mardan press club has elected both Muhammad Riaz Mayar and Parveez Khan as president and general secretary respectively. The annual elections for the Mardan Press Club for the year 2025 were successfully completed.

The election proceedings were conducted by Imran Younas election chairman and Falak Sher under the supervision of District Bar Association (DBA) Mardan finance secretary Javed Iqbal advocate. The other unopposed elected office-bearers included Hidayat-ur-Reham Hoti as vice-president, Amir Shoaib as joint secretary, and Parveez Shaheen as finance secretary.

BISE new appointment: Abzar Muhammad was appointed as Director of Research and Development in Mardan Education Board. The announcement was made by the Education Department after the provincial government gave formal approval to the appointment of the Director of Research and Development a few days ago.

Meanwhile, the sports department has left no stone unturned to attract the youth in Mardan towards sports, construction works of various sports grounds and providing them with sports equipment.

Media role hailed F.P. Report

BANNU: Mayor Bannu Irfan Durrani has said that the journalists should point out the problems, the district government will take full action, the power of the pen is stronger than the weapon. The provincial government has completely ignored the local government representatives.

The local government representatives are protesting every day for the provision of funds, but the government is not sincere in providing funds to the local governments.

Youths urged to use internet for preaching Islamic teachings

Haleem Asad

LOWER DIR: Jamaat-i-Islami former chief Sirajul Haq has urged youths to equip themselves with the latest knowledge of technology to cope with the challenges faced by the Muslims.

He was addressing a function at Balambat here the other day. He said that many of the educated youths used the internet for earnings and worldly benefits but Muslim youths should use it for serving the religion and the nation.

Mr Haq said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan were in the grip of lawlessness and target killers were roaming freely. He said that despite militancy neither the federal nor the provincial government was taking it seriously. The JI former chief said that more than 120 people were killed in Kurram in recent days.

He said that salaries of ministers and MPs in Punjab were increased many fold but the government kitty was empty for the poor masses. He said the country needed a thorough overhaul and he was sure the revolution would start from Dir. The JI leader said that the government had approved Rs 1 billion for the establishment of the Dir University but the project had been shelved due to negligence of local lawmakers and the KP government.

Siraj said the country



was being ruled by the agents of the USA. He said that the enforcement of Islamic sharia system, an end of interest based economy and fair distribution of national resources would solve all the problems faced by the nation.

Polio duty allowance: A total of 2300 police personnel and 230 Dir Levis officials, who performed security duties during anti-polio drives, on Monday complained that they had not been paid for three anti-polio campaigns. Requesting anonymity, some of the police officials told local journalists that they had performed security duties amid threats to their life during the anti-polio campaigns in the Lower Dir district but they had not received any allowance.

They said the non-payment for such a long time had caused them unrest. According to media reports, a total of 20 police officials were killed in attacks during anti-polio campaigns across the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa this year while 18 new polio

cases were detected.

Meanwhile the district police officer Salim Abbas Kulachi told this reporter on contact that the officials who performed polio duty would soon be paid for one campaign. The police high ups had ensured the DPOs to ensure payment of polio duty to police officials in their banks.

Swati Qaum meeting: A meeting of the Swatis tribe was held in Samarbagh with its central president Malik Mohidullah Swati in the chair. The tribe's elders from different areas attended the meeting. Mohidullah Swati said that unity among the tribesmen was necessary for the development and peace.

He emphasized that personal interests should be put aside and work for a common goal, so that obstacles in the way of development should be removed. The participants declared unity as essential for the future of the nation and expressed their determination that the Swati tribe would be united on all fronts.

Capacity building program concludes

F.P. Report

KOHAT: FATA University Darra Adam Khel, Kohat has in collaboration with the National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) under the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan, successfully hosted a one-week "Capacity Building Program" (CBPI for the university management professionals. The program, designed to enhance the professional skills of management personnel from public sector universities across Pakistan, was conducted with high enthusiasm and active participation.

The training program saw the participation of 28 professionals, including 12 from FATA University and 16 from Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST). The Closing Ceremony was honored by the presence of the esteemed Chief Guest, Prof. Dr. Naseer Ud Din, Vice Chancellor of Kohat University of Science and Technology, the focal person of the training program from NAHE, Tahir Mehmood and the Vice Chancellor FATA University Dr. Alamzeb Aamir.

Prof. Dr. Naseer Ud Din in his address commended the initiative and emphasizing its impact on improving management practices within higher education institutions. He praised the visionary leadership of Dr. Alamzeb Aamir, Vice Chancellor of FATA University, for his unwavering commitment to fostering academic and administrative excellence in the region. He remarked, "Dr. Alamzeb Aamir's dedication to empowering university management and promoting a culture of continuous learning is commendable. This initiative demonstrates FATA University's pivotal role in shaping the future of higher education in Pakistan."

The Chief Guest also highlighted the importance of such programs in bridging knowledge gaps and strengthening leadership within the academic sector. He noted that collaborations like these are crucial for driving progress in the educational landscape of the country.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Alamzeb Aamir expressed heartfelt gratitude to the key contributors who made the program a success. He

acknowledged the instrumental support of Dr. Noor Amna Malik, Managing Director of NAHE, whose vision and encouragement brought the initiative to fruition. He also extended special thanks to Suleman, Director of NAHE, and Tahir Mehmood, NAHE's focal person for the Program, for their invaluable guidance and assistance throughout the training.

Vice Chancellor FATA University also lauded Dr. Sharif Ullah Jan, the NAHE focal person at FATA University, for his exemplary coordination and dedication in organizing the event. Reaffirming FATA University's commitment to capacity building and development, Dr. Aamir expressed optimism for future collaborations with NAHE and HEC to enhance the professional standards of university management nationwide.

The successful completion of this program is a testament to FATA University's dedication to fostering professional excellence and its significant contributions to strengthening the higher education system in Pakistan.

DPC Wana elects new cabinet

F.P. Report

WANA: District Press Club (DPC) Wana elected Shahzada Wazir and Irfan Ullah as president and general secretary for year 2025, on Monday.

DPC cabinet include Zardad Khan as Finance Secretary, Mujeebur Rahman as Vice President, Nek Muhammad as Senior

Vice President, Deen Muhammad as Joint Secretary, and Shahzadeen as Press Secretary.

The election was conducted under the supervision of Shafiullah, President of the South Waziristan Bar Association, by the Election Committee of the District Press Club. The process was peaceful and democratic.

On this occasion, the newly elected President Shahzada Wazir stated that elections are a democratic process, and today, the members of the District Press Club Wana have honored him by placing their trust in him. He expressed his gratitude and pledged to work together with all members as a team and to lead collectively.

A generation under threat: Climate change impacts on children

Marya Haleema

WHILE the whole world is talking about climate change, we focus on terms like carbon footprints, fossil fuels, smog, renewable energies, and global heat waves. However, we rarely discuss the impact these have on the mental and physical health of our children. We don't even recognize these as significant issues or problems. We pay no attention to them.

The habits and thoughts of our children are changing due to this growing issue, but we ignore it. Our children, especially those in Pakistan, are struggling to survive these environmental changes. We should assess the mental state they're in, whether it's due to trauma from floods, cyclones, or heat waves. We prefer to only look at

our immediate circumstances and engage in general discussions.

Climate change poses a significant threat to children in Pakistan, particularly those living in vulnerable communities. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation have far-reaching consequences for their health, education, and overall well-being.

One of the most pressing concerns is the impact of climate change on children's health. Heatwaves are becoming more frequent and intense, putting children at increased risk of heatstroke and other heat-related illnesses. Air pollution, exacerbated by climate change, can lead to respiratory problems and weaken children's immune systems. Moreover, changes in weather patterns can affect the spread of infectious dis-

eases, impacting children's health and development.

Climate change disproportionately affects girls in Pakistan due to existing gender inequalities. Here's how:

Increased burdens: Climate disasters like floods and droughts often force girls to take on additional household responsibilities, hindering their education and development.

Limited access to resources: Girls often have less access to resources and support systems compared to boys, making them more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Health risks: Climate-related issues like water scarcity and extreme weather events increase girls' risks of malnutrition, disease, and early marriage.

Displacement and migration:

Climate-induced displacement can disrupt girls' education and increase their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

It's crucial to address these challenges by empowering girls, and implementing climate change adaptation strategies that consider their specific needs.

Climate change also disrupts children's education. Extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, can damage schools and infrastructure, forcing children to miss out on schooling. Additionally, climate-related disasters can displace families, disrupting children's education and increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

Furthermore, the effects of climate change on food security and livelihoods can force families into poverty, making it difficult for

them to afford education for their children. The psychological well-being of children is also affected by climate change. Witnessing and experiencing extreme weather events can be traumatic for children, leading to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The uncertainty and disruption caused by climate change can also create a sense of insecurity and fear among children, affecting their emotional and social development.

The effects of climate change are not evenly distributed, and children in Pakistan, particularly those living in poverty, are disproportionately affected. These children often lack access to adequate healthcare, safe drinking water, and quality education, making them more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Addressing the effects of cli-

mate change on children in Pakistan requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, promoting sustainable development practices, and strengthening social safety nets to protect vulnerable children. It is crucial to prioritize children's needs in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts to ensure a sustainable and equitable future for all.

In conclusion, climate change poses a significant threat to children in Pakistan, affecting their health, education, and overall well-being. Urgent action is needed to address the root causes of climate change and to protect children from its devastating impacts. By prioritizing children's needs in climate action, we can create a more sustainable and equitable future for all.



S Korea orders air safety probe after plane crash

SEOUL (BBC): South Korea's acting leader has ordered an emergency safety inspection of the country's entire airline operations, a day after 179 people were killed in the deadliest plane crash on its soil. The Jeju Air plane burst into flames as it crash-landed in South Korea's Muan International Airport, killing everyone onboard save for two victims.

Acting President Choi Sang-mok has asked investigators into the incident to promptly disclose their findings to bereaved families. His request also comes as another Jeju Air flight turned back to Seoul shortly after takeoff on Monday, due to an unidentified landing-gear issue. On Monday, the Jeju Air plane departed from Gimpo International Airport and returned less than an hour later after realising a mechanical defect caused by the landing-gear issue, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported. Landing gear refers to the set of wheels and other parts of the plane which supports the plane during take-off, taxiing and landing.

The aircraft that turned back was a Boeing B737-800, the same model as the one involved in the disaster. Thirty-nine of the 41 aircrafts in Jeju Air's fleet are of this model. After deadly crash, Boeing had said it was in touch with Jeju Air and that it stood "ready to support them". The 179 passengers on flight 7C2216 were aged between three and 78 years old, although most were in their 40s, 50s and 60s, according to Yonhap news agency. Two Thai nationals are among the dead and the rest are believed to be South Korean, authorities have said. The ill-fated plane had skidded off the runway after touching down and crashed into a wall shortly after 09:00 local time (00:00 GMT). A South Korean transport official had said that the plane had been attempting to land but was forced to hold off after air traffic control gave a bird strike warning - an alert about the risk of a collision with birds. Air traffic command later gave permission for the plane to land from the opposite direction, the official said. The airline's bosses bowed deeply as they gave a public apology at a press conference. "We deeply apologise to all those affected by the incident. We will make every effort to resolve the situation," the firm said in a statement. Jeju Air shares were trading around 8% lower in Seoul on Monday. The accident is a national tragedy for South Korea, which has been embroiled in political turmoil after parliament

voted to impech President Yoon Suk Yeol and his temporary successor Han Duck-soo. Acting President Choi, who stepped into the interim role, said he is "heartbroken" by the accident. "To the honorable citizens of our nation, as an acting president, my heart aches as we face this unforeseen tragedy amid recent economic hardships," he said.

Meanwhile, in the past year, Choi Jin-young has done everything he can to bring attention to his father, a missionary who's serving a life sentence in North Korea. He's met senior U.N., U.S. and other human rights officials, testified at public events, and accepted many media interviews. But as he marks 10 years since his father's arrest this week, Choi doesn't know where his father is, or even if he's still alive. "I have some good memories of my dad. I'm his son so I must fight hard to get him returned," Choi, a 34-year-old beer company official in South Korea, told The Associated Press. "I can only assume he's been in an extremely bad situation."

His father Choi Chun-kil, 65, is one of at least six South Koreans who have all but disappeared since being arrested and convicted in North Korea in the past decade or so. Three, including Choi, are Christian missionaries who spent time in Chinese border towns, and the other three are North Korean-born defectors who resettled in the South. The three missionaries were involved in covert efforts to spread Christianity in the North by providing North Korean visitors room and board and teaching them the Bible. All three were arrested in 2013 or 2014, and then convicted of plotting to overthrow the North Korean government and spying for South Korea and sentenced to hard labor for life. Little is known about the defectors, except that North Korea accused one of trying to kidnap North Korean children. Seoul has not released their names, citing requests from family members. But observers say they have little hope of their repatriations to the South as Pyongyang likely views them as its own citizens. It's less clear why the North has held the three South Korean-born missionaries for such a long time. North Korea has released or deported American missionaries and other foreign detainees after a maximum of two to three years in prison. North Korea maintains a virtual ban on religion and considers foreign evangelism a threat to its ruling Kim family's cult of personality. Experts say North

Korea likely lured the South Korean missionaries onto its territory to make the arrests, and fabricated or exaggerated their crimes. The three missionaries have been denied consular services and opportunities to communicate with their loved ones in South Korea. They haven't been seen since the initial months of their detention, when they were shown to the outside world at press conferences in Pyongyang to confess to crimes and apologize. Experts say their statements were likely coached or coerced by North Korean officials. Kim Jeong-sam, brother of another jailed missionary Kim Jung Wook, said he prays for his 60-year-old sibling three times a day and misses him whenever he uses hot water. "Especially when I take shower with hot water on a cold winter's day. I miss him more because I wonder if he can also use hot water there," Kim, 63, said.

It's not known where in North Korea the South Koreans are held. Experts say they're likely kept apart from North Korean inmates to prevent them from spreading hostile thoughts. In responses to questions from the AP, South Korea's Unification Ministry said North Korea hasn't responded its repeated public calls to confirm whether the detainees are still alive. But it said the North has likely not mistreated the prisoners since South Korea's appeals to the international community have likely been conveyed to it. Hyeon Soo Lim, a Canadian pastor who was jailed in North Korea from 2015-2017, believes his foreigners-only prison was in Pyhyngsong city, about an hour's drive from Pyongyang, the capital. He said he was mostly the only inmate, except his final months in prison when he encountered American detainee Kim Tong Chol. Lim said he didn't see the three South Korean missionaries at his prison. Lim, 69, said he was required to do eight hours of work like harvesting potatoes or digging six days a week. But Lim said he was given a Bible and allowed to exchange letters and a phone call with his family in Canada. He said he was sent to hospital three times. Kenneth Bae, a former American detainee, described similar conditions in his memoir. Like Lim, he said he didn't suffer beatings or torture. But in one exceptional case, American university student Otto Warmbier died in 2017 days after he was released by North Korea in a coma after 17 months in captivity.



GAZA: The grandchildren of Reda Abu Zarada sitting by a fire at a camp by the sea in Khan Younis.

China hands lengthy jail terms to two teenagers

BEIJING (Reuters): A court in northern China handed lengthy prison terms to two teenagers for murdering their classmate with a shovel in March, state media said on Monday, in a case that triggered heated public debate on juvenile delinquency.

The male suspects sur-named Zhang and Li were sentenced to life and 12 years in jail respectively for intentional homicide by a court in the city of Handan in the province of Hebei, CCTV said, but no motive was given. The court found the methods of the killing "were particularly cruel, and the circumstances were particularly heinous", it added.

A third suspect sur-named Ma escaped with a sentence of "special correctional education", in line with the law, the broadcaster said. All three were aged 13 at the time of the murder. They were detained the day after the body of the 13-year-old victim, sur-named Wang, was found on March 10, buried in a shallow pit in an abandoned greenhouse on the city's outskirts, state media said. The court said Zhang bore principal responsibility for killing Wang with a shovel and initially devised the murder plan, while Li, his main accomplice, joined in the killing and subsequent burial.

Ma followed the pair to the site of the murder and witnessed the killing, but did not participate. In 2021, China lowered the age of criminal responsibility to 12 from 14 for certain crimes, but kept minors exempt from the death penalty. Suspects aged 12 to 14 may face criminal responsibility for serious crimes such as intentional homicide if the top prosecutor approves the charges. At the time of the crime, state media said all four were the offspring of rural migrant workers who spend most of the year working in large cities, leaving grandparents and other relatives to care for their children. Census data from 2020 shows such "left behind" children, as they are called, number nearly 67 million. Academic studies show they are at higher risk of suffering mental health issues, becoming victims of bullying and criminal behaviour.

At the time, some social media commentators and lawyers had demanded the death penalty, saying minors had received inadequate punishment for serious crimes in recent years.

Peru's Navy rescues fishermen

TUMBES, Peru (AP): Peru's Navy says it has rescued about 30 fishermen who had been stranded for two days at sea as giant waves pounded the country's northern coast. Many of them had struggled to bring their boats back to Acapulco beach in the Tumbes region.

Jaime Yacila, the mayor of the province of Contralmirante Villar, which lies in the Tumbes region 1,200 kilometers (745 miles) north of capital Lima, said that some fishermen could not wait any longer to be rescued at sea, which accelerated the operation. "They (the fishermen) did not want to lose their boats," Yacila told reporters.

Kavelashvili inaugurated as Georgia's president

TBILISI, Georgia (AP): Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili was formally inaugurated as president of Georgia, cementing the ruling party's grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

Outgoing pro-Western Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili said that she would vacate her residence at the Orbeliani Palace in Tbilisi, but insisted she was still the legitimate office holder. "I will come out of here, come out to you and be with you. ... This presidential residence was a symbol as long as there was a president here who was legitimate. I bring legitimacy with me," Zourabichvili told a crowd of supporters outside the palace. She called Kavelashvili's inauguration a "parody."

Kavelashvili, 53, who was the only candidate on the ballot, easily won the vote earlier in December given the Georgian Dream party's control of a 300-seat electoral college that replaced direct presidential elections in 2017. It is made up of members of Parliament, municipal councils and regional legislatures. In his speech, Kavelashvili promised to be "everyone's president, regardless of whether they like me or not." He called for the nation to unite behind him around "shared values, the principles of mutual respect, and the future we should build together."

Georgian Dream retained control of Parliament in the South Caucasus nation in an Oct. 26 election that the opposition alleges was rigged with Moscow's help. The party has vowed to continue pushing toward accession in the European Union but also wants to "reset" ties with Russia. Georgia's outgoing president and main pro-Western parties have boycotted the post-election parliamentary sessions and demanded a rerun of the ballot. In 2008 Russia fought a brief war with Georgia, which led to Moscow's recognition of two breakaway regions as independent, and an increase in the Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Critics have accused Georgian Dream - established by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia - of becoming increasingly authoritarian and tilted toward Moscow, accusations the ruling party has denied. The party recently pushed through laws similar to those used by the Kremlin to crack down on freedom of speech and LGBTQ+

rights. Georgian Dream's decision last month to suspend talks on their country's bid to join the EU added to the opposition's outrage and galvanized protests. Protesters in front of the parliament building held red cards, in reference to Kavelashvili's career in soccer.

"Because today our president is a footballer, we are showing him a red card. The next step will be sending him off the pitch. The Georgian people will definitely do this, because it was a circus that they have held today in the parliament," protester Sofia Shamanidze told The Associated Press. Zourabichvili, 72, was born in France to parents with Georgian roots and had a successful career with the French Foreign Ministry before President Mikheil Saakashvili named her Georgia's top diplomat in 2004. Constitutional changes made the president's job largely ceremonial before Zourabichvili was elected by popular vote with Georgian Dream's support in 2018. She became sharply critical of the ruling party, accusing it of pro-Russia policies, and Georgian Dream unsuccessfully tried to impeach her. Zourabichvili has rejected government claims that the opposition was fomenting violence.

"We are not demanding a revolution," she told The Associated Press. "We are asking for new elections, but in conditions that will ensure that the will of the people will not be misrepresented or stolen again. Georgia's opposition has mocked Kavelashvili for lacking higher education. He was a striker in the English Premier League for Manchester City and played for several clubs in the Swiss Super League. He was elected to Parliament in 2016 on the Georgian Dream ticket, and in 2022 co-founded the People's Power political movement, which was allied with Georgian Dream and become known for its strong anti-Western rhetoric.

Kavelashvili was one of the authors of a controversial law requiring organizations that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "pursuing the interest of a foreign power," similar to a Russian law used to discredit critical organizations. The EU, which granted Georgia candidate status in December 2023 on condition that the country meets the bloc's recommendations, put its accession on hold and cut financial support in June following approval of the "foreign influence" law.

Syria's embassy in Lebanon suspends services

BEIRUT (AP): Syria's embassy in Lebanon suspended consular services, a day after two relatives of deposed Syrian President Bashar Assad were arrested at the Beirut airport with allegedly forged passports.

Lebanese authorities handed over dozens of Syrians - including former officers in the Syrian army under Assad - to the new Syrian authorities after they were caught illegally entering Lebanon, a war monitor and Lebanese officials said. The embassy announced on its Facebook page that consular work was suspended "until further notice" at the order of the Syrian foreign ministry. The announcement did not give a reason for the suspension.

Two Lebanese security officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly, said the suspension was ordered because the passports belonging to Assad's relatives - the wife and daughter of one of his cousins - were believed to have been forged at the embassy. Assad's uncle, Rifaat Assad - who has been indicted in Switzerland on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity - had flown out the day before on his real passport and was not stopped, the officials said. The U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that 70 Syrians, including for-

mer army officers, were handed over by a Lebanese security delegation to the security forces of the new Syrian government, led by the former insurgent group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS. Three Lebanese judicial officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed the report.

Regional countries have been quick to establish ties with Syria's new rulers. Delegations of Libyan and Bahraini officials arrived in Damascus on official visits. HTS leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, has largely succeeded in calming fears within and outside of Syria that his group would unleash collective punishment against communities that supported Assad's rule or attempt to impose strict Islamic law on the country's religious minorities. However, in recent days, sporadic clashes have broken out between the HTS-led security forces and pro-Assad armed groups. The country's new security forces have launched a series of raids targeting officials affiliated with Assad and have set up checkpoints in areas with significant populations of the Alawite religious minority to which the former president belongs to search for weapons. There have also been ongoing tensions and clashes in northeastern Syria between Kurdish-led forces and armed groups backed by

Turkey. Many Kurds have viewed the new order in Damascus, which appears to have strengthened Turkey's hand in Syria, with anxiety.

Ankara sees the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces - a key U.S. ally in the fight against the Islamic State group - as an affiliate of its sworn enemy, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which it classifies as a terrorist organization. The U.S. State Department said that Secretary of State Antony Blinken had spoken with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan to "discuss the latest developments in Syria." "Secretary Blinken emphasized the need to support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process that upholds human rights and prioritizes an inclusive and representative government," the statement said, adding that they "also discussed the shared goal of preventing terrorism from endangering the security" of Turkey and Syria.

Hundreds of protesters convened by Kurdish women's groups participated in a demonstration in the northeastern city of Hasaka to demand women's rights in the new Syria. Pishan Ramadan, a participant from Hasaka, said the new government "is worse than Bashar" and that its leaders are Islamist extremists who "don't accept any role for women."

Jet crash disaster in South Korea marks another setback for Boeing

WASHINGTON (AP): A machinists strike. Another safety problem involving its troubled top-selling airliner. A plunging stock price. 2024 was already a dispiriting year for Boeing, the American aviation giant. But when one of the company's jets crash-landed in South Korea, killing all but two of the 181 people on board, it brought to a close an especially unfortunate year for Boeing.

The cause of the crash remains under investigation, and aviation experts were quick to distinguish incident from the company's earlier safety problems. Alan Price, a former chief pilot at Delta Air Lines who is now a consultant, said it would be inappropriate to link the incident to two fatal crashes involving Boeing's troubled 737 Max jetliner in 2018 and 2019. In January this year, a door plug blew off a 737 Max while it was in flight, raising more questions about the plane. The Boeing 737-800 that crash-landed in Korea, Price noted, is "a very proven airplane. It's different from the Max ...It's a very safe airplane."

For decades, Boeing has maintained a role as one of the giants of American manufacturing. But the the

past year's repeated troubles have been damaging. The company's stock price is down more than 30% in 2024. The company's reputation for safety was especially tarnished by the 737 Max crashes, which occurred off the coast of Indonesia and in Ethiopia less than five months apart in 2018 and 2019 and left a combined 346 people dead. In the five years since then, Boeing has lost more than \$23 billion.

And it has fallen behind its European rival, Airbus, in selling and delivering new planes. Last fall, 33,000 Boeing machinists went on strike, crippling the production of the 737 Max, the company's bestseller, the 777 airliner and 767 cargo plane. The walkout lasted seven weeks, until members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers agreed to an offer that included 38% pay raises over four years. In January, a door plug blew off a 737 Max during an Alaska Airlines flight. Federal regulators responded by imposing limits on Boeing aircraft production that they said would remain in place until they felt confident about manufacturing safety at the company.

In July, Boeing agreed to plead guilty to conspiracy to commit fraud for deceiving the Federal Aviation Administration regulators who approved the 737 Max. Acting on Boeing's incomplete disclosures, the FAA approved minimal, computer-based training instead of more intensive training in flight simulators. Simulator training would have increased the cost for airlines to operate the Max and might have pushed some to buy planes from Airbus instead. (Prosecutors said they lacked evidence to argue that Boeing's deception had played a role in the crashes.)

But the plea deal was rejected this month by a federal judge in Texas. Reed O'Connor, who decided that diversity, inclusion and equity or DEI policies in the government and at Boeing could result in race being a factor in choosing an official to oversee Boeing's compliance with the agreement. Boeing has sought to change its culture. Under intense pressure over safety issues, David Calhoun departed as CEO in August. Since January, 70,000 Boeing employees have participated in meetings to discuss ways to improve safety.

Republicans gain temporary control of Minnesota House

ROSEVILLE, Minn. (AP): Republicans will start the year with at least a temporary majority in the Minnesota House after a Democrat decided not to appeal a judge's decision that he failed to establish residency in the suburban district he was elected to represent.

That means Republicans will have a slim 67-66 majority in the House when the Legislature begins Jan. 14. That may not last long because Gov. Tim Walz has already scheduled a Jan. 28 special election in the Democratic-leaning district that Curtis Johnson won by 30 points in November. "While I disagree with the conclusions reached by the District Court, I recognize that whatever the decision on appeal the ultimate decision belongs to the Legislature, where it appears there is no viable pathway for me being allowed to retain my seat," Johnson said in his resignation letter. "Rather than dragging this out further, I have decided to resign now, so that a special election can be held as soon as possible."

Ramsey County Judge Leonardo Castro ruled last week that Johnson didn't live in the Roseville-area district for the required six months ahead of the election and is therefore ineligible to serve. Johnson's Republican challenger, Paul Wikstrom, presented surveillance video and photos in court to show Johnson did not reside in the apartment he claimed as his residence. The St.

Paul Pioneer Press reported that the lack of utility hookups and regular activity at the apartment reinforced that conclusion.

Republican Rep. Lisa Demuth, who is in line to become House speaker with the GOP in control, said she is pleased the judge's decision will stand. Previously, leaders of both parties had been working out a power-sharing agreement given that the chamber was expected to be divided equally 67-67. "This confirms that Republicans will have an organizational majority on day one, and we look forward to ensuring that a valid candidate represents District 40B in the upcoming legislative session," Demuth said in a statement.

Although Democrats argue that Republicans would need to have at least 68 seats to control the House, or pass laws. The Democrats should be able to stop Republicans from being able to pass laws, but the GOP could still push its agenda. Republicans will have working control of committees to advance bills to the floor, which could force Democrats from swing districts to face tough decisions on bills. And Republicans could try to launch investigations they have been seeking for a long time into the Walz administration and problems it has had limiting fraud.

Democrats had been expecting to have a one-vote edge in the Senate, but that chamber is now evenly split at 33-

33 after former Majority Leader Sen. Karl Dziedzic died from cancer. A special election will also be held for her Democratic-leaning Minneapolis district, but that hasn't been scheduled yet. Demuth also questioned whether Walz has the power to set the special election so quickly even before the Legislature certifies the vacancy. If that argument prevails that would extend Republican control of the House longer, but the secretary of state's office told Minnesota Public Radio that Walz's order setting the special election is proper.

Whenever the election happens, Democrats are confident they will win the seat, current House speaker Rep. Melissa Hortman said. "A prompt special election will allow the voters of District 40B to ensure that they will be represented in the Minnesota House for the bulk of the session," Hortman said in a written statement. "We expect the district will again vote to elect a Democrat by overwhelming margins."

A pending court challenge in a different suburban district could also affect the balance of power in the House, but it appears Democrats will likely prevail in that dispute. Incumbent Democratic Rep. Brad Tabke, of Shakopee, was declared the winner by 14 votes over Republican Aaron Paul despite 20 missing ballots that were accepted but never counted and then apparently thrown away.

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Deepening economic woes

THIS season when we economists pretend to know what is going to happen over the next year and you pretend to believe us. As in the last few years, peering into the economic future is complicated by the presence of important geopolitical factors which economists are not well equipped to assess. These factors will probably dominate the headlines and there will be a widespread belief that they will have a large economic impact.

In fact, such things seldom do. In 2024, for instance, access to one of the world's most important shipping routes, namely through the Red Sea, was severely curtailed but the much anticipated disaster for global supply chains failed to happen. Conflict in the Middle East intensified - but oil prices fell. Many of the geopolitical risks for 2025 are associated with the return of Donald Trump to the White House. It is now widely believed in both policy circles and the financial markets that there will soon be a US-brokered negotiated peace deal between Russia and Ukraine. From a human point of view that would be wonderful, but would it have a major economic impact? Since most Western countries are unlikely to re-establish close ties with Russia in the wake of such an agreement, I doubt that there would be the sustained fall in global energy prices that many think might be the result. On the opposite tack, a conflict between the US and Iran would be taken to threaten much higher global oil prices, but if this were to materialise, extra supply from Saudi Arabia and the US would counter this influence.

With regard to geopolitical influences on the world economy, the one big exception is the possibility of a conflict between the US and China over Taiwan. The economic consequences of this would be huge. But most good judges assess the likelihood of this happening in the coming year as fairly low. That risk aside, things look set to be ok for the world. Global growth of something like 3pc is a reasonable prospect, similar to what was recorded in 2024. Admittedly, this is low by past standards but it would hardly be a disaster. US growth may slow as a result of Trump's tariffs. While China may also slow in the second half, it should again confound all those people who perennially see it as on the brink of some major economic collapse. One major global feature, and a harbinger of the more distant future, is that India will probably be the world's fastest-growing major economy.

Within Europe, growth is likely to remain sluggish, with both France and Germany weak. A notable exception is Spain, where growth prospects are good. Economists are usually best advised to steer clear of exchange rate predictions but our clients seldom allow us the luxury. With some trepidation, I venture that the dollar may strengthen further in 2025, buoyed by Trump's tariffs and the strong US stock market drawing in capital from abroad. Venturing even further into territory where angels should fear to tread, dollar strength may see the pound drop a bit more, perhaps to something like \$1.20, or even lower. That would be good for our competitiveness, although it would add to inflationary pressures.

Mind you, any weakness against the dollar is not bound to extend to the rate against the euro. In fact, given the combination of a weak economy and serious political uncertainty in both France and Germany, the pound might well strengthen against the euro. Here in the UK we are probably set for a moderate year, not helped by continued weak growth on the Continent and held back at the beginning of the year by the continued after-effects of October's Budget. Indeed, the year is about to begin with many businesses fearing that we are on the brink of a recession. But recent pessimism about the UK may have been somewhat overdone. Whereas the negative impact of higher taxes has definitely been felt in the blow to business and consumer confidence, the boost to aggregate demand from higher government spending has not yet come through fully. Might there also be a bit of a boost from more housebuilding? Even so, we are hardly in for a bonanza. Yet, for devotees of the Yes, Prime Minister view of the world, the most important thing is that we should come out ahead of France. There are two major risks facing the economy.

The first concerns inflation. I suspect that it will be slow to fall, reflecting still strong pay growth, fuelled by large public sector pay awards, another large rise in the minimum wage and the increases in employers' National Insurance. If this is right, then there is scope for considerable disappointment in the markets and more widely in the economy at the pace of interest rate reductions by the Bank of England.

At the moment, it is still likely that rates will come down a bit in 2025. But if I had to highlight a possible major surprise over the year ahead it would be that rates do not come down and that, indeed, they could even rise. The second risk concerns the fiscal position. If the borrowing numbers continue to disappoint what would the Chancellor do? I do not believe that she has the scope just to let higher borrowing take the strain, thereby accepting that her fiscal rules will be broken so soon after being newly minted. She would have to choose between cuts to public spending and higher taxes. What a choice for a new Labour chancellor. Whichever of these she chooses, she would be extremely unpopular. In the markets there is already chatter that she may not last that long. After all, if Sir Keir Starmer finds himself in even graver political territory, then he will have to look for a scapegoat. The Chancellor would be a likely candidate.

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Jimmy Carter: Father of Arab-Israeli normalisation

Imad K Harb

ON December 29, former President Jimmy Carter passed away at the age of 100. As the 39th president of the United States and as a private citizen, Carter was an advocate for peace between nations, democracy and various humanitarian and environmental causes. But in the Middle East, he is going to be remembered as the father of Arab-Israeli normalisation.

Sworn in as president in 1977, Carter was given the opportunity by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to be the architect of the first normalisation deal between an Arab country and the Zionist state. He helped Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin conclude the 1978 Camp David Accords and negotiate the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty that formally ended the conflict between the two countries.

As developments in the past four decades have shown, neither the accords nor the treaty led to peace and justice in the Middle East. Israel continues its occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and has launched a genocidal war on the Gaza Strip; the Palestinians still do not have an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital; and an overwhelming majority of the Arab public refuses to recognise Israel or agree to normalising relations with it.

Looking back at the accords Carter brokered, it is clear that they were the beginning of the slow and gradual, although not publicly acknowledged, abandonment of the Palestinian cause by Arab officialdom, and a US campaign to bury Palestinian national aspirations. The Camp David Accords were first and foremost a roadmap towards a full Egyptian-Israeli peace, full recognition of Israel by Egypt, and an end to Egypt's participation in the Arab economic boycott of Israel. To be sure, the accords were a mere framework for negotiations between the two countries that would lead a few months later to the signing of a peace treaty.

But they also included provisions related to the Palestinian people, whose wording was indicative of the ultimate purpose of the accords. The document spoke of a plan to provide

"autonomy" to the "inhabitants" of the occupied territory, as if the Palestinians were aliens squatting in the West Bank and Gaza.

At the time, the US had not yet recognised the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Thus, the accords called for electing a "self-governing authority" for the occupied territory. But

tuted government for the Palestinians, the PA was required to recognise Israel's right to exist before securing official Israeli acknowledgement of Palestinian grievances and national aspirations.

Jordan, for its part, had to sign a peace treaty with Israel, becoming the second Arab state after Egypt to recognise the Zionist state. All Amman was able to preserve from its relation-

omic relations. Bahrain aimed to use its relations with Israel as a hedge against an aggressive Iran. Morocco received a much-desired US recognition of its sovereignty over the Western Sahara. And Sudan was able to get itself removed from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism. To be sure, the Abraham Accords were no more than transactions that advanced the signers' interests at the expense of the Palestinian cause, thus allowing Israel to deepen its apartheid policies and entrench its occupation of Palestinian land.

And it is not difficult to see a strong desire in the upcoming Trump administration for an expanded map of Arab normalisation with Israel, one that includes Saudi Arabia, for example. As was the case with earlier normalisation deals, the Palestinians will be the last to count on any dividends from more Arab openness on Israel.

After the end of his presidential term, Carter continued to pursue efforts for peace between Palestinians and Israelis. But the more he observed the situation on the ground, the more he became convinced that the US policy of steadfast support for Israel was wrong and counterproductive.

Thus in 2007, he published a book titled Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid in which he declared that Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories amounted to the crime of apartheid. This was a welcome change of heart from a long-held conviction among many US politicians and opinion-makers. Carter remains the only prominent US politician brave enough to call Israeli policies and practices by their proper name.

As Americans mourn his death and remember his legacy, it is important to reflect on the disastrous US policies in Palestine. Over the past four decades, Israel's occupation has grown more and more violent thanks in large part to unconditional US support. It is time for Washington to revise its stance on Israel-Palestine. A reversal in US policy on Palestine - one that recognises Palestinian rights and holds Israel accountable for its crimes - is something Jimmy Carter likely would have wanted to see in his lifetime.

Aljazeera

This encouragement became a full-fledged campaign during the presidency of Donald Trump who, along with his administration lieutenants, evinced more than the usual American bias in favour of the Zionist state. In 2020, Trump presided over the signing of the so-called Abraham Accords that normalised relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco.

that autonomy and the elected authority were to be supervised by Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, in obvious violation of the Palestinians' right to constitute an independent, national government.

Throughout the 1980s, and because of US-supported Israeli objections, the Palestinians were absent and prevented from playing a role in devising peace plans for the Arab-Israeli and Palestine-Israel conflict. But the eruption of the first Intifada in December of 1987 and Jordan's 1988 relinquishing of its claim to the West Bank made it clear that the Palestinians could no longer be ignored in peace negotiations.

Still, in 1991, the Palestinians participating in the Madrid Conference were only present as part of a Jordanian delegation, once again denying their nationhood. Like other iterations of the US-led and sponsored "peace process", the Madrid path led to a stalemate, as Israel continued to ignore the Palestinians' national rights and reject any talk of ending its occupation. Following the Israeli elections in 1992 that brought the Labor Party to power, the US shepherded the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel that created the Palestinian National Authority (PA). As a consti-

ship with Palestine was its custodianship of religious sites in Jerusalem, a status that is constantly challenged by the Israeli authorities today. Throughout the so-called "peace process" that the Camp David Accords set in motion, the US was keen to encourage Arab states to consider their interests separately from those of the Palestinians. This encouragement became a full-fledged campaign during the presidency of Donald Trump who, along with his administration lieutenants, evinced more than the usual American bias in favour of the Zionist state.

In 2020, Trump presided over the signing of the so-called Abraham Accords that normalised relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco. Sudan joined the following year. While all Arab states involved insisted that the normalisation of relations with Israel would help improve the lives of Palestinians and should not be seen as abandoning them, the truth was they all got something in return for recognising Israel with no regard for Palestinian interests.

The UAE's normalisation with Israel appears to be the fastest and deepest. The two countries have quickly developed and expanded military and eco-

Giving lar ao bar yao Pakistan a chance

Palwasha Aftab

IN 1893, the Afghan administration struck a deal with British colonizers, selling off parts of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, along with its populace and future generations for an annual payment of 700,000 rupees. In 1947, these regions chose to accede to Pakistan.

In October of that same year, Afghanistan rescinded its earlier negative vote, originally cast in September 1947, concerning Pakistan's admission to the United Nations (UN). Following this diplomatic gesture, both nations exchanged ambassadors in 1948. Sardar Shah Wali Khan, Afghanistan's then ambassador to Pakistan, was also reported to have affirmed that whatever claims Afghanistan may have had on Pashtun-majority areas in Pakistan, it would now relinquish such claims in favor of Pakistan.

Despite these initial positive developments, Afghan administrations' aspiration to create 'Lar ao bar yao Afghan' (Greater Afghanistan), by reclaiming territories ceded to British India through the Durand Line Agreement of 1893, continues to dominate and antagonize Pak-Afghan relations.

This narrative has served as a rallying point for nearly all Afghan rulers, spanning the royal regimes to communist leadership, from religious fundamentalists to the ostensibly liberal factions, and currently, the de facto Taliban regime. Each has invoked the Durand Line saga for their domestic political agendas. Here in Pakistan, the Pashtun rights and justice movement, known as the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), has also engaged in this discourse, often adopting similar rhetoric.

Nevertheless, a comprehensive assessment of the validity of these claims through the lenses of international law, history, demographics, and Pashtun aspirations is necessary. In the next section, we will delve into this examination. From an international law perspective, Afghanistan's stance on the Durand Line lacks merit. According to Article 11 of the Vienna Convention, to which Afghanistan is a signatory, border agreements regarding international boundaries remain unaffected even after their inheritance by successor states.

Thus, Pakistan, as a successor state to Britain (British India), has inherited all the legal rights and responsibilities that Britain previously exercised with regard to the Durand Line. Furthermore, member countries of the UN, including all Islamic countries, China, the United States and Great Britain, have also recognized the Durand Line as a legitimate international border. Apart from that, from a historical standpoint, it is noteworthy to mention that the Pashtun belt in Eastern Afghanistan, encompassing regions such as Helmand, Kandahar, Paktika, Paktia, Nuristan, Nangarhar, Kunar, Khost, Zabul, and Nimroz, was historically part of the Indus Valley Civilization, which was centered in what is now Pakistan. Demographically, the situation presents a similar context. Approximately 40 million Pashtuns live in Pakistan, while only an estimated 15 to 17 million inhabit Afghanistan. This demographic evidence reinforces the notion that a significant majority of Pashtuns currently live within Pakistani borders.

Significantly, the influx of Afghan nationals into Pakistan, driven by a desire for employment, business opportunities, quality healthcare, education, and other amenities, is a testament to their preference for Pakistan over Afghanistan as a destination for a better quality of life. As the world turns its attention to Afghanistan, the country, currently, is grappling with a myriad of challenges, including terrorism, human rights violations and widespread poverty, which are having far-reaching consequences that extend beyond its borders, impacting the entire region.

Recently, Ambassador Usman Jadoon, Pakistan's permanent representative to the United Nations, addressed the UN Security Council, stating, "Terrorism within and from Afghanistan poses the single most serious threat to the country, to the region, and the world." Earlier, the 15th ISIL (Daesh) and Al-Qaeda/Taliban United Nations monitoring report highlighted that the proscribed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has become the largest terrorist group operating in Afghanistan, enjoying operational and logistical support from both the Afghan Taliban and various factions of the Al-Qaeda network.

The report further noted a concerning escalation in TTP-led assaults against Pakistan, rising sharply from 573 incidents in 2021 to 715 in 2022, and reaching 1,210 in 2023, with this trend showing no signs of abating into 2024. While Pakistan remains committed to engaging in constructive dialogue with Afghanistan to mitigate the threats posed by terrorism from its western neighbor, the Taliban leadership appears unfazed about allaying Pakistan's security concerns and denies harbouring terrorist outfits on its soil.

Although, Pakistan's security forces and law enforcement agencies are resolutely dedicated to eradicating the scourge of terrorism within the country's borders; nevertheless, enhanced measures are required to address the longstanding security threat that emanates from Afghanistan. Given the historical, demographic, and personal aspirations of the Pashtun communities on both sides of the border, the question arises: would it not be prudent to consider the integration of the Pashtun belt in Eastern Afghanistan with Pakistan?

Certainly, the plight of Afghan brothers and sisters suffering under the oppressive rule of the Taliban resonates deeply with the people of Pakistan. Besides, it is worth noting that no nation is keener than Pakistan to support and witness improvements in the lives of Afghans. Encouragingly, recent predictions from Goldman Sachs, a prominent American multinational investment bank and financial services provider, suggest that Pakistan could emerge as the world's sixth-largest economy by 2075, with projections indicating a GDP of \$12.7 trillion and a per capita income of \$27,100.

Given this promising outlook, combined with the lack of prospects for stability in Afghanistan - given its history of internal conflicts and civil unrest - the integration of Eastern Afghanistan with Pakistan could offer a beneficial solution for Pashtun communities on both sides of the border, potentially bringing greater stability and prosperity to the region. This approach would not only fulfill the aspirations of both populations but also align with the PTM's demand for a more unified Pashtun identity.

The Hill

America's case for Greenland

Matthew Shoemaker

AS global competition intensifies and the Arctic emerges as a critical geopolitical battleground, the United States must assert greater control over Greenland to safeguard its national security interests.

President-elect Trump's vision of American ownership of Greenland is not merely a whimsical notion; it is grounded in the historical and legal framework established by the 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement. This agreement empowers the US to significantly influence and potentially control this strategically vital territory, making a compelling case for action that Congress and diplomats cannot ignore.

The 1951 agreement was forged in the crucible of the Cold War, recognizing Greenland's critical importance to North Atlantic security. This pact granted the United States significant rights and responsibilities within Greenland, establish-

ing a framework that continues to shape the geopolitical landscape of the Arctic region. The agreement's provisions grant significant authority for increased American control when national security is invoked:

Military Presence: Article II of the agreement allows for the establishment of "defense areas" in Greenland, where the United States can construct and operate military facilities. This provision has enabled the continued operation of Thule Air Base, now the Pituffik Space Base, a cornerstone of American strategic capabilities in the Arctic. Operational Control: In cases where the US is responsible for operating defense areas, American commanders have substantial authority, with Danish personnel serving in advisory roles. This arrangement demonstrates the trust placed in American leadership and expertise.

Freedom of Movement: The agreement grants US

forces broad access rights within Greenland, including the use of air, land and sea spaces adjacent to defense areas. This freedom of movement is essential for maintaining effective control and rapid response capabilities.

Infrastructure Development: The US is permitted to "improve and generally fit the area for military use" without compensation to Denmark. This clause has allowed for significant American investment in Greenland's infrastructure, further entrenching US presence and influence. The geopolitical landscape has evolved significantly since 1951, but Greenland's strategic importance has only increased. A warming Arctic is opening new shipping routes and exposing vast mineral resources, attracting the attention of global powers like China and Russia. In this context, the provisions of the 1951 agreement take

on renewed significance.

Arctic Security: Greenland's location makes it an ideal base for monitoring and responding to activities in the Arctic region. The island's proximity to North America - just a few hours' flight from major US cities - underscores its critical role in homeland defense. Resource Control: Greenland's rare earth mineral deposits are of particular interest to the United States, especially given concerns about Chinese dominance in this sector. The ability to secure these resources could be framed as a matter of national security. Diplomatic Leverage: The existing agreement provides a strong foundation for negotiations with Denmark and Greenland. The US could argue that expanded control is a natural extension of its long-standing commitment to Greenland's defense and development.

While the 1951 agreement does not explicitly allow for unilateral American control of Greenland, it does establish a precedent for significant US authority within the territory. Any move towards greater control would need to be carefully negotiated with Denmark and Greenland, respecting their sovereignty while emphasizing mutual security interests. Several approaches could be considered for expanding American influence in Greenland: Enhanced Defense Agreement: Negotiate an updated version of the 1951 agreement, expanding US rights and responsibilities in light of new security challenges. Economic Integration: Increase American investment in Greenland's economy, particularly in strategic sectors like mining and defense infrastructure development. NATO framework: Leverage Greenland's strategic importance within NATO to justify

a larger American presence and role in the island's affairs. The 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement provides a strong historical and legal basis for expanded American involvement in Greenland. As the Arctic becomes an increasingly contested region, Greenland's strategic value will only grow. The United States, with its established presence and legal framework for operation in Greenland, is well-positioned to assert its interests in this critical territory.

By leveraging existing agreements and emphasizing mutual security concerns, the US can make a compelling case for enhancing its role in Greenland's future. This approach aligns with President-elect Trump's vision of increased American control over this vital Arctic asset, ensuring US national security interests are protected in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape.

Less ‘European family’, more howitzers: Ukraine needs hardware, not cosy words

Peter Pomerantsev

WHENEVER I come to Ukraine, I find words that have lost their essence elsewhere swell again with meaning. The fight for "freedom" is not a pretentious slogan here, but just what you do every day. "Sovereignty" is not a slippery abstraction, but the difference between deciding your own fate or having it decreed in Moscow.

It's also in Ukraine that one realises that "freedom" and "sovereignty" exist in a collaborative relationship with others. Ukraine is now defending its neighbours' freedom from an advancing Russia. Kyiv's resistance is benefiting Taiwan's freedom, too. Meanwhile, without help - especially from America - Ukraine would still fight on but, as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy admits, would find it hard. As speculations about negotiations and potential peace deals loom over 2025, the precise meaning of Ukraine's relationships will need to be defined. What does being an "ally" really mean today? What is a true "security order"? Will peace just mean, in the words of Olga Myrovych, CEO of the Lviv Media Forum, that Ukraine should "rest in peace"?

Just as Ukraine's resistance to Russia's invasion has reinvigorated some words, so it has shown up the shallowness of others. Many of the concepts that organise our political imagination have turned out to be feeble when it comes to enabling action against Russia's attack on the "international rules-based order". Indeed, that phrase is increasingly only used with irony marks attached. Joe Biden tried to invoke a cold war 2.0 standoff between "democracies" against "dictatorships". But plenty of democracies

across the world see the invasion as a far-off problem they know nothing about. Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Union, speaks emotively about Ukraine being part of the "European family"; however, when it comes to security, the EU has thus far been well meaning but impotent. Meanwhile, Nato's pledge of collective defence has always rested on America's resolve, which now looks too erratic to rely on.

As Ukraine prepares for possible negotiations, its leadership is asking what "guarantees" its partners can give. If "international order", "Europe" and even "Nato" are flaky concepts, how can guarantees be secured into something real? Ukrainians remember the Budapest memorandum of 1994, when Ukraine gave up its nuclear weapons in return for promises from Russia, the US and Britain to respect its borders. Everyone fears a repeat of those empty words. Even if Russia agrees to a ceasefire next year, what's to stop it rearming and attacking again? Russia's intent to destroy Ukraine is centuries old; it won't fade in 2025. In a world where so many familiar assumptions are crumbling, the only ultimate "guarantee" is for Ukraine to be well armed so that it can always resist a Russian invasion. In Kyiv this month, members of the European parliament subcommittee on self-defence, military intelligence officers, drone manufacturers, Ukrainian ministers and arms manufacturers discussed how to connect lofty political language to the reality of howitzers, drones and factory floors. The event, hosted by friends of the We Build Ukraine thinktank, was dedicated

to how Europe can envision a common defence industry to deter Russia. Much of the talk was about supply chains. Ukrainian drone manufacturers, for example, worry that Chinese sanctions on microchips will limit their production - would Taiwan be a more reliable supplier, they wondered. In this framing, abstract talk of "partnerships" is made tangible through secure supply chains or "friend-shoring".

The definition of economic blocs needs to change, too. "It was a sad revelation for us when we realised the EU is not a true union when it comes to industrial production," one Ukrainian expert told me. "All the countries compete with each other. That's a peacetime logic. In war, you need to direct and enable mass industrial capacity. Change regulations to make production easier; incentivise business to invest long term; unite university research with learning from the front-lines."

Ukraine can be at the hub of nations that recognise the Russian threat to their collective freedom, and that can change their industrial production and supply chain networks accordingly. These countries will probably be centred around north-eastern Europe, with Britain potentially in a vital role, but also will take in partners from Asia and beyond who see our existential interdependency. Instead of relying on ageing acronyms rife with political contradictions, Edward Lucas, of the Center for European Policy Analysis, says we need "coalitions of the willing, capable and threat aware".

As this new network comes into being, it will also need to dis-

rupt its adversaries' network. A new report by the Open Source Centre details Russia's reliance on howitzers to "kill its way" to victory in Ukraine. But the howitzers degrade fast without high-quality chromium to refresh the barrels. The chromium is supplied from outside Russia and so is vulnerable to highly targeted sanctions, export controls and more creative disruption. Russia also needs central Asian gun cotton to make the propellants that fire the artillery. A recent PBS investigative report from Simon Ostrovsky delved into mysterious explosions at a gun cotton warehouse in Uzbekistan. Were the Ukrainians responsible? The Americans? Or was it the Russians, angry that the Uzbeks might sell the gun cotton to western powers that help Ukraine? As this new industrial warfare becomes central, we will have many more stories about its shadow wars. Ultimately, script writers will need to focus on it, too: the new Bonds and Slow Horses will be dedicated to its invariable moral compromises, hidden heroism and dirty secrets.

Indeed, the idea that freedoms and military production are so interdependent may jar with the pacifist instincts of some progressives. But here Ukraine can offer a pointed lesson. Ever since she won the Nobel peace prize, the Ukrainian human rights lawyer Oleksanda Matviichuk has been gracefully explaining to the world that even though, indeed because, she is a human rights activist, she also advocates for Ukraine's right to self-defence and to return fire inside Russia at the military bases that are being used to murder Ukrainian civilians. "law" is also an empty term if it can't be defended literally.

The Guardian

Why Trump is targeting Panama, Greenland, Canada

Alex Gangitano

PRESIDENT-ELECT Trump has spent parts of the holiday season vowing to take over the Panama Canal, calling for the US to buy Greenland from Denmark and suggesting Canada could become the 51st state. It all suggests Trump is focused on somehow expanding the US on his watch, though it's hard to tell how serious it all is.

Some Republicans think Trump is just trolling, while others see a strategic play related to furthering US national security. "The Panamanian issue is China. They're dominating the Western Hemisphere economically and financially and we've been standing by watching," a former Trump campaign official said. Panama has controlled the canal, which connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, for nearly 25 years. Trump, in floating the idea the US could take over the canal, complained of "exorbitant prices" and said the US is "being ripped off."

China has invested heavily in Panama, including in a number of construction deals, and manages two of Panama's five main ports. Trump implied in his complaints that countries like China were getting undue influence over the management of the canal. Panama President José Raúl Mulino pushed back on Trump's claims, noting rates to transit the canal are not decided "on a whim." Talk of buying Greenland can also be seen as a national security play.

The Arctic is a key region as the US looks to counter Russia and China, and it's becoming more contested as melting ice opens up new shipping routes. Panama has controlled the canal, which connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, for nearly 25 years. Trump, in floating the idea the US could take over the canal, complained of "exorbitant prices" and said the US is "being ripped off."

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Trump's repeated jabs at Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau using a US governor does look like trolling on one level. But Republicans watching on think the president-elect is also trying to win an advantage in trade negotiations. Trump has vowed to impose a 25 percent tariff on products imported from Canada, as well as Mexico, and has accused both countries of inaction or cross-border drug trafficking and crime. In a Christmas Day post, Trump called Trudeau "governor" and said the taxes in Canada are "far too high," claiming if Canada became the 51st state, taxes would be cut. He also suggested hockey great Wayne Gretzky should run for prime minister of Canada, saying the job is "soon to be known as the Governor of Canada."

Plenty of people in Canada have not seen Trump's online remarks as amusing. "It's pretty scary that he doesn't see issues with making threats like that to America's closest ally," said Matthew Lebo, a political science professor at the University of Western Ontario and a visiting professor at McGill University. Canadian leaders appear to be taking the remarks pretty seriously. After Trump's tariff threats, Trudeau flew down to Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla., to meet

with Trump on his home turf last month, Lebo noted, while Ontario Premier Doug Ford threatened to cut off energy supplies to the United States if Trump really imposed severe tariffs on Canadian exports.

"We will go to the full extent depending how far this goes. We will go to the extent of cutting off their energy, going down to Michigan, going down to New York State and over to Wisconsin," Ford said during a press conference following a virtual meeting with Trudeau, per CBS News. "I don't want this to happen, but my No. 1 job is to protect Ontario, Ontarians and Canadians as a whole since we're the largest province," Ford said. Lebo said some Canadian leaders aren't sure what to make of Trump's remarks or how to respond.

"You don't know which of the strategies is right for dealing with a bully. Do you be nice and give them something that they want, or do you try and threaten them back?" Lebo said. A new Leger poll, reported by the Canadian Press, found 13 percent of Canadians were open to the idea of joining the US - but that figure is "about the same range as the percent of Ukrainians who want to be part of Russia," Lebo noted. Democratic strategist Antjuan Seawright shrugged off Trump's focus on the three regions as "to some degree, a distraction tactic" after chaos on Capitol Hill last week over funding the government before last Friday's deadline. "It's power and control and extremism," Seawright said. "[It's] Donald Trump trying to have unchecked power, controlling the narrative and the conversation." Trump's team, for its part, suggested it is global leaders searching Trump out given his growing world power. "World leaders are flocking to the table because President Trump is already delivering on his promise to Make America Strong Again. When he officially takes office, foreign nations will think twice before ripping off our country, America will be respected again, and the whole world will be safer," Trump-Vance transition spokesperson Anna Kelly told The Hill in a statement. Trump's team also noted that Canada has already committed to securing the border to prevent drugs from coming into the US and said that Trump intends to curb Chinese economic aggression by securing the Panama Canal and Russian aggression by controlling Greenland.

Jimmy Carter had a second term. It just wasn't in the White House

Randall Balmer

AT a campaign event in Winston-Salem on the eve of the 1976 North Carolina Democratic primary, a voter asked then-candidate Jimmy Carter whether he was a "born again" Christian. Carter, a Southern Baptist Sunday-school teacher, replied that, yes, he was "born again," thereby sending a legion of journalists from outside the Bible belt to their Rolodexes to figure out what in the world he was talking about.

Carter sought throughout his life to act on the principles of his faith, which was defined in part by the extraordinary activism of 19th century evangelical Christians who worked assiduously on behalf of those Jesus called "the least of these." They were involved in peace crusades and helped to organize public schools so that the children of those less affluent could become upwardly mobile. Northern evangelicals worked for the abolition of slavery. They supported prison reform and women's suffrage.

Carter's progressive evangelicism was very much in that tradition. He was sensitive to racial inequalities from a young age and tried to address them - as school board member, as governor and as president. He supported women's equality, including the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. As president, Carter tried to nudge American foreign policy away from its reflexive Cold War dualism toward an emphasis on human rights. He recognized that if the United States were to have any meaningful relationship with Latin America, we needed to attenuate our colonialism, so he pushed through the ratification of the Panama Canal treaties. He advanced peace in the Middle East farther than any of his predecessors (or successors), and he appointed more women and people of color to federal office than any previous

president. Many environmentalists consider him the best president ever for their cause.

Carter's failure to win reelection in 1980 devastated him. He departed Washington for Plains, Ga., at 56, the youngest president to leave office since William Howard Taft. Rosalynn was especially embittered by the election loss. In one of our interviews decades after the 1980 election, Carter told me that in the course of his frequent reassurances to his wife that they still had productive years ahead of them, he began to believe his own rhetoric. He also conceded that if he had been president for four more years, that second term would not have been nearly so fruitful as the alternative turned out to be.

Carter's post-presidency began with a middle-of-the-night idea. In addition to a presidential library, Jimmy told Rosalynn, "We can start an adjacent institution, something like Camp David, where people can come who are involved in a war. I can offer to serve as a mediator, in Atlanta or perhaps in their countries. We might also teach how to resolve or prevent conflict." This would be an entirely new model for out-of-office presidents - a privately funded nonprofit center to advance his goals and allow him to address issues he would have pursued if he'd stayed in the White House.

In a list of basic principles for the center, Carter stipulated that it would be nonpartisan and that it would not duplicate the programs of other institutions, such as the United Nations. Most important, Carter wanted an "action agency," an institution devoted to change rather than simply "theoretical or academic analysis." The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, along with the Carter Center, was dedicated in Atlanta on Oct. 1, 1986, Carter's 62nd birth-

day. His faith undeniably informed every effort at the center. Carter told an interviewer in 1988 that the life of Jesus had always been his guide. "I don't see any disharmony in this life between evangelistic effort on the one hand and benevolent care of people who suffer or who are in need on the other," he said. "I think they are intimately tied together." Carter understood problems afflicting the world as spiritual challenges in part, noting that industrialized Western society had failed to adopt Christian principles of concern and caring. He believed that people of privilege, and especially people of faith, bore a special responsibility for those less fortunate, for those who suffer and are deprived. "That's where Jesus spent all his ministry," Carter said. Piety alone wasn't sufficient; followers of Jesus must live out their convictions with acts of charity.

Early on, Carter identified access to healthcare, including mental healthcare (one of Rosalynn's concerns), as a fundamental human right, noting at one point that 40,000 children die every day from preventable diseases. Using education and simple, low-cost methods, the Carter Center's health initiatives addressed "neglected tropical diseases": lymphatic filariasis, trachoma, schistosomiasis and malaria. Other programs targeted guinea worm and river blindness (onchocerciasis), extraordinary initiatives that have achieved near eradication of those diseases in regions where the Carter Center has been active.

Peace and conflict resolution, the second focus of the Carter Center, built on Carter's success in negotiating the Camp David accords. "We need to deal with other people with mutual respect," Carter told an audience at Messiah College in 1988, "and through that

kind of approach there can be peaceful resolution of differences through the use of diplomacy and negotiation, not through the use of military power." The center conducted programs on democracy and human rights and monitored elections in dozens of countries. Carter leveraged his relationships with world leaders to mediate various disputes, including those in Guyana, Ethiopia and Serbia. In 1994, Carter convinced Kim Il Sung to open North Korea's nuclear reactors to inspectors. In Haiti the following year, US military planes were headed toward the island when Carter, together with Colin Powell and Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, persuaded the military junta to abandon power.

Carter's persistent efforts at conflict resolution, dating back to the Camp David accords of 1978, were recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002. Jimmy and Rosalynn, who died in November 2023, extended their public service beyond the Carter Center, too - most notably with Habitat for Humanity, which Carter once described as "the most practical, tangible way I've ever seen to put Christian principles into action." During one of our conversations, Carter choked up when he told of completing a house for a woman and her family who had been living in an abandoned septic tank. Carter's alternative "second term" lasted for more than four decades. Out of the ashes of political annihilation, he became not just an elder statesman and world-renowned humanitarian but arguably the most consequential of modern former presidents.

James Laney, former president of Emory University, partner of the Carter Center, offered the best and most succinct characterization of the man from Plains. Carter, Laney remarked, was "the first president to use the White House as a stepping stone."

The Los Angeles Times

If popular culture is anything to go by, 2024 is the year we simply gave up

Kirsty Major

IF culture is the mirror that reflects the state of society, right now we're all looking a little dishevelled - and struggling to find the energy to care. The signs have been there for a while, with rumblings initially picked up by trend forecasters' finely tuned cultural seismometers. In 2021, Sean Monahan coined the term "the vibe shift" in his Substack to explain the transition from the self-controlled, self-improvement-obsessed worthiness of the 2010s to the messy decadence of the 2020s. Three years later, it feels like that earthquake has finally hit.

The text of the year was, of course, the album Brat by Charli xcx, and the image that summed it all up was from the lead single's music video: the pop star pouring a glass of red wine while standing on a vibrating power plate, spilling it down her white T-shirt and staring defiantly into the camera. In the background, actor Rachel Sennott scrolls on her phone on an exercise ball and actor and model Julia Fox vapes while curling a dumbbell. If not dancing, this is casually leaning on the grave of wellness culture. The message is: "It's OK to be a bit messy, physically and men-

tally, and let's have a good time while we're at it." While accepting a prize at the Wall Street Journal's Innovator awards, the musician said: "Luckily for me, the pendulum of culture swung in favour of messiness, personality and the niche."

In fashion, Miu Miu's spring collection featured stuffed and overflowing bags, and on Balenciaga's autumn runway, labels stuck out of the models' clothes. Successful advertising these days, according to brand strategy consultant Eugene Healey, is chaotic and entertaining. In a TikTok post, he said: "If brands are still going to sell me something I don't need, at least make a spectacle out of it." Long gone are the days of earnest and minimal millennial advertising such as Airbnb promising us we could "Belong Anywhere".

Along with the chaos, there is also indulgence, perhaps a symptom of our cultural long Covid - the excess being a response to the privations we experienced under lockdown. People have given up being vegan, everyone is smoking again, and if "girly pop summer" (featuring Chappell Roan and

Sabrina Carpenter alongside Charli xcx) was anything to go by, partying is back.

Meanwhile, the ultimate archetype of meaninglessness, the goth, made a return. Bill Skarsgård starred in the reboot of dark superhero film The Crow, Winona Ryder reprised her role as Beetlejuice's Lydia Deetz and vampy model, musician and social media chef (see indulgence) Gabbriette was in the ascendant.

The issue with foregoing all meaning and leaning into nihilism is that you can end up in some ethically dubious situations. When Nietzsche wrote his dire prediction for humanity's future, "there can be no doubt that morality will perish", he was surely thinking of the spectacle of convicted con artist Anna Sorokin and her ankle tag appearing on Dancing with the Stars. Our collective obsession with stories about scamming has morphed into an ironic open-armed embrace of the scammer.

The question is, are we really having a good time? In the third season of HBO's Industry (the New Yorker's pick for TV show of the year), copious amounts of

drugs, alcohol and sex fuel the endless accumulation of money and power, but none of it basked in the glow of the 80s' "greed is good" film and TV. Instead, each scene plays out as if lit by the most unsparing strip lighting. Characters don't lounge opulently puffing on cigars inside high-end New York restaurants, instead huddling outside London office blocks chugging on cigarettes as if to stave off the next panic attack.

If the 2010s were a battle cry against the excesses of capitalism, social injustice and climate breakdown, popular culture in 2024 seemed to have given up the fight. Of course, the cultural pendulum will no doubt swing back again. In his missive on the next "vibe shift", written after Donald Trump's re-election, Monahan writes: "The vibe shift this time is a story about progressive millennials realising that when they declared total victory for their politics in 2020 - it was a pyrrhic victory ... They have to get into the trenches and convince people that their interpretations of reality are correct." It sounds like a slog, but for now, grab a sweet treat or a glass of wine. There is always next year.

Elon Musk wants to ‘delete’ many Americans’ financial lifeline

Sharon McGowan

NEARLY every exit poll conducted on Election Day found that, more than any other issues, voters' concerns about the economy helped to return Donald Trump to the White House and put Republicans back in charge of both houses of Congress.

Americans who felt the sting of inflation and who had trouble making ends meet, as companies steadily increased prices for essential goods like groceries and clothing, voted in the hopes that a new administration and new Congress would bring relief for their families.

So it is especially surprising that one of the first federal agencies to come under scrutiny from the incoming administration is one that has returned billions of dollars to many of the same consumers who were counting on leaders in Washington to look out for their wallets.

On Nov. 27, Elon Musk - who, along with Vivek Ramaswamy, has been tasked by President-Elect Trump with running a new Department of Government Efficiency - posted on his platform X that he wants to "Delete CFPB," referring to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The agency, Musk said, was part of a problem of "too many duplicative regulatory agencies" in Washington. But there are no other agencies in the federal government returning money to Americans' bank accounts in the way the CFPB does.

Since its founding, the agency has returned more than \$19 billion in cash to people who have been scammed by financial institutions, including predatory payday lenders and even some of the largest banks in the country. It has done so under Republican and

Democratic presidents, including major actions against Wells Fargo and Equifax during President Trump's first term in office, which, combined, returned \$425 million to consumers. (Those actions both began under the Obama administration, but Trump's CFPB directors oversaw the execution of those fines.)

The money recovered is made available to those who have been impacted by the institutions' wrongdoing through the CFPB's victims' relief fund. To date, more than 200 million Americans have been eligible for payments from the fund. The agency has also cancelled many consumers' debts altogether and reduced loan principles for many others.

In fact, just days after Musk posted his message on X, the CFPB announced that it was mailing refund checks to more than 4 million people who were scammed by so-called credit repair companies, including Lexington Law and CreditRepair.com, which illegally collected fees from consumers seeking relief for the effects of economic woes weighing down them and their families. The companies will pay \$2.7 billion in consumer redress and civil penalties; \$1.8 billion of that will go directly to those who lost money as a result of the scam.

It's no wonder the agency enjoys broad, bipartisan support, with more than eight in 10 Americans supporting the CFPB's various enforcement actions. In red and blue states, Americans seem to support returning money to those who have been cheated.

The agency's impact is felt in other ways, too. In Oklahoma, CFPB collected evidence that helped retired Lt. Col. Susan Parisi in her

fight against loan company GreenSky - which scammed her into a high-interest loan she never agreed to. The CFPB found that GreenSky was using "deceptive" and "fraudulent" tactics and ordered the company to return \$9 million to consumers. My organization is representing Lt. Col. Parisi in her class action on behalf of others who were scammed by GreenSky.

So why is an agency that has been so effective, and returned so much money to so many people, being targeted for "deletion?" Because, in the course of holding wrongdoers accountable, it has crossed paths with some of the most powerful people in the country.

Musk's post on X, for example, seems to have been prompted by complaints from Marc Andreessen, a venture capitalist whose companies have been sanctioned (and, in the case of LendUp Loans, shuttered) because of CFPB investigations and actions. Andreessen accused the agency of "terrorizing financial institutions," and was clearly infuriated when the CFPB found that LendUp had misled customers about high-interest loans and overcharged US service personnel.

Fortunately, neither Musk nor the incoming administration can completely eliminate the CFPB, whose funding comes from the Federal Reserve in a model, upheld by the US Supreme Court, that is meant to protect it from political meddling. Republicans and Democrats alike should ensure that firewall remains in place, and the CFPB remains on the job, if they're serious about providing real, meaningful economic relief to Americans.

Political stability vital to economic growth: Gilani

LAHORE (APP): Senate Chairman Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has agreed with the LCCI (Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry) leadership that political stability is the cornerstone of economic progress and prosperity.

Talking to business community here at the LCCI on Monday, he urged the LCCI leadership to establish robust connections with the political parties. He promised to arrange direct meetings with the heads of Senate Standing Committees and federal ministers.

He said that business growth, shining prospects for commerce and economic development are matters close to his heart. He mentioned that as Prime Minister, he had focused on industry, trade and economic advancement. He called for collaborative efforts to address challenges and seize opportunities.

The Senate Chairman said that a public-private partnership is important in achieving economic development. He underscored the need for policies that promote manufacturing, value-addition, innovation and renewable energy.

“Hydropower is the best option for affordable and environment-friendly energy,” he said, adding that agriculture must also remain a top priority.”

Gilani stressed the importance of increasing agricultural productivity, addressing issues such as adulteration in seeds and pesticides and ensuring the availability of quality inputs.

“Everyone must pay taxes”, he said and called for reforms to ensure fairness and transparency in the taxation system.

Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani supported LCCI’s proposals to restructure or privatize loss-making state-owned enterprises, which have consistently drained the national exchequer.

Chairman Gilani commended the chamber’s hospitality and its significant role in the national economy. “I maintain strong connections with chambers across the country, and LCCI’s contribution to the economy is remarkable,” he remarked.

In his welcome address, LCCI President Mian Abuzar Shad said that like the Senate, the Lahore Chamber has also formed



LAHORE: Chairman Senate Yusuf Raza Geelani presented with souvenirs by Lahore Chamber of Commerce President Mian Abuzar Shad and Vice President Shahab Nazir.

Nigaah Art Awards 2024 organized



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Nigaah Art Awards 2024 celebrated a magnificent evening of artistic achievement, bringing together some of the most talented individuals in the art world. Held in the vibrant heart of Karachi at Mohatta Palace, the event honored exceptional artists across various categories.

The winners of the Nigaah Art Awards 2024 are as follows:

Abstract: Farrukh

Shahab, Printmaking: Laila Rehman, Miniature: Nusra Latif Qureshi, Still Life: Irfan Cheema, 3D Sculpture: Amin Guljee, Landscape: Shahla Rafi, Figurative: Ali Azmat, Portraiture: Buland Iqbal, Photography: Malika Abbas Noshervani, Drawing: Madiha Hyder, Emerging Artist: Shamir Iqtidar, Curator: Noor Ahmed, Art Critic: Nusrat Khawaja, Calligraphy: Muzammil Ruheel, Lifetime Achievement Awards: Wahab

Arjumand Faisel, Dr Rahat Naveed Masud, Amra Ali, Noorjehan Bilgrami, and Taqueer Muhajir, who brought their expertise and discerning eye to selecting this year’s outstanding winners.

The evening featured mesmerizing fire dance and dhol performances, a captivating folk music recital, a reading of book excerpts, and an auction of paintings to support art student scholarships for the Taqueer Muhajir scholarship program, adding to the event’s vibrant atmosphere.

The Nigaah Art Awards continue to serve as a platform to promote and honor artistic talent, fostering a deeper appreciation for the arts in Pakistan and beyond. This year’s winners exemplify the incredible diversity and vitality of the art world, inspiring the next generation of artists to push boundaries and tell their unique stories through their craft.

WCCIS team visits SIMAP

SIALKOT (APP): President Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Sialkot (WCCIS) Dr. Mariam Nouman led a delegation of surgical committee members of WCCIS to meet with the Surgical Instruments Manufacturers Association of Pakistan (SIMAP).

The meeting, hosted by Chairman of SIMAP Zeeshan Tariq along with other executive members, focused on fostering collaboration between WCCIS and SIMAP.

Discussions centered on exploring opportunities to support women entrepreneurs in the surgical instruments sector, enhancing innovation, and strengthening industry representation.

Both organizations emphasized the importance of capacity building, skill development, and aligning with global market standards to boost visibility for women-led businesses in international markets.

WCCIS extends its gratitude to Chairman SIMAP Zeeshan Tariq and the SIMAP team for their warm hospitality and valuable insights.

Asia stocks mostly down after Wall Street losses

TOKYO (AFP/APP): Asia stocks mostly fell in thin holiday trade on Monday after tech losses killed off the traditional year-end lift on Wall Street at the end of last week.

The “Santa Claus rally” got off to a good start but US stocks then fell across the board on Friday, with the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq both dropping more than one percent.

Tech stocks led the way, with Elon Musk’s electric car giant Tesla closing around five percent lower and AI chipmaker Nvidia shedding around two percent.

Weighing on investor sentiment were worries about the pace of US interest rate cuts and possible higher import tariffs under incoming US president Donald Trump.

“As US stock markets concluded with a downturn on Friday, Asia-Pacific markets are bracing for a slippery penultimate trading day of 2024,” said Stephen Innes at SPI

Asset Management.

“With US (bond) yields climbing and liquidity essentially non-existent, there’s always the potential for outsized moves. This comes during a critical phase of year-end rebalancing, intensified by hefty equity positions across portfolios,” Innes said in a note.

In Tokyo, the Nikkei was down 0.75 percent at 40,020.00 points on the last day of trading until January 6.

The yen was little changed after hitting 158.08 against the dollar on Thursday, the lowest in almost six months.

That came after Bank of Japan governor Kazuo Ueda failed to give a clear signal on a possible interest rate increase next month.

In Seoul, Jeju Air shares tumbled more than eight percent after one of its planes crashed in South Korea on Sunday, killing all but two of the 181 people on board.

South Korea’s transport ministry said on Monday it was “reviewing plans to conduct a special inspection on (Boeing) B737-800 aircraft” after the crash.

South Korea was also hit with further political turmoil, with authorities issuing an arrest warrant for suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Yoon briefly imposed martial law this month and was then impeached by parliament. Lawmakers also impeached his acting successor Han Duck-soo last week.

Chinese stocks also opened lower on Monday, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index down 0.09 percent at 3,397.12.

China’s purchasing managers’ index (PMI) for manufacturing was due on Tuesday.

The reading was expected to stay at 50.3, above the 50 line dividing expansion and contraction, according to Bloomberg.

Rupee sheds 01 paisa against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani rupee on Monday depreciated by 01 paisa against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.47 against the previous day’s closing of Rs278.46.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs278.05 and Rs279.55, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 06 paisa to close at Rs290.21 against the last day’s closing of Rs290.15, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.76, whereas a surge of 99 paisa was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs349.96 as compared to the last day’s closing of Rs348.97.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham remained unchanged to close at Rs75.81, while the Saudi Riyal went up by 01 paisa and closed at Rs74.16.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Six ships, Cussler, African Bari Bird, Arotic Tern, Rui Ning-9, Simaisma and Jasco Changhou, scheduled to load/offload Container, Cement, Palm oil, Gas oil, LNG and Coal, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal, FOTCO oil Terminal, Port Gas Terminal and Power Electric Port Terminal respectively on Monday.

Meanwhile, three more ships, Amabiko, Ivan-6 and Al-Khuwair also arrived at outer anchorage during last 24 hours.

Eleven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them three ships, Cussler, Arctic Tern and Mp Mr Tanker-1 are expected to sail on today afternoon.

A cargo volume of 163,383 tonnes, comprising 148,593 tonnes imports cargo and 14,790 tonnes export cargo carried in 2,470 Containers (1,600 TEUs Imports & 870 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

Twenty One ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them four ships, ST.Nikolai, Aramon, DM Jade and Al-Khuwair are expected to take berths at LCT, FOTCO, EVTL and EETL respectively on Monday.

PSX witnessed bullish trend, gains 3,907 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bullish trend on Monday, gaining 3,907.82 more points, a positive change of 3.51 percent, closing at 115,259.00 points as compared to 111,351.18 points on the last trading day.

A total of 1,059,020,119 shares were traded during the day as compared to 815,920,043 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs40.889 billion against Rs32.917 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 465 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 333 of them recorded gains and 84 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 48 companies remained

unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Energyco PK with 125,613,935 shares at Rs7.44 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 111,551,930 shares at Rs1.83 per share and Bank of Punjab with 84,182,656 shares at Rs10.47 per share.

Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs351.23 per share price, closing at Rs21,133.87, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs92.12 rise in its per share price to Rs8,980.56.

Khyber Textile Mills Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs60.39 per share closing at Rs578.73 followed by PIA Holding Company Limited with Rs58.78 decline to

close at Rs832.28.

Gold rates dip by Rs.600 to Rs272,600 per tola: The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs600 on Monday and was traded at Rs272,600 against it sale at Rs273,200 the previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs514 to Rs233,711 from Rs234,225 whereas that of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up to Rs214,235 from Rs214,706 respectively.

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 decreased by \$6 to \$2,614 against \$2,620, the Association reported.

Leopards Courier wins Best Logistics Partner for E-Commerce 2024 award



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Leopards Courier Services has proudly been named the Best Logistics Partner for E-Commerce 2024 at the prestigious Global Digital Awards organized by the Pakistan E-Commerce Association. Winning this award through public voting highlights Leopards’ leadership in the logistics and e-commerce industries and reaffirms its reputation as Pakistan’s number one courier and Logistics Company.

The ceremony also recognized Zahid Ali Khosa, Vice President Commercial of Leopards Courier Services, who was honored as an “Honorable Guest”

and presented with a commemorative shield. Adding to the celebrations, he also participated in a high-profile panel discussion, sharing expert insights on the future of logistics and e-commerce in Pakistan.

In another milestone for the company, Abdul Aleem Sheikh, Head of Marketing & Communications, received the Innovative Marketing Leader of 2024 award, reflecting Leopards’ excellence in driving creativity and innovation within the sector.

Leopards Courier Services is not only revolutionizing the logistics landscape but is also contributing significantly to Pakistan’s economic progress. The award serves as a testament to the

company’s unwavering commitment to quality, innovation, and customer satisfaction.

Speaking about this achievement, Rizwan Saadat, CEO, and Jehangir Shahid, Chairman, dedicated the award to the entire Leopards family, acknowledging their relentless hard work and dedication that has positioned Leopards Courier Services as Pakistan’s largest courier and logistics company.

This recognition highlights Leopards’ transformative journey and its pivotal role in empowering businesses, enhancing e-commerce connectivity, and supporting economic growth across Pakistan and beyond.

PC Legacy Skardu: A stunning new addition to Pakistan’s hospitality landscape opens in Skardu Valley

F.P. Report

SKARDU: The Pearl-Continental Hospitality Division of Hashoo Group, one of Asia’s leading hospitality service providers, in partnership with renowned orthopedic surgeon Dr. Syed Imran Ali Shah, proudly announces the opening of PC Legacy Skardu, an upscale hotel poised to redefine the hospitality landscape in the region and open new avenues for tourism in Skardu.

Located just minutes from Skardu International Airport, the hotel offers

unparalleled convenience for travelers from both within Pakistan and abroad, thanks to direct flights connecting many countries to the region. With a dedicated 24/7 airport shuttle service, guests can step off their flights and immediately experience luxurious surroundings, making PC Legacy Skardu an ideal destination for both domestic and international tourists seeking adventure or relaxation in one of the world’s most scenic destinations.

PC Legacy Skardu stands out for its distinctive design, personally

envisioned by Dr. Shah, who ensured every detail reflects a perfect harmony between modern sophistication and the untamed beauty of Skardu. The Rafsal Skyline Tower and Restaurant, an iconic feature of the property, includes a ground-floor gym, two luxury suites, and a rooftop space that offers uninterrupted views of the majestic Karakoram mountain range.

The hotel offers a range of accommodations, including Standard Rooms, Junior Suites, Executive Suites, and Chalets, catering to all

types of travelers. Each room is equipped with air conditioning, central heating, complimentary Wi-Fi, and 24/7 room service to ensure maximum comfort and convenience.

Dining at PC Legacy Skardu is a highlight, with guests able to enjoy expertly prepared local and international cuisines at the all-day dining restaurant or breathtaking views at the rooftop eatery. For those seeking a more casual setting, the on-site coffee shop provides a relaxing space for light refreshments. Business and leisure trav-

elers alike will appreciate the state-of-the-art fitness facilities and versatile indoor and outdoor event spaces. Guests eager to explore Skardu’s renowned attractions can avail themselves of bespoke tour packages provided by Pearl Tours and Travel.

Speaking about the partnership, Dr. Syed Imran Ali Shah remarked, “PC Legacy Skardu is an embodiment of the beauty and heritage of Skardu Valley and a realization of my personal vision. The design reflects my belief in blending modern com-

fort with the awe-inspiring surroundings of the region. It’s a space where guests can truly connect with the soul of this extraordinary destination.”

Bastien Blanc, CEO of Hashoo Group’s Hospitality Division, added, “PC Legacy Skardu is a milestone in our journey to redefine hospitality in Pakistan. This property embodies our commitment to delivering exceptional experiences by combining the region’s natural wonders with world-class service. We are confident it will set a benchmark for hospitality in Skardu and

beyond, welcoming domestic and international tourists from the many countries now connected with direct flights.”

The hotel is ideally located for travelers eager to explore the region’s unique attractions, such as the serene Upper and Lower Kachura Lakes, the ethereal sands of Katpana Lake and Cold Buddha Rock, and the historic Kharpoch Fort.

PC Legacy complements the Hashoo Group’s diverse hospitality portfolio by providing modern comfort paired with cul-

tural authenticity, offering a distinctive experience that aligns with both the approachable midscale charm of Hotel One and the refined luxury of Pearl-Continental Hotels and Resorts. With the success of PC Legacy Hunza, renowned for its breathtaking views of Rakaposhi, and the upcoming PC Legacy Hyderabad, the brand continues to set new standards in hospitality, celebrating the distinctive character of its destinations and creating memorable experiences across Pakistan.



In brief

Osaka has to 'scrap a little' for season-opening win in Auckland

A U C K L A N D (AFP/APP): Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka made a winning straight-sets start to her season Monday as she strives to rediscover the form that took her to world number one. The Japanese star has struggled for consistency since returning to the court a year ago after the birth of daughter Shai in July 2023. Now ranked 57, she stressed on Sunday that the fire to win still burned brightly and she was confident of revisiting her former glories. Now under the wing of Serena Williams' long-time coach Patrick Mouratoglou, the 27-year-old put in a solid performance at the Auckland Classic to overcome Israel's Lina Glushko, ranked 221, 6-4, 6-4. But she to dig deep with Glushko making her work hard in the rallies. Osaka converted the only break point she had in a tight first set and raced to a 3-1 lead in the second. But Glushko then reeled off three games in a row before Osaka regrouped to win the next three in windy conditions for the 85-minute victory. "It was good to have to, I guess, scrap a little for the first round," Osaka said. "I just kept trying to tell myself 'one point at a time,' and try not to get discouraged. Thankfully it came out in my favour at the end." She will next play Austria's Julia Grabher who saved a match point in beating Spanish qualifier Leyre Romero Gormaz 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (9/7). In other action, fellow Japanese player Nao Hibino outlasted Germany's Jule Niemeier 6-3, 6-4 while Dane Clara Tauson beat Italy's Lucrezia Stefanini 6-2, 6-3. Top seeds Madison Keys and Elise Mertens begin their campaigns on Tuesday, as do former Grand Slam winners Emma Raducanu and Sofia Kenin.

Record 351,000 spectators flock to 4th Test

MELBOURNE (INP): The blockbuster clash against India on Monday became the best attended Test in Australia's history as fans flocked to the Melbourne Cricket Ground for the final day. Early on day five of the fourth Test, a bumper crowd of 51,371 had swelled the total number of spectators since the start of the match on Boxing Day to 351,700, with still more expected through the gates. That beat the previous record of 350,534 at the same ground during the 1936-37 Ashes series against England, when Donald Bradman ruled the sport and Tests were played over six days. "Thank you, Melbourne. An Australian cricketing record, an MCG record and history made," Cricket Australia tweeted. In terms of Boxing Day Tests, the previous record was 271,865 during the 2013-14 Ashes. "I think what's been particularly special about this series is the number of India fans, from not just India but all around the world," Cricket Australia chief Nick Hockley told reporters during the Test. "I have met fans from the UK, from Canada, from the US. "Obviously it is a fantastic time of year but it talks to the MCG has almost got this spiritual place in cricketing folklore."

Australia win thriller to take series lead over India

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Australia beat India by 184 runs in a thrilling conclusion to the fourth Test in Melbourne to take a 2-1 lead going into the final match of the series. India were set a target of 340 in 92 overs and battled cautiously throughout the innings with little ambition to chase an unlikely victory. But a sensational bowling performance in the evening session saw Australia take the final seven wickets for just 34 runs as India were bowled out for 155 in the final hour. The tourists slipped to 33-3 but opener Yashasvi Jaiswal looked intent on securing a hard-fought draw for India before he was caught behind off Pat Cummins for 84 from 208 balls with 21 overs remaining. Jaiswal had battled through a wicketless afternoon session alongside wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant, who made 30 from 104 balls - but they were the only men to pass double figures. Pant eventually ran out of patience and slogged Travis Head to long-on for another wasteful dismissal and his departure after tea sparked the

collapse. Cummins and Scott Boland finished with three wickets each while spinner Nathan Lyon took two after his batting heroics, falling for 41 in the second over of the day as Australia were all out for 234. He was bowled by Jasprit Bumrah, who finished with 5-57 in another scintillating performance. The series concludes in Sydney from 2 January, where a win would secure Australia's place in the World Test Championship final alongside South Africa. Cummins stars in classic win In front of a record attendance for a Test match in Australia - with 373,691 spectators at the MCG over the five days - captain Cummins delivered another masterclass with the ball and with his tactics. India openers Jaiswal and captain Rohit Sharma started slowly to set the tone for the team's approach, battling to 25-0 from 16 overs with just 12 scoring shots played within the first 90 balls. However Cummins' double-wicket maiden in the 17th over burst the door open for

Australia, as Rohit edged to gully for nine and KL Rahul was caught at slip for a duck. Three further maidens followed before Mitchell Starc removed Virat Kohli for five on the stroke of lunch with India firmly on the back foot. But after the break they were thwarted by resistance from Pant and Jaiswal, who both adapted to the situation by calming their usual aggressive approach. Their fourth-wicket stand of 88 was watchful and looked like saving the game until a stroke of brilliance from Cummins saw him throw the ball to part-time spinner Head. Pant could not resist attacking and clubbed a short delivery to Mitchell Marsh on the boundary which ignited Australia and opened the gates for their seamers to pounce on a nervous middle-to-lower order. Ravindra Jadeja was caught behind off Boland, first-innings centurion Nitish Kumar Reddy edged Lyon to slip and when Cummins landed the hammer blow with Jaiswal edging a well-directed bouncer behind, it felt as if India's hopes departed with him. Jaiswal stands alone amid



Australia celebrate the MCG win.

India collapse The pressure continues to mount on senior players in India's top order - not least skipper Rohit, after another poor Test with 12 runs from his two innings. Kohli was also out to a loose shot, flailing outside his off stump while appearing to be caught in two minds about how to approach the innings. But Jaiswal, after his first-innings 82, held firm and demonstrated his ability to adjust his game when required with another gritty knock. The 23-year-old only hit eight fours in his 208-ball stay and dis-

played great maturity in helping Pant curb his own attacking instincts. He was visibly unhappy with his dismissal as he walked past umpire Joel Wilson, who had initially given him not out. Australia requested a review and third umpire Sharfuddoula Saikat recommended Wilson's decision be overturned because of a deflection he could see on the slow-motion reply despite ultra-edge technology not showing a spike. Washington Sundar provided more stubborn resistance after Jaiswal's departure with his unbeaten five from 45 balls, but

the lower order was blown away, with the last three wickets falling in the space of four overs. Australia were only an over away from the second new ball but it was not required as both Akash Deep and Bumrah fell to Boland before Lyon claimed the final wicket with Mohammed Siraj pinned lbw for a duck. India still have a chance of reaching the World Test Championship final but their fate is now out of their own hands. They must triumph in Sydney and hope Sri Lanka win the series against Australia that starts at the end of January.

Duffy, Hay heroics secure T20 series for New Zealand over Sri Lanka

MOUNT MAUNGANUI (AFP): Crucial wickets to Jacob Duffy and a rollicking cameo with the bat by Mitchell Hay saw New Zealand beat Sri Lanka to wrap up their Twenty20 series with a game to spare at Mount Maunganui on Monday. New Zealand made 186-5 in their 20 overs, with player-of-the-match Hay cracking an unbeaten 41 from 19 deliveries. Sri Lanka in reply were all out for 141 with Duffy taking four wickets for a miserly 15 runs, including the tourists' top scorers Kusal Perera for 48 and Pathum Nissanka for 37. "I said at the start whoever could use the wind the best would do pretty well, and we were able to do that with the bat," New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner said, while also praising Duffy's bowling. "Every time I bring him back he gets a pole. "The best way to slow a run rate down is to take wickets and that's what we were able to do in the middle." The 45-run victory, following their eight-run win on Saturday put New Zealand 2-0 up in the three-match series. "I'm really disappointed with the results," Sri Lankan captain Charith Asalanka said, adding his side needed to adapt more quickly to New Zealand pitches. "They're more bouncy than at home, that's the main thing, and we have to adjust to that. At the



same time they (New Zealand) were brilliant." Sri Lanka started their run race cautiously with eight off the first two overs before Nissanka launched into New Zealand's strike bowler Matt Henry, taking 16 off his next over. But, no sooner had Sri Lanka started to fire, Santner came into the attack into the fifth over and removed Kusal Mendis for 10 with his first delivery. Nissanka and Perera had lifted the score to 71 by the 10th over when Duffy, who turned the first game in New Zealand's favour, again made a crucial breakthrough. A slower delivery to Nissanka was scooped to Henry at fine leg and the Sri Lankan talisman was gone for 37. When Perera was bowled at the start of the 16th over it was the beginning of the end for Sri Lanka as their last seven wickets fell for just 14 runs. New Zealand, who again lost the toss and were told to bat first, produced a steady performance until Hay opened up with three overs remaining. In the final 18 deliveries New Zealand scored 43 runs, 35 of them coming from Hay as he atoned for his first-ball duck in game one. After New Zealand lost Rachin Ravindra for just one early, Tim Robinson and Mark Chapman put on 69 for the second wicket. But in the 10th over, after belting the first ball from Wanindu Hasaranga over the midwicket fence, Robinson misread the next delivery and was bowled for 41. Another "wrong 'un" from Hasaranga undid Chapman, who was stumped for 42 off 29 deliveries. Hasaranga returned the best figures for Sri Lanka with 2-28.

Salah 'far away' from new Liverpool deal

LONDON (Agencies): Liverpool winger Mohamed Salah says he is "far away" from signing a new deal at the Premier League club. Salah, 32, is out of contract at the end of the season and can enter negotiations with non-English clubs on 1 January over a free transfer once his deal expires. The Egyptian scored his 20th goal of the season as Liverpool beat West Ham 5-0 at the London Stadium on Sunday to extend their lead at the top of the table to eight points. Asked about his future following the victory, Salah told Sky Sports: "No, we are far away from that [contract] and I don't want to put anything in the media. "The only thing on my mind is I want Liverpool to win the league and I want to be part of that. "I will do my best for the team to win the trophy. There is a few other teams catching up with us and we need to stay focused and humble and go again." Salah, club captain Virgil van Dijk and England defender Trent Alexander-Arnold are all out of contract at the end of the season. Liverpool boss Arne Slot says he is not concerned that the trio can, in theory, sign pre-contract agreements with foreign clubs from 1 January. "I think I have a lot of control over what they do," Slot said. "If they're on a training pitch, if they're in a meeting with me... but talking about the private lives, I don't have control about them. "I have control to a certain extent over them, from what I expect from them on the pitch, and I'm really pleased to see what Virgil brings, what Trent brings and what Mo (Salah) brings." Earlier this season, Salah said he was "disappointed" by the club's failure to offer him a new deal. After Liverpool's win against Manchester City earlier this month, Salah said he played the game against Pep Guardiola's side as if it were the last time he would face them. Former Liverpool midfielder Danny Murphy says he is still confident Salah will remain at Anfield. "I hope it's a little bit of gameplay in terms of the negotiations (with Liverpool)," Murphy told Match of the Day. "Every Liverpool supporter wants him to stay and I've got a really positive feeling that he'll stay and they'll get it done. "They're just taking their time - these things do when you're talking about huge amounts of money. "He's the most important player Liverpool have at the moment. They've got to get it signed off."

Main draw matches of Tennis C'ships on Tuesday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The stage is set for the main draw of the 10th Begum Kulsum Saifullah Khan National Ranking Tennis Championships 2024 as the final round of qualifiers concluded at the PTF-SDA Tennis Complex, Islamabad on Monday. In the Men's Singles Qualifying Final Round, players including Rayank Khan, Abdul Basit, Murtaza Hussain, Mujahid, M. Haziq Asim,

Ahtesham Humayun, M. Yahya, M. Talha Khan and Omer Jawad emerged victorious, earning their spots in the main draw. The tournament, which honours the memory of Begum Kulsum Saifullah Khan, mother of PTF Patron Senator Salim Saifullah Khan, has attracted over 200 entries nationwide across six categories that include Men's Singles, Men's Doubles, Ladies' Singles, Boys' 18 & Under Singles, Boys' 14

& Under Singles and Boys' 12 & Under Singles. Pakistan's 's top-ranked tennis stars, including Aqeel Khan, Muhammad Shoaib, Muzamil Murtaza, Muhammad Abid, Barkatullah, Shahzad Khan, Yousaf Khalil, Heera Ashiq, Meheq Khokhar, Amna Ali Qayum, Sheeza Sajid and nd Soha Ali are also featuring in the event. The main draw matches will commence on Tuesday at 9:30 am.

Sialkot to face Peshawar in final of Quaid-e-Azam Trophy

KARACHI (APP): Sialkot will take on Peshawar in the final of the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy 2024-25 after the third triangular stage match between Sialkot and Lahore Whites was drawn at the National Bank Stadium in Karachi on Monday. The five-day final will be played at the UBL Sports Complex in Karachi from 2 January, 2025. Resuming their first innings at the overnight score of 628 for nine, Lahore Whites were bundled out for 639 in 153.1 overs, with opening batter Ali Zaryab returning undefeated on 206. For Sialkot, Shahzaib

Bhatti took the last wicket to fall and ended up taking five wickets for 236 runs in 57.1 overs. In turn, starting their second innings with a deficit of 174 runs, Sialkot were 260 for six in 67 overs when both the teams shook hands for a draw. The highlight of the innings was opening batter Azan Awais (121, 169b, 17x4s, 1x6) scoring a century. The left-handed batter also scored a century (168, 293b, 19x4s) in the first innings. The 20-year-old batter is currently leading the batting charts with 807 runs from seven matches, which included four centuries and two

half-centuries. Scores in brief: Match draw between Sialkot and Lahore Whites at the National Bank Stadium. Sialkot 465 all out, 119.3 overs (Azan Awais 168, Ashir Mehmood 101, Mohsin Riaz 51; Mohammad Waheed 5-124, Hikmatullah 3-83) and 260-6, 67 overs (Azan Awais 121, Mohsin Riaz 57 not out; Mohammad Ahsan 2-47). Lahore Whites 639 all out, 153.1 overs (Ali Zaryab 206 not out, Imran Darg 132, Obaid Shahid 121, Tayyab Tahir 47; Shahzaib Bhatti 5-236, Amad Butt 2-116).

Clinical Swiatek romps as Tsitsipas crashes at United Cup

PERTH (AFP): Iga Swiatek romped to an emphatic victory in her season-opening match at the United Cup Monday, but Stefanos Tsitsipas crashed as Kazakhstan upset Greece to make the knockout round of the mixed-team tournament. Five-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek was on court for the first time since news broke in late November that she served a one-month ban for a doping violation. But the Pole quickly shook off any nerves in Sydney with a 6-1, 6-0 thrashing of Norway's Malene Helgo, needing just 62 minutes for the demolition job. "Pleased with everything, honestly. I'm happy for sure with the performance," said the world number two. "It's not always easy to play for your country, sometimes the pressure is a bit bigger. "I feel good, I feel happy, happy I can play tennis overall," she added. "I'm just going step by step and we'll see what's next." The 23-year-old tested positive for the heart medication trimetazidine (TMZ) in an out-of-competition sample in August when she was ranked number one. However, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) accepted that the violation

was not intentional and she escaped with a one-month sanction. While she was in electric form, Greek star Tsitsipas had a day to forget. He is coming off a mediocre 2024 in which his ranking dropped to its current 11 from a career-high three and was hoping for a confidence-boosting fresh start in Perth. But he was stunned 6-4, 7-6 (7/0) by 78th-ranked Alexander Shevchenko. Tried hard Kazakh world number six and 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina then survived a late wobble before burying Greek hopes with a 6-4, 6-3 defeat of Maria Sakkari. "I'm really happy for the team," said Rybakina, now working with Novak Djokovic's former coach Goran Ivanisevic. "We all tried hard. "It was a tough match for me today and I'm so happy to be in the quarter-finals." Rybakina took the first set and led 5-0 in the second, but the former world number three Sakkari won three games in a row to threaten a comeback. Rybakina came through on her third match point as Sakkari mis-hit an overhead after 85 minutes. "At 5-0 you have nothing to lose, she played more

aggressively and hit some good shots," said Rybakina. Shevchenko called his defeat of a sluggish Tsitsipas "one of the best" of his career. "He was not at his best today. But I played really well and found the moment to win that match," he said. "It will definitely go in my record as one of my best wins." Defending champions Germany, led by Alexander Zverev, face China in the Perth evening session. In Sydney, Katie Boulter led Britain to victory over Argentina with all three teams in the group, which also includes hosts Australia, still in contention for the knockout rounds. World number 24 Boulter took 86 minutes to take down 100th-ranked Nadia Podoroska 6-2, 6-3. Underdog Billy Harris looked on track to seal the tie for Britain when he went a set up against Tomas Martin Etcheverry. But the Argentine, who lost heavily to Australia's Alex de Minaur at the weekend, rallied for a gutsy 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 win to send the tie to a deciding mixed doubles. Etcheverry fronted up again with Maria Carle to take on Boulter and Charles Broom, with the British pair coming out on top 7-6 (7/4), 7-5.

Shahidi, Bennett star as Afghanistan draw Zimbabwe Test

BULAWAYO (AFP): Afghanistan veteran Hashmatullah Shahidi and Zimbabwe rookie Brian Bennett starred as the first Test was drawn after a rain-shortened final day in Bulawayo on Monday. Shahidi claimed an Afghan record 246 runs at the end of a marathon innings while spinner Bennett took five wickets. Zimbabwe made 586 and 142-4 to lead Afghanistan by 29 runs at stumps after the tourists posted 699. Both first innings scores were national records. With Zimbabwe 88-4 in their second innings and 25 runs behind, batting stability was required and the unbeaten partnership of veterans Sean Williams (35) and Craig Ervine (22) provided it. Shahidi departed after being trapped leg before by Bennett, whose 5-95 were the best figures since the six-man Zimbabwe attack. The 30-year-old left-hand batter faced 474 balls in 694 minutes, and struck 21 fours at Queens Sports Club in the southwestern city.

His partnerships with Rahmat Shah (364 runs) and Afsar Zazai (211) ensured Afghanistan took a 113-run first innings lead. The previous highest Test score of Shahidi was 200 not out, also against Zimbabwe, in Abu Dhabi three years ago. Before the exit of Shahidi, wicketkeeper Zazai claimed a maiden Test century, hitting 113 before being caught at backward point by substitute Johnathan Campbell. The fall of Shahidi triggered a collapse with the final six Afghanistan wickets going for just 20 runs in four overs as the off spin of Bennett wreaked havoc. Bennett, a 21-year-old appearing in only his second Test, twice took wickets from successive balls only to be deprived of hat-tricks on both occasions. He also shone with the bat, making 110 not out in the first innings after Zimbabwe captain Ervine won the toss. Batting a second time, Zimbabwe put on 73 runs before an outside edge from

Joylord Gumbie (24) allowed Shahidi to make a simple catch in the slips. The fall of the wicket was followed almost immediately by mid-afternoon rain that led to a one hour delay. Test debutant Ben Curran, a son of deceased former Zimbabwe coach Kevin Curran and brother of England internationals Tom and Sam, made 41 before being run out. Gumbie, Curran and Takudzwanashe Kaitano (5) fell in the space of 14 balls, with spinner Zahir Khan taking two wickets, and Dion Myers (4) was bowled by teenage spinner Allah Ghazanfar. Brief scores Zimbabwe 586 in 135.2 overs and 142-4 in 34 overs (Ben Curran 41, Sean Williams 35 not out, Craig Ervine 22 not out; Zahir Khan 2-43) v Afghanistan 699 in 197 overs (Hashmatullah Shahidi 246, Rahmat Shah 234, Afsar Zazai 113; Brian Bennett 5-95) Result: Match drawn Toss: Zimbabwe



In brief

CSA officers visit Safe City

ISLAMABAD (APP): Undertraining officers from the 52nd Common batch of the Civil Services Academy Lahore on Monday visited Safe City Islamabad, where they were briefed on the advanced technology and operations enhancing the capital's safety and security. According to police spokesperson, the delegation visits the command-and-control center, the data hub unit, modern technology-equipped cameras, and the police operations center hall. The delegation received a comprehensive briefing on the procedures and advantages of this project. Furthermore, the delegation was informed that Safe City Islamabad is playing a significant role in various departments through modern techniques, including the Police Operations Center, Emergency Control Center, Data Hub Unit, Dispatch Control Center, E-Challan System, and the "Pucar-15" helpline. The delegation was also apprised of the functionality and benefits of the Safe City cameras in the city and that the modern cameras of Safe City are playing a crucial role in ensuring the safety of the city, preventing crimes, and safeguarding the lives and property of citizens. Additionally, facial recognition cameras have been installed at the entry and exit points of the city which are playing an important role in identifying suspicious elements. The delegation acknowledged the modern technical system of the Islamabad Police and its benefits. The delegation expressed special gratitude to the Safe City team for this successful visit.

IFA destroys expired products

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Director Operations (DDO) of Islamabad Food Authority (IFA), Dr Tahira Saddique, said on Monday that the authority has intensified its campaign against food safety violations and sealed a popular bakery in Blue Area for unhygienic conditions while it raided a distribution center in Koral Town for handling expired products. Talking to APP, she said the authority, accompanied by the Food Safety Teams (FSTs), conducted an inspection at a well-known bakery in Blue Area. The team found hygiene violations during the preparation of bakery items, leading to the immediate sealing of the establishment. Dr. Saddique revealed that several warnings had been issued to the bakery in the past, but the violations persisted. She emphasized that hygiene standards are non-negotiable, promising strict action against food outlets, restaurants, and bakeries violating safety rules across the federal capital. In another operation, the Food Authority raided a distribution point in Koral Town after discovering that expiry dates on products were being altered. More than 5,000 kilograms of expired inventory were seized and destroyed. The facility was sealed, and a case was registered against those involved in tampering with product dates. Dr Tahira described the practice of selling expired goods as a severe threat to public health, stating that suppliers and sellers who endanger lives for profit are "enemies of humanity." She reiterated the Food Authority's commitment to protecting citizens by ensuring food safety across the federal capital. The Islamabad Food Authority has vowed to continue its operations indiscriminately, ensuring that no entity compromises public health standards for monetary gain.



ISLAMABAD: A group of Lawyers from different Bar Associations called on Federal Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar.

Minister calls for premarital testing to combat thalassemia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Housing and Works Minister Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada on Monday emphasized the need for legislation, awareness, mandatory premarital lab tests, and modern research to combat thalassemia in Pakistan. During his visit to the Thalassemia Centre of Sundas Foundation in F-9 Park, Islamabad, the minister praised the dedication of the senior management in serving humanity. He inaugurated the Activity Room established for thalassemic children and the electric cart donated by Allied Bank to facilitate the transportation of children from the outer gate. The minister, while addressing the ceremony as chief guest, deeply praised the selfless work of the foundation that being a pioneer non-profit organization of its nature, is providing free-of-cost blood transfusion services to

thousands of children countrywide.

He also remembered the humanitarian work of the founding chairman Muneer Ahmed Qureshi alias Munnu Bhai who demonstrated profound involvement in the treatment of patients suffering from Thalassemia. On this occasion, the minister distributed gifts among the children.

Director Sundas Foundation Islamabad Air Vice Marshal HI(M) Aftab Hussain described the functions and operations of the foundation, its current services and its challenges.

He said that the foundation has been working for the last 26 years and nowadays it has expanded its services to nine major cities in Pakistan with twelve established centers.

This organization is transfusing 30,000 blood bags every year and supplying 250-300 units of healthy and screened blood and blood products daily,

he added.

He said the center in Islamabad since its inception six years ago, has benefited 52,243 patients with any sort of blood disease or disorder.

The Centre provides free-of-cost blood transfusion services, medicines, testing, and investigation facilities. He added.

He further informed that to provide a holistic environment an activity room for religious, academic, and extracurricular activities for the thalassemic children has been established. This is the first thalassemic center in the world to have this facility.

He counted escalating inflation and varying blood donation trends in society as the major challenges of the organization.

In the end, senior actor and Director Khalid Abbas Dar gave a vote of thanks and expressed gratitude to the organizers, donors and the chief guest.

Govt open to dialogue alongside legal proceedings

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Petroleum Dr. Musadik Malik on Monday said that the government is open to meaningful dialogue, but legal and criminal cases will proceed alongside any discussions.

Talking to a private news channel, he emphasized that the government is always willing to initiate dialogue in the country's greater interest. He clarified that criminal cases involving Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership would not be part of the dialogue agenda.

Addressing allegations against the PTI founder, he said, "The 190 million pound case and the others against him are of a criminal nature. He stressed the importance of dialogue to address national challenges, not to protect personal interests.

Pakistan reports 68th WPV1 case

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the National Institute of Health (NIH) on Monday confirmed the detection of the 68th wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) case of 2024 from the country.

The lab confirmed the case from D.I.Khan. This is the 10th polio case from D.I.Khan this year.

Pakistan is responding to the resurgence of WPV1 this year with 68 cases reported so far. Of these, 27 are from Balochistan, 20 from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 19 from Sindh, and one each from Punjab and Islamabad.

Polio is a paralyzing disease that has no cure. Multiple doses of the oral polio vaccine and completion of the routine vaccination schedule for all children under the age of five is essential to provide children high immunity against this terrible disease.

The Pakistan Polio Program conducts multiple mass vaccination drives in a year, bringing the vaccine to children at their doorsteps, while the Expanded Programme on Immunization provides vaccinations against 12 childhood disease free of charge at health facilities.

It is crucial for parents to ensure vaccination for all their children under the age of five to keep them protected. A sub-national Polio vaccination campaign was conducted across Punjab, Sindh, KP, AJK, GB, and Islamabad from 16 -22 December vaccinating over 42 million children.

Success of PTI-Govt talks hinges on seriousness: Sindhu

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-N Senator Khalil Tahir Sindhu Monday stressed on PTI that dialogue is the best way to resolve issues and that the success of PTI-government talks hinges on the seriousness and maturity of the participants.

In an interview with a private news channel, Senator Khalil Sindhu underscored the vital role of seriousness and maturity in negotiations, emphasizing that all parties must engage in talks with an open mind, a willingness to listen and a commitment to finding common ground.

Senator Sindhu stated, "Nawaz Sharif, the leader of PML-N, has consistently backed negotiations with

PTI, emphasizing the need to resolve issues in a smooth and democratic manner.

He believes that dialogue and cooperation are essential for promoting a stable and prosperous Pakistan, and I fully endorse his stance on this matter.

Tahir emphasized the need for PTI to refrain from making controversial statements in public, stressing that this would help bring much-needed political stability to the country.

By avoiding inflammatory rhetoric, PTI can create a more conducive environment for constructive dialogue and cooperation with other political parties, he mentioned.

Responding to a query about Hanif Abbasi's state-

ments, Senator Khalil emphasized that all decisions will be made under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif.

He stressed that others should exercise maturity when making public statements, promoting a culture of responsible and thoughtful communication.

Khalil Sindhu further said that PTI should prioritize the country's dignity, while also asserting that the PML-N government will not be swayed by pressure.

Instead, he advocated for resolving issues through democratic norms and constructive dialogue, underscoring the importance of finding mutually beneficial solutions through table talks, he added.

Kashmir's demography cannot be changed: Lord Qurban

ISLAMABAD (APP): Lord Qurban Hussain, a member of the British House of Lords, on Monday described the change of demography in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) an attempt to alter the region's ethnic and religious composition.

He expressed these views during 'meet the press' organized in National Press Club (NPC) in Islamabad, where he highlighted the atrocities of Indian army in the disputed territories and acknowledged the role of Pakistan to support Kashmir's issue internationally.

While quoting the reports of International organizations and like Genocide watch and United Nation (UN), he claimed that genocide watch organi-

zation have indicated that the Indian army has been involved in atrocities and there have been numerous instances of human rights abuses and massacres in IIOJK that leads towards genocide. While UN has also revealed the acrostics by Indian army, he added.

He also acknowledged Pakistan's efforts in highlighting the issue of Kashmir as they are actively working to bring the Kashmir issue to the global stage. They've been using various diplomatic channels to raise awareness about the issue and garner international support, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Head of Sunni Ulema Council Pakistan Allama Muhammad Ahmed Ludhianvi is holding a press conference. —INP Photo

Police finalize security plan for New Year night

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi District Police have finalized foolproof security arrangements to ensure law and order during New Year's Eve celebrations.

All available resources will be utilized under an effective security plan to protect the citizens, and prevent aerial firing, fireworks and one-wheeling on the New Year night.

More than 6600 officers of Rawalpindi Police would be deployed with all activities monitored via CCTV cameras, said City Police Officer, (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani.

He said that more than 800 traffic wardens would also be on duty to regulate traffic on city roads.

32 special pickets have been set up across the city

to prevent one-wheeling, the CPO informed.

Additional pickets have also been set up in the jurisdiction of all the police stations to prevent aerial firing and fireworks. Khalid Hamdani said adding that a ban on aerial firing, fireworks and one-wheeling has been imposed and strict action would be taken against the violators.

FIRs would be registered against those involved in aerial firing, he said and informed that Dolphin Force, Mohafaz Squad, and police station mobiles would be on patrolling duty in different city areas to ensure security.

On New Year's night, effective arrangements have also been made for the security of the churches and

worship of the Christian community, he added.

He informed that the police officers have been directed to remain on high alert and monitor anti-state elements closely.

He said that activities such as one-wheeling, aerial firing, and unruly behaviour would not be tolerated, warning that troublemakers harassing women or citizens would face immediate detention. Protection of lives and property of the citizens and enforcement of the law would be ensured at all costs, the police spokesman said.

The citizens are encouraged to report violations such as one-wheeling, arms display or aerial firing by calling the police helpline at 15, he added.

Punjab's cleanliness campaign huge success in Murree: Report

ISLAMABAD (APP): Punjab's Cleanliness Campaign has achieved remarkable success in Murree, transforming the popular hill station into a pristine destination where the 'Clean Punjab' initiative, spearheaded by Chief Minister Punjab, has received widespread acclaim from visitors and locals alike.

As part of the campaign, the local administration has implemented various measures to maintain the town's cleanliness and beauty. Visitors have praised the efforts, noting the significant improvement in the town's infrastructure and services, said a report aired by the PTV news channel.

"We are thrilled to see the transformation in Murree," said a visitor from Lahore. "The town is spotless and the scenic beauty is breathtaking. The

'Clean Punjab' initiative is a commendable effort by the government."

The campaign's success is a testament to the government's commitment to promoting sustainable tourism practices and environmental conservation, said a visitor. By maintaining the natural beauty of Murree, the government aims to attract more tourists and boost the local economy, said local administration officer. The 'Clean Punjab' initiative has not only improved the physical appearance of Murree but also raised awareness about the importance of cleanliness and environmental protection, said a local.

"I have been visiting Murree for years, but this time, I was impressed by the cleanliness and organization," said a tourist from Karachi. "The local

administration has done an excellent job in maintaining the town's beauty." "We have implemented a comprehensive traffic management plan to ensure smooth flow of traffic in Murree," said the DSP Traffic Police, Rawalpindi. "Our team is working tirelessly to manage the influx of tourists and prevent congestion on the roads. The 'Clean Punjab' initiative has not only improved the town's cleanliness but also helped in streamlining the traffic management system," he added.

He further added, "We have deployed additional personnel and installed CCTV cameras at strategic locations to monitor the traffic and ensure public safety. We are committed to providing a safe and enjoyable experience for the tourists visiting Murree."



ISLAMABAD: A man cutting woods into pieces for selling purpose. —INP Photo

Minister met Chinese officials

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Baz Mohammad Faizan, Deputy Minister of Irrigation and Natural Resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock of Afghanistan, has met with two diplomats from China. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock of Afghanistan, in the meeting, the Chinese diplomats discussed the construction of three cold storage facilities in Afghanistan.

Envoy affirms commitment

KABUL (BNA): Cenk Unal, the Turkish Ambassador to Kabul, met with Sheikh Neda Mohammad Nadeem, the Acting Minister of Higher Education, and affirmed Turkey's commitment to cooperating with Afghanistan across various sectors. Discussions during the meeting focused on Turkey's support for undergraduate and postgraduate programs, shared religious and cultural values, and a planned visit by Turkish university delegations to Afghan educational institutions.

1m Afghan migrants returned: Ministry

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation said that in the past nine months, more than one million Afghan migrants have returned to Afghanistan, either forcibly or voluntarily, from neighboring countries.

Abdul Mutalib Haqqani, the spokesperson for the ministry, stated that of this number, over 90,000 people returned from neighbor country, around 17,000 from Turkey, and the rest from Iran.

"In the past nine months, from the beginning of Hamal to the end of Qaws, over one million Afghans have returned to the country from neighboring countries, either forcibly or voluntarily. Of this number, nearly 93,000 came from neighbor country, around 17,000 from Turkey, and

the remainder from Iran."One of the families recently returning from Iran to Kabul shared their struggles of life in migration.

"For three years, I lived in Iran with my family as a migrant. Last Tuesday, we were arrested and taken to a camp. After that, I contacted my family. Since we had no guardian, I had to bring my family back with me," said Visal, a migrant who returned from Iran.

Some migrants who have returned from neighbor country are also seeking government support to provide them with jobs and basic amenities.

"The government of neighbor country created many problems for us. They did not allow us to work in the markets. Now we are very happy to have returned to our homeland,"

Parwiz, a migrant who returned from neighbor country.

"Life there was very difficult, and it was impossible to continue. Now that we are in Afghanistan, we have no job or livelihood. We ask the government to provide us with work and facilities," said Hussain, another returnee from neighbor country.

"Young people returning from abroad to Afghanistan should be provided with employment opportunities in the country," said Ehsanullah Ahmadzai, a migrant rights activist.

Previously, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that in 2024, more than 1.2 million Afghan migrants had returned to Afghanistan from neighbor countries.

'Saffron production rises in Afghanistan'

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock stated that saffron production has increased this year compared to the previous year.

Misbahuddin Mustaeen, spokesperson for the ministry, attributed this increase to favorable rainfall, the use of new cultivation and harvesting methods, and the distribution of improved saffron bulbs to farmers.

"A total of 40 metric tons of saffron have been collected in the country. Herat province leads in production, accounting for 90% of the total saffron produced nationwide," he added.

The Chamber of Commerce and Investment has called for greater facilitation for saffron farmers to develop and boost saffron cultivation and production.

Khan Jan Alokozai, a member of the chamber's board of directors, said: "There have been some advancements in this area, which is promising. However, farmers need more support. This support should come from both international organizations and the Islamic Emirate."

Mohammad Nabi Afghan, an economic expert, highlighted the challenges in saffron exports and said: "In the past, organizations like USAID and global institutions supported farmers and orchard owners. This support included the transportation of products via cargo, air, or land. Unfortunately, such support no longer exists."

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP), in its latest report, announced that it is supporting Afghan saffron farmers by providing seeds, necessary expertise, and assistance in cultivation and processing.

Iran executes Afghan citizen in Lorestan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The human rights organization Hengaw has reported that the Islamic Republic of Iran has executed an Afghan citizen in the Lorestan province of the country.

In a report, Hengaw stated that the execution of this Afghan citizen took place in the central prison of Aligudarz in Lorestan province.

According to the report, the Afghan citizen was identified as Jalal Stanikzai, who had been arrested four years ago on charges of "premeditated murder."

This execution is part of a troubling trend in Iran, where the number of executions, including those of Afghan citizens, has significantly increased in recent months.

Earlier, the Iran Human Rights Defenders Group reported the execution of ten prisoners, including two Afghan citizens, in the Jiroft prison, on charges related to drug crimes.

Recently, the "Execution Information Center" reported that Iran leads the world in executions, with 882 executions recorded in 2024 alone.

According to the Iranian Human Rights Organization, dozens of people, including 49 Afghan citizens, have been executed in the past ten months in the country's prisons.

The rising number of executions in Iran, especially involving Afghan citizens, has drawn widespread international condemnation. Human rights organizations continue to call for an immediate halt to the death penalty in Iran, urging the government to abide by international human rights standards.

As global pressure mounts, the Iranian authorities face increasing criticism for their handling of executions.

The continued executions, particularly those involving foreign nationals, raise concerns about the country's commitment to human rights and its international reputation.

Kabul, Baku explore opportunities to deepen ties

KABUL (BNA): The Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, met with Ilham Mammadov, Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Afghanistan, in his office.

During the meeting, DFM Stanekzai expressed condolences over the tragic plane crash in Azerbaijan and emphasized the need to enhance political, economic, and social bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Azerbaijan.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Mammadov acknowledged Afghanistan's expression of sympathy over the incident as a testament to the brotherly ties between the two nations. He expressed gratitude while affirming Azerbaijan's eagerness to expand political engage-



ment with Afghanistan.

He also reiterated his country's readiness to

cooperate in strengthening Afghanistan's economy and promoting mutual well-

being, calling the reinforcement of bilateral relations significant for both nations.

Progress made in easing banking restrictions, says Central Bank

KABUL (TOLONews): The Central Bank said that banking restrictions in the country have decreased over the past three years.

Haseebullah Noori, the spokesperson for the Central Bank, told TOLONews that the reduction in these restrictions is the result of efforts and technical meetings between the Central Bank of Afghanistan and international banks and financial institutions.

He further stated that efforts to modernize the banking system in the country are ongoing. Speaking about the current withdrawal limits, the spokesperson said:

"Individuals can withdraw up to 150,000 afghani weekly from afghani accounts and up to \$2,000 from dollar accounts. Monthly withdrawals of up to 500,000 afghani and \$6,000 are allowed from personal accounts."

Noori highlighted efforts to modernize the banking system in the country, noting that an electronic card called "AfPay" has now been activated in both state-owned and private banks. Citizens can use the diverse services provided by this card.

Haseebullah Noori stated: "We have made significant progress in the field of electronic banking. The

"AfPay" Electronic card is now active. Holders of this card can withdraw money from all commercial banks, pay taxes and electricity bills, transfer funds from one account to another, and check their account balances."

Some economic experts, emphasizing the importance of modern banking globally, have called for collaboration with advanced countries to transform Afghanistan's traditional banking system into a modern one.

Abdul Ghaffar Nezami, an economic analyst, said: "It is necessary to invite countries that have advanced in this field and

have successful experiences with global standards to help train and strengthen Afghanistan's banking system."

Despite these advancements, banking restrictions and the continued freezing of Afghanistan's foreign reserves remain serious challenges for the interim government.

Previously, China's special representative to the United Nations Security Council emphasized the unfreezing of Afghanistan's foreign reserves by the US, stating that global banking restrictions have impacted Afghanistan's banking system and caused a liquidity crisis.

Essential medical supplies boost emergency services at hospital

KABUL (BNA): Officials from the Nangarhar Public Health Directorate have reported the provision of medical equipment and consumables to the Maternal and Child Health and Emergency Departments of the Nangarhar Regional Specialized Hospital by a supporting organization.

Mawlawi Aminullah Sharif, Director of Public Health in Nangarhar, told Bakhtar News Agency that the donation includes suction machines, pulse oximeters, thermometers, nebulizers, ECG leads, oxygen blenders, medical gowns, and other essential items.

Mawlawi Sharif emphasized that these supplies will enhance the hospital's maternal and child health



services and play a vital role in saving lives during emergencies.

Additionally, doctors at

the hospital acknowledged the significance of such assistance, describing it as instrumental in strength-

ening the healthcare sector and improving the well-being of the local population.

Four dead, seven injured in two traffic accidents

SAMANGAN (Amu TV): Two traffic accidents in Khulm District, Samangan Province, on Monday left four people dead and seven others injured, local Taliban officials said.

Hashmatullah Rahmani, a spokesperson for the Taliban's police command in Samangan, said the accidents occurred in the Largan and Sayad areas. Preliminary investigations indicate that driver negligence and poor road conditions were the primary causes.

The injured were transported to nearby medical facilities, with some reported to be in critical condition, Rahmani added.

These incidents mark the third traffic accident reported in a single day. Earlier

on Monday, a collision in Ghilan District, Ghazni Province, claimed one life and left seven others injured, including women and children.

On Sunday, three separate traffic accidents across Baghlan, Faryab, and Laghman provinces resulted in seven fatalities and 30 injuries.

Afghanistan has witnessed an alarming rise in traffic accidents in recent weeks. Last week, a devastating crash on the Kabul-Kandahar highway claimed at least 50 lives, underscoring the dangerous conditions on the country's roads.

While the Taliban-run traffic department has often attributed these incidents to driver negligence, residents

and activists have repeatedly raised concerns over Afghanistan's deteriorating road infrastructure and lack of enforcement of traffic regulations.

Meanwhile, a traffic collision in Ghazni Province's Gilan District on Monday left one person dead and seven others injured, including women and children, according to Taliban officials.

The incident occurred on the Kabul-Kandahar highway when a passenger vehicle collided with a cargo truck, the Taliban-run Bakhtar News Agency reported. Among the injured were six children and one woman, who were transported to a hospital in Ghazni for treatment.

Logar prison launches tailoring program



KABUL (BNA): For the first time, 30 prisoners in Logar's central prison have participated in a tailoring training course.

Officials from the Technical and Vocational Department of Logar stated that this three-month course

aims to equip prisoners with tailoring skills.

According to Engineer Habibullah Habibi, head of the department, the program is designed to help inmates gain skills that will enable them to support their families and communities

after their release.

The prisoners expressed satisfaction with the initiative and called for similar educational programs in the future. Officials further announced plans to extend such training programs to female prisoners next year.

UNICEF treats 475,000 malnourished children in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has announced that in 2024, it has treated over 475,000 malnourished children in Afghanistan.

On Monday, UNICEF stated in a message on its X/Twitter page, emphasizing that children suffering from malnutrition in Afghanistan require nutritious food.

The report states that these services have been

distributed across 3,300 of the organization's service points in Afghanistan.

This comes at a time when several international aid organizations have raised alarms about the increasing number of vulnerable people in Afghanistan, including children suffering from malnutrition.

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, current-

ly, 3.2 million children under the age of five and 840,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women in Afghanistan are suffering from severe malnutrition.

Previously, UNICEF reported that over one million malnourished children in Afghanistan were examined in September of this year.

The World Health Organization has warned that due to the growing poverty and hunger, a sig-

nificant number of children in Afghanistan are at risk of malnutrition.

As the crisis deepens, international organizations and humanitarian aid groups continue to call for urgent action to address the growing humanitarian needs.

Without sustained support and intervention, the situation for vulnerable children and families in Afghanistan may worsen further, making long-term recovery more difficult.

Govt to provide one bulletproof vehicle for each PHC circuit bench: Registrar

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has agreed to provide one bulletproof vehicle for the security of the judges of the Peshawar High Court (PHC) each Circuit bench. The government has also agreed to provide security to the judicial magistrates.

This was claimed by PHC Registrar Barrister Ikhtiyar Khan along with Additional Registrar Admin Mamreez Khan Khalil while addressing a press briefing and added that the High Court and district judiciary have made significant progress in reducing the backlog of cases, despite limited resources.

The High Court and district judiciary disposed of 52,300 cases during the last 10 months, which is more than the number of new cases filed during the same period. They added that the number of pending cases in the district judiciary has decreased from 276,000 to 262,000.

The Registrar of PHC said that the provincial government has agreed to provide bulletproof vehicles for the security of the judges of the Peshawar High Court. He added that the government has also agreed to provide

security to the judicial magistrates.

The registrar said that the judiciary is also focusing on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to reduce the backlog of cases. He added that the Tank and Waziristan courts will start functioning soon, and the judiciary is working to establish proper system.

He said that the judiciary is committed to providing justice to the people, and despite the challenges, they are working tirelessly to achieve this goal. He added that the Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim is personally monitoring the progress and has formed a committee to oversee the process.

He said that the committee is working to identify the causes of the backlog of cases and to find solutions to these problems. He added that the judiciary is facing several challenges, including the shortage of judges, the lack of infrastructure, and the security threats. He added that despite these challenges, the judiciary is committed to providing justice to the people.

He said that the judiciary is working to establish a robust and efficient system for the disposal of cases. He added that the judiciary is also working to improve the infrastructure of

the courts and to provide better facilities to the litigants. The Registrar of Peshawar High Court said that the judiciary is committed to upholding the rule of law and to providing justice to the people. He added that the judiciary will continue to work tirelessly to achieve this goal, despite the challenges and difficulties.

PHC grants bail to PTI female leader: Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhel of Peshawar High Court (PHJC) has granted protective bail to Nadia Khattak, a female leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) till 10th January. The court has also ordered her to appear before the relevant courts.

During the hearing of the protective bail application, the court was informed that Nadia Khattak is a resident of Nowshera and has cases registered against her in Islamabad and Attack. The applicant wants to appear before the relevant courts, but fears arrest, and therefore, requests protective bail to enable her to appear before the courts. After hearing the arguments, the court granted Nadia Khattak protective bail until January 10th and ordered her to appear before the relevant courts on the scheduled date.



KARACHI: A view of sit-in of Parachinar affectees near power house.

FIA arrests 9 linked to Greek boat tragedy

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Gujranwala zone has successfully apprehended nine individuals involved in human trafficking during raids in Gujranwala and Gujrat.

The FIA spokesperson told media on Monday that those arrested include Muhammad Shafique, Azmat Ali, Khizer Hayat, Mirza Sikandar, Muhammad Nawaz, Shahid Amin, Shehzad Yusuf, Zafar Iqbal, and Asad Abbas.

The spokesperson also highlighted the arrest of Zafar Iqbal, a notorious agent apprehended in Mandi Bahauddin, who was involved in the abduction of children and trafficking them abroad. Shahzad Yusuf was taken into custody in Khariyan. He is implicated in the Libya boat incident and is a member of an international human trafficking network. Yusuf allegedly extorted 2.3 million rupees from a victim, promising employment in Italy.

Additionally, Muhammad Shafiq and Khizer Hayat were found to have extorted 4 million rupees each from victims, promising them safe passage to Libya. Azmat Ali was reported to have extorted 5 million rupees from a citizen by falsely offering employment in Libya. Mirza Sikandar received 5 million rupees to send two sons of a complainant to Europe for work, while Muhammad Nawaz took over 1 million rupees for trafficking a person to Cambodia.

The spokesperson added that Shahid Amin received 1.7 million rupees, while Asad Abbas received 2 million rupees from victims. A significant amount of money was also recovered from their possession during the operation. Director of Gujranwala Zone Abdul Qadir Qamar emphasized that all available resources are being deployed to apprehend the remaining perpetrators. "No one will be allowed to endanger the lives of innocent individuals," he asserted.

ECNEC approves 7 projects

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar Monday chaired the meeting of Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) which approved seven development projects costing around rupees 217 billion.

Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Finance, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, Provincial Ministers and Federal Secretaries attended the meeting. It approved the increase in scope of Irrigation component of Sindh Emergency Flood Rehabilitation Project and the revision of scope for CAREC Corridor road infrastructure project falling in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

It also approved the revised scope of Karachi Water Supply and Sewerage Improvement Project at cost of Rs 25.4 billion besides approving the World Bank funded project GRADES with aim to improve attendance and learning outcomes in schools of Punjab.

Biden announces \$2.5b military aid to Ukraine

WASHINGTON (AFP): US President Joe Biden announced \$2.5 billion in additional security assistance for Ukraine on Monday as he uses his final weeks in office to surge military aid to Kyiv before President-elect Donald Trump takes power.

"At my direction, the United States will continue to work relentlessly to strengthen Ukraine's position in this war over the remainder of my time in office," Biden said in a statement. Biden's announcement includes \$1.25bn in military aid drawn from US stockpiles and a \$1.22bn Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) package, the final USAI package of Biden's time in office.

Under USAI, military equipment is procured from the defence industry or partners, rather than drawn from American stocks,

meaning it can take months or years to arrive on the battlefield. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is approaching the three-year mark and recently the Russians have used North Korean troops to bolster their fighting position.

North Korean forces are experiencing mass casualties on the front lines of Russia's war against Ukraine, with 1,000 of their troops killed or wounded in the last week alone in Russia's Kursk region, White House spokesperson John Kirby told reporters on Friday. In a statement, Biden said the new assistance will provide Ukraine with "an immediate influx of capabilities that it continues to use to great effect on the battlefield and longer-term supplies of air defence, artillery, and other critical weapons systems".

Nearly three years into the war, Washington has

committed \$175bn in total aid for Ukraine, but it is uncertain if the aid will continue at that pace under Trump, who replaces Biden on January 20. Trump has said he wants to bring the war to a swift end. During the presidential election campaign, Trump questioned the level of US involvement in the conflict, suggesting European allies should bear more of the financial burden.

Some of his fellow Republicans — who will control both the House of Representatives and Senate starting next month — have also cooled on sending more aid to Kyiv. Biden said the Defence Department is in the process of delivering hundreds of thousands of artillery rounds, thousands of rockets, and hundreds of armoured vehicles "which will strengthen Ukraine's hand as it heads into the winter".

Trump loses appeal against E Jean sexual assault verdict

NEW YORK (Reuters): A federal appeals court on Monday upheld a \$5 million verdict that E Jean Carroll won against Donald Trump when a jury found the US president-elect liable for sexually abusing and later defaming the former magazine columnist.

A unanimous three-judge panel of the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan rejected Trump's argument that the trial judge made mistakes in letting jurors hear evidence about the Republican's alleged past sexual misconduct, making the trial and verdict unfair. The court said that evidence, including Trump bragging about his sexual prowess on an "Access Hollywood" video that surfaced during the 2016 US presidential campaign, established a "repeated, idiosyncratic pattern of conduct" consistent with Carroll's allegations.

"Taking the record as a whole and considering the strength of Ms Carroll's case, we are not persuaded that any claimed error or combination of errors in the district court's evidentiary rulings affected Mr Trump's substantial rights," the court said in an unsigned decision. Lawyers for Trump did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A lawyer for Carroll did not immediately respond to similar requests.

The May 2023 verdict stemmed from an incident

around 1996 in a Bergdorf Goodman department store dressing room in Manhattan, where Carroll, now 81, said Trump raped her, and an October 2022 Truth Social post where Trump denied Carroll's claim as a hoax. Though jurors in federal court in Manhattan did not find that Trump, 78, committed rape, they awarded the former Elle magazine advice columnist \$2.02 million for work, while Muhammad Nawaz took over 1 million rupees for trafficking a person to Cambodia.

A different jury ordered Trump in January to pay Carroll \$83.3 million for defaming her and damaging her reputation in June 2019, when he first denied her rape claim. In both denials, Trump said he did not know Carroll, she was "not my type," and that she fabricated the rape claim to promote her memoir. He is appealing the \$83.3 million verdict.

Carroll's cases are continuing despite Trump's having won a second four-year White House term on Nov 5. In 1997, in a case involving former President Bill Clinton, the US Supreme Court ruled unanimously that sitting presidents have no immunity from civil litigation in federal court over actions predating and unrelated to their official duties as president.

Trump's lawyers argued the \$5 million verdict should be thrown out because the trial judge, US District Judge Lewis

Kaplan, should not have let jurors hear testimony from two other women who accused Trump of sexual misconduct. One, businesswoman Jessica Leeds, said Trump groped her on a plane in the late 1970s. The other, former People magazine writer, Natasha Stoyanoff, said Trump forcibly kissed her at his Mar-a-Lago estate in 2005.

Trump's lawyers also said the trial judge should not have let jurors watch the 2005 "Access Hollywood" video, where Trump boasted graphically about forcing himself on women. But the court said that in each of these encounters, "Mr Trump engaged in an ordinary conversation with a woman he barely knew, then abruptly lunged at her in a semi-public place and proceeded to kiss and forcefully touch her without her consent."

It said this was "relevant to show a pattern tending to directly corroborate witness testimony and to confirm that the alleged sexual assault [of Carroll] actually occurred." The court also rejected Trump's claim that Kaplan should have allowed evidence that a prominent Democratic critic, billionaire LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, funded Carroll's case, saying it had "little probative value." Carroll is also a Democrat. Kaplan also oversaw the trial that ended with the \$83.3 million verdict.

Sixth baby dies from severe cold in Gaza as Israel raids hospitals

GAZA: Cold weather in Gaza has claimed the life of a baby, the sixth to die in a week, according to medical sources, as Israel continues its relentless attacks on hospitals across the strip.

One-month-old Ali al-Batran died on Monday at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in central Gaza, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported, quoting medical sources who attributed his death to plummeting temperatures.

The day before, his twin brother, Jumaa al-Batran, perished from the cold in the displaced family's flimsy tent in Deir el-Balah, also in the centre of the enclave, his father said, describing how Jumaa had been discovered with his head as "cold as ice". The babies were born one month prematurely. Israeli forces have displaced almost all of the 2.3 million residents of Gaza, forcing tens of thousands of them into makeshift tents in open-air camps along the rainy,

windswept coast.

Three of the six Palestinian babies who have died of hypothermia in the past week lived in the coastal "safe zone" of al-Mawasi, close to the southern town of Khan Younis. Gaza's Government Media Office said on Monday that "bitter cold and frost" hitting "dilapidated tents" in the strip's camps had killed seven people, including an adult healthcare worker.

Gaza's Ministry of Health reported on Monday that 27 people had been killed over the previous 24 hours. Reporting from Deir el-Balah, Al Jazeera's Hind Khoudari said: "You can't imagine the situation right now. We are all freezing and shaking due to the very cold weather. ... Especially those who are in al-Mawasi very close to the beach are suffering from the cold."

"We're talking about Palestinians who have been displaced for more than 14

months. They still have the same tent. There [are] no tent tarps. It's also very expensive to afford any nylon or any equipment or tools to cover your tent and even winter clothes [and] blankets." In parallel, Israel has attacked two hospitals – al-Wafaa and al-Ahli – in Gaza City. The bombing of al-Wafaa on Sunday killed seven people and critically wounded others, according to the Palestinian Civil Defence.

A witness at the scene of the al-Wafaa bombing described seeing bodies "ripped to pieces". The Israeli military said its attack targeted a Hamas "command and control centre", but it provided no evidence to support this assertion. Israeli forces also detained hundreds of Palestinians, including dozens of medical staff from Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza on Friday. — Aljazeera

SC asks PST to reconsider acquitted public servant service

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Accepting plea of a public servant who failed to exercise right of appeal against termination of service within specified period due to incarceration, the top court asked Punjab Service Tribunal to reconsider the matter.

A three-member bench of the Supreme Court comprising Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Irfan Saadat Khan remanded the case to the Punjab Service Tribunal (PST) underscoring importance of fair consideration of all relevant circumstances before deciding on the dismissal of such appeals based solely on time limits.

In a recent ruling, the bench mentioned challenging circumstances as the petitioner was unable to pursue a departmental appeal due to his incarceration under frivolous criminal charges in August 30,2010. After five years he was granted bail on August 25, 2015. Later, the petitioner was acquitted on February 25, 2015.

After his arrest, Multan police issued a show-cause notice against the petitioner on November 25, 2010, on the grounds of absence from duty without leave, and was dismissed on January 11, 2011, while he was

behind bars. "The Superintendent of Police Headquarters, Multan, vide order dated 11.01.2011, awarded him with the major penalty of dismissal from service by means of an ex-parte order, stated by the SC verdict.

The Bench ruled that given his incarceration, the petitioner was not in a position to diligently follow up on the appeal process, which would have otherwise been his right under service laws. The Bench further noted that while a departmental appeal could have been filed through the jail superintendent, the petitioner never received the dismissal order while in jail, meaning the delay was not attributable to him.

The ruling stressed that civil servants must be treated fairly, and it is the duty of the Service Tribunal to consider all facts judiciously when it comes to terms and conditions of service. The Bench ruled that the petitioner, being a victim of circumstances, could not be held responsible for the delay in filing the appeal.

Poverty is not valid ground to disentitle mother from minors custody: While dismissing appeal of a father seeking custody of his two minor sons, the Supreme Court held welfare of the minor is always prime consideration saying poverty is not a valid ground for disentitling a mother

from custody of children.

In a significant ruling, a two-member bench of the Supreme Court (SC), comprising Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Yahya Afridi and Justice Shahid Bilal Hassan expressed through a seven-page reported verdict, "The paramount consideration for the court in making the order of appointment of guardian of minor is that it should be satisfied that it is for the welfare of minor.

The bench further said that it is an established law that father is a natural guardian of his minor child/children, but indeed the court has to be satisfied while appointing the father as a guardian that the welfare of minor lies in the fact that he be appointed as a guardian and the custody of minor be delivered accordingly.

"There are many factors, which may not entitle the father to the custody of minor and some of the factors could, where the father is habitually involved in crimes or is a drug or alcohol addict, maltreats his child/children, does not have a capacity or means to maintain and provide for the healthy bringing up of his child/children or where the father deliberately omits and fails in meeting his obligation to maintain his child/children", the bench noted.

Haideri says PTI making efforts for Imran's relief

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam leader Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri has said the purpose of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's struggle is the release of its founder.

Without the role of its founder, Haideri affirmed that PTI had no value. He expressed this while talking to private TV channel. Answering a question, he said if the government's draft on constitutional amendments had been implemented, there would have been severe repercussions.

He further said that the JUI-F stopped the government from establishing a constitutional court while adding if it had not been there, the government would have approved all 56 amendments.

He said the PTI and JUI-F had many differences but after coming into the opposition, they both decided on a ceasefire. He said Maulana Fazlur Rehman had made it clear that there should be no political victimization against the PTI founder. The JUI-F leader added General (R) Bajwa had stopped us from staging a sit-in against the then PTI government.

Meanwhile, JUI-F senior leader Hafiz Hamdullah has welcomed President's signature on the Seminary Registration Act, stating that it has increased the President's respect among religious circles.

President Asif Ali Zardari earlier signed the Seminary Registration Act into law. As per details, Hamdullah also noted that the President's signature has reaffirmed the supremacy of Parliament. Hamdullah thanked the President for his decision, which he believes has accepted the stance of Mau-lana Fazlur Rehman. He also appreciated the positive role played by the Prime Minister and his cabinet in the matter.

31 Kurdish fighters killed in Syria

BEIRUT (AFP): A Syria war monitor said 31 combatants had been killed since Sunday in ongoing battles between Turkiye-backed groups and Kurdish-led forces.

Swathes of northern Syria are controlled by a Kurdish-led administration whose de facto army, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), spearheaded the fight that helped defeat the Daesh group in the country in 2019 with US backing. Turkiye accuses the main component of the SDF, the People's Protection Units (YPG), of being affiliated with the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which both Washington and Ankara consider a terrorist group.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that seven pro-Turkish fighters were killed in clashes Monday in the northeastern Manbij region, in Aleppo province. SDF fighters had

infiltrated the city of the same name after it was retaken by Ankara-backed groups earlier this month, the monitor said.

Six other pro-Turkish fighters and three members of the SDF were killed the day before in the same part of Aleppo province, it said. The SDF said Monday that it had carried out attacks elsewhere in the province that destroyed "two radars, a jamming system and a tank of the Turkish occupation" near a strategic bridge over the Euphrates.

According to the Observatory, 13 members of the pro-Turkiye factions and two members of the SDF "were killed as a result of flaring battles" near the bridge and the Tishreen Dam. The Britain-based Observatory said clashes in the area had been going on for around three weeks "as both sides seek to advance." Turkiye has

staged multiple operations in SDF areas since 2016, and Ankara-backed groups have captured several Kurdish-held towns in northern Syria in recent weeks.

The fighting has continued since rebels led by Islamist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) ousted longtime ruler Bashar Assad from power on December 8. New Syrian leader Ahmed Al-Sharaa, whose HTS group has long had ties with Turkiye, told Al Arabiya TV on Sunday that the Kurdish-led forces should be integrated into the national army.

"Weapons must be in the hands of the state alone. Whoever is armed and qualified to join the defense ministry, we will welcome them," he said. "Under these terms and conditions, we will open a negotiations dialogue with the SDF... to perhaps find an appropriate solution."

Russia, Ukraine exchange hundreds of prisoners of war

KYIV, MOSCOW (BBC): Russia and Ukraine have exchanged hundreds of prisoners of war in a deal brokered by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Russian defence ministry said it had swapped 150 Ukrainian soldiers held captive for an equal number of Russian troops.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said 189 Ukrainians had returned home. He added that those released included "defenders of Azovstal and Mariupol", the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and Snake Island. Outside a hospital in northern Ukraine, anxious relatives were wrapped up against the bitter winter cold, waiting for their loved ones.

One woman, Alina, was waiting for her husband, Oleksandr. He was captured defending the city of

Mariupol in 2022. "I have so many emotions," she said, tears streaming down her face. "It's been so difficult. I just want to see him." The Russian defence ministry meanwhile said newly-released Russian troops were in Belarus, an ally of Russia, and were being given medical assistance and the chance to contact their families.

In a video posted by Russian human rights commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova, soldiers were seen gathered in front of coaches in military and winter clothing. "Very soon our guys will hug their families and friends and celebrate the New Year on their native land," she said in an accompanying message. This was the 59th prisoner exchange since the full-scale invasion began and one of the biggest so far.

On the Ukrainian side, those released included soldiers, border guards, National Guardsmen and Navy servicemen. Many had been in captivity for more than two-and-a-half years, and Ukrainian officials said some had returned with serious illnesses and injuries. For some families, the agonising uncertainty has come to an end. But thousands more Ukrainians remain in captivity in Russia and occupied parts of Ukraine. Officials in Kyiv told the BBC that negotiations about prisoner exchanges have become more difficult in recent months - ever since Russian forces began to make significant advances on the battlefield. Ukraine does not publish numbers of prisoners of war being held by Russia, but the total is thought to be more than 8,000.