

## FO advises Pakistanis F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office has issued advisory to the Pakistani nationals regarding travel to Syria in the wake of deteriorating situation in the country. A press release issued by the foreign Office says in view of the recent developments and evolving situation in Syria, Pakistan nationals are advised to avoid unnecessary travel or visit to Syria until the situation improves.



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## NEPRA offers discounts F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) on Friday approved the Winter Package proposed by the federal government, offering discounts to consumers on additional electricity usage. According to the package, domestic consumers will receive a 30per cent discount, equivalent to Rs. 11.42 per unit, on minimum additional electricity usage.

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LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif receiving a souvenir from Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf at closing ceremony of 7th Maritime Security Workshop in Pakistan Navy War College.

## Bilawal emphasises need for political dialogue

F.P. Report

KARACHI: PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Friday emphasised the need for dialogue among political forces to address the country's challenges, highlighting the deteriorating situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Speaking at the Pink Football event at Lyari Football Ground, he urged political parties to foster unity and prioritise economic and political stability. Criticising the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government for focusing on "extremist politics" instead of public welfare, Bilawal lamented their absence from the All Parties Conference (APC). He stressed that provincial funds should be directed towards providing relief to the people and ensuring peace in the region.

Bilawal commended Lyari's resilience, praising the establishment of an international-standard football ground and the participation of young and female players from across Sindh. He called for greater empowerment of women, asserting that they have proven their leadership potential in Pakistan's history and will continue to excel in various fields, including sports.

Warning against forces attempting to lead the youth toward extremism, Bilawal emphasised the importance of youth development for the nation's future. Concluding his address, he urged the Sindh government to address local infrastructure issues in Lyari, ensuring its continued development as a hub of opportunity.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has appreciated the efforts of the Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi for bringing all political parties on a single platform to sort out solution to problems faced by the people of the province.

In a statement issued, the PPP chairman has said that he welcomes the initiative of the KP Governor Faisal Karim Kundi to engage all political parties in an effort to create political consensus and address the difficulties faced by the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chairman Bilawal Bhutto has said that dialogue between political parties is the most effective means to not only address political, economic and security challenges. But, also forge the political



consensus and stability required to achieve the results.

He said that it is unfortunate that the government with executive authority and primary responsibility to address these issues has not even spent a single day since they formed government doing what they are meant to sever the people of their province. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa instead of serving their people has been busy in practicing their extremist politics at the expenses of the people of the province.

He while criticizing the KP chief minister for not attending the All Parties Conference (APC), Bilawal Bhutto said that despite having been invited they refused to attend or contribute to the APC as well. He said that the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa deserve that their problems to be addressed and added that with or without the help of the KP government, they will continue to fight for the real rights of the people of all provinces.

Meanwhile, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi said that lawyers always playing vital role in strengthening democracy and assured to play role in addressing their problems.

He said this during a meeting with a delegation led by Fida Bahadur Vice President of the Supreme Court Bar Association, Lajbar Khalil Advocate and other prominent lawyers during their visit to the Governor House. The Governor said that their concerns would be addressed and efforts would be made to resolve their ongoing issues.

## Bushra Bibi explains her departure from D-Chowk

F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: In an unexpected turn of events, Bushra Bibi, wife of former PM Imran Khan, on Friday visited the family of a worker who lost his life during Islamabad protest and explained her position regarding her exit from D-Chowk.

She claimed that she was left alone till 12:30 at night and she was there to support the PTI protesters. She said she could never leave those who came out in support of Imran Khan. "I was in my car until 12:30am at D-Chowk," she said.

She visited the house of deceased Tajudeen and commiserated with his family. She gave a cheque of Rs10 million which, she said, was on the direction of Imran Khan. "I told everyone not to leave me

alone but they left me there [at D-chowk]. Bibi was alone there," she insisted.

She recalled the 'troubling moment' she had to endure when the PTI protesters lost their lives due to violent clashes. Without naming anyone, she said, "she does not understand why some people are telling lies." She said she did not leave the site for the protest because Imran Khan said so even when all people had left her.

Today, when Bushra went to visit the family members of deceased PTI worker Tajuddin, she told the party supporters that she had been in pain for the last few days as so many deaths had taken place, "due to which I was confused and could not figure out why people were lying".

"I am not a woman who

runs away. I would especially not leave those who had come out for Khan. No one knew which car was mine. At D-Chowk, I was all alone in my car till 12:30am," she said.

"Several cars had come there because they were forcefully pushed out of D-Chowk. Bibi did not move because Khan did not say. I had told everyone not to leave me alone, but everyone left me alone. I was all alone." Present on the occasion, a PTI worker backed her story, saying that he was a witness to the situation. At this, she said, there were several witnesses. "The ones evacuating the area are also witnesses. As I was staying put and not leaving, my car was fired upon. The rest of the convoy came later. I came here because Khan told me to visit the families of those who had died."

## SBP injects over Rs9.6tr in market F.P. Report

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), on Friday, injected Rs9640.7 billion in the market through reverse repo purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation (OMO).

The SBP conducted Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) on December 06, 2024 for 7-day and 28-day tenors and, as per results issued, accepted an amount of Rs9086.7 billion offered through 32 bids. The central bank received 32 bids for 7-day tenor cumulatively offering an amount of Rs9086.7 billion at the rate of return ranging from 15.04 to 15.11 percent while no bid was received for the 28-day tenor.

The central bank accepted the entire amount offered through 32 bids for 7-day tenor at the 15.04% rate of return. Meanwhile, SBP also conducted Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation for the 7-day and 28-day tenors. The central bank received 4 bids for 7-day tenor quoting an amount of Rs554 billion at the rate of return ranging between 15.10 to 15.12 % while no bid was received for 28-day tenor. The SBP accepted the entire amount offered through 4 quotes for 7-day tenor at 15.10% rate of return.

## ATC orders release of Omar Ayub F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) has ordered the release of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Omar Ayub and Raja Basharat following their earlier arrest despite being granted bail by the Peshawar High Court.

Arrested PTI leaders were presented before the court for their demand, however the court ordered to release them. The court expressed strong displeasure over their detention, questioning, "Why were they arrested when the High Court had already approved their bail?" On Thursday, the Rawalpindi police arrested Ayub, Basharat and Ahmed Chattha outside Adiala jail after charges were filed against them and other suspects, including the PTI founder in the GHQ attack case.

The PTI founder Imran Khan was arrested on May 9, 2023, from the premises of the Islamabad High Court, where he was attending a hearing in a corruption case. Khan, who served as the prime minister of Pakistan from 2018 to 2022, was accused of receiving illegal gifts and assets from foreign countries. Imran Khan's arrest sparked widespread protests and riots across the country, as his supporters and party workers took to the streets to demand his release.

The PTI protesters attacked and vandalized several civil and military installations, including the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the army in Rawalpindi, the Jinnah House in Lahore, the Mianwali airbase, and others. The protesters also burned vehicles, blocked roads, and clashed with the police and security forces.

Meanwhile, PTI leader Omar Ayub has accused Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif, PML-N leader Maryam Nawaz, IG Punjab, and DPO Attock of being responsible for his unlawful arrest, which he claims took place at an Adiala Jail checkpoint on Wednesday. The arrest occurred despite Ayub having secured a protective bail from the Peshawar High Court.

Speaking to the media after the Rawalpindi Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) approved his bail and ordered his release, Ayub described the ordeal as a blatant violation of his legal rights.

# The Frontier Post

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday stressing the strategic importance of maritime security said Pakistan Navy was fully prepared to defend the sea boundaries of the country.

Addressing the closing session of the 7th National Maritime Security Workshop (MARSEW) at the Navy War College in Lahore, the PM lauded the Pakistan Navy's unwavering commitment towards playing a significant role in maintaining national security. Terming blue economy vital for economic prosperity, PM Sharif lauded Pakistan Navy's proactive measures to harness maritime resources for the nation's development.

PM Shehbaz Sharif said Gwadar Port due to its strategic location was a cornerstone of Pakistan's economic future and blue economy. He highlighted Gwadar Port's role in the development of regional trade and connectivity and stressed streamlining of processes at the port to facilitate importers and exporters.

He expressed a strong commitment to leveraging maritime resources for economic progress and enhancing national security. He also acknowledged China as a vital partner, expressing gratitude for its steadfast cooperation in the maritime domain. Sharif also emphasized equipping the Karachi Port Trust with modern technology to execute loading and unloading of consignments from across the world.

He highlighted the importance of National Shipping Corporation and announces to re-establish it in accordance with the commercial needs. The prime minister expressed satisfaction that Pakistan had ample talent and

resources, however stressed the need to utilize them properly to get rid of the shackles of debt.

He expressed the government's firm resolve to eliminate terrorism across the country and paid rich tribute to the martyrs of the armed forces for their great sacrifices during anti-terrorism operations. He told the participants that the meetings of the Apex Committee were held regularly which aimed at ensuring peace and security in the country.

Earlier, PM Sharif was received by Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf, upon his arrival at PN War College. In his welcome address, Commandant Pakistan Navy War College, Rear Admiral Azhar Mahmood, provided an overview of workshop's activities.

A panel of participants presented a paper containing recommendations for a National Maritime Policy. The panel analyzed the maritime environment, highlighting its impact on national security and economic prosperity, and proposed measures to address challenges and capitalize on opportunities. The participants included parliamentarians, policymakers, bureaucrats, academics, entrepreneurs, armed forces officers, and media representatives. The Maritime Security Workshop is an annual event organized by Pakistan Navy to enhance understanding of maritime security dynamics, create awareness about Blue Economy, and explore Pakistan's untapped maritime potential.

Meanwhile, the President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to Major Shabbir Sharif Shaheed (Nishan-i-Haider) on the 53rd anniversary of his martyrdom, recognising his gallantry and sacrifice to safeguard the country.

The president and prime minister, in their separately issued statements, lauded the valor of Major Shabbir Shaheed while fighting the enemy in the 1971 war without caring about his own life. They said that the whole nation was proud of martyred Major Shabbir for his gallantry and sacrifice and reiterated that the people of Pakistan would never forget the sacrifices of their soldiers. They also prayed to Allah Almighty for the elevation of Major Shabbir Sharif Shaheed and other martyrs in paradise.

"The entire nation is proud of brave officers like Major Shabbir Sharif who sacrificed his life for the defense of the motherland. The nation recognizes the sacrifices of all the martyrs and will not forget them," the president remarked.

Calling Major Shabbir Sharif a model of courage and bravery, Prime Minister Shehbaz said that in the 1971 war, he held back the enemy's advance at Sulemanki. "Major Shabbir Sharif Shaheed not only defended his position but also disabled enemy tanks with an anti-tank rifle and eliminated the enemy, including their company commander. Despite its numerical superiority, the enemy could not withstand the effective defense of Major Shabbir Sharif," he remarked.

He said that Major Shabbir Sharif Shaheed laid down his life to protect the motherland. His patriotism and the spirit of self-sacrifice for the country's defense, by offering his own life, is an inspiring example for the younger generation, he added. "The entire nation, including myself, is proud of Major Shabbir Sharif Shaheed and his family. His dutifulness and loyalty to the nation will continue to inspire future generations," the prime minister said.

## Grand Jirga agree on ceasefire in Kurram

F.P. Report

KOHAT: In light of directives issued by Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur, a joint session of Grand Jirga was held that was attended by elders of both sides of the Kurram district.

The jirga was chaired by Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Mutasim Billah Shah on Friday and attended by DIG Kohat, Sher Akbar Khan. The members of the Grand Jirga hold individual as well as collective settings with both the sides and after long deliberations agreed on ceasefire in Kurram district for an indefinite period.

Both the sides agreed that solution of any problem through fighting is impossible and for a permanent and durable solution of this decades long-standing problem time would be required. It was pledged that for the sake of bright future of their new generation and peace of the region persistent efforts would be made to reach peace agreement. Commissioner Kohat assured that the government would fulfill its responsibilities for establishment of lasting peace and to ensure implementation of government's writ.

Meanwhile, KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur hailed the peace efforts of the grand jirga and met the members of the body, said adviser to KP Chief Minister on Information, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif quoting the provincial chief executive.

"Over 100 people from both sides attended the jirga," he said, adding that it was decided that firing posts would be vacated until the final decision of the jirga. Taking credit of the development, Barrister Saif said: "Peace has been restored in the region due to the sincere efforts of the CM."

It is pertinent to mention here that a ceasefire was reached on November 24 between the warring tribes but it could not last long as violence gripped the region again.

Later, the rival tribes in the violence-hit district agreed on a ceasefire deal again on December 1 after the deadly clashes. This time, the tribes agreed to a peace deal for indefinite period.

Last week, KP CM Gandapur emphasised the need for establishing peace in the area and ordered authorities to demolish dugouts of rival tribes and seize their weapons. The provincial chief executive had issued the directives during a grand jirga, organised in Kohat district, which was attended by elders of the rival tribes.

He also directed the authorities concerned to take measures for the "immediate resettlement" of homeless victims in Kurram. "People's loss of life and property should be compensated immediately," he added. Furthermore, he said, the weapons in the possession of the rival tribes should be immediately seized. "The administration will keep those weapons in its custody until peace is restored," he had added.

Violence erupted in the district after ambushes on two separate convoys travelling under police escort on November 21. Since then, violence between the feuding communities escalated, with police struggling to maintain the law and order situation. Citizens were facing trouble due to scarcity of different commodities, including food items, medicines and fuel, as Parachinar-Peshawar highway was closed amid skirmishes.

## JUI-F gives deadline for passage of Bill

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) has given the government a deadline of December 8 to pass the Madrasah Registration Bill. In a statement, JUI-F leader Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haiidri said that the government must approve the bill concerning religious seminaries by December 8.

He warned that if the bill is not passed by December 8, they would be forced to march towards Islamabad. "We are religious people and do not wish to take such a step, but the country cannot bear this delay," Haiidri said. The JUI-F leader also accused the delay in passing the bill of being a deliberate attempt to obstruct the process, labeling it as "malicious intent."

Haidri assured that there would be a resolution to the issue, as Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had assured him that he would speak with the president to ensure the bill's approval. Responding to a question regarding the potential change in the PM House, Haidri stated that they did not acknowledge the current elections and questioned how the government could take a U-turn after such a shift.

He clarified that the bill is not just supported by JUI-F and Wafaqul Madaris, but is endorsed by all religious seminary organizations. Earlier it was reported that President Asif Ali Zardari has returned the Madrasah Registration Bill to the Prime Minister's Office, citing legal objections. According to media, the bill, which aimed to regulate and register religious schools (madrasahs), has faced significant hurdles in the legal review process. Sources reveal that the president raised concerns over the bill's legal validity, particularly its lack of clarity regarding the jurisdiction of madrasah registration. The bill had been pushed through by the government, following assurances made to Maulana Fazlur Rehman, a key ally.

## JCP okays committee to draft rules for appointing judges

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Judicial Commission of Pakistan on Friday approved the formation of a committee to constitute rules and criteria for appointing judges, according to a press release issued by the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Friday's meeting was attended by CJP Afridi, Supreme Court justices including Mansoor Ali Shah, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar and the chief justices of the Sindh and Peshawar high courts, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and Senator Ali Zafar were also present.

The press release stated that alongside forming the committee, the commission also approved the nomination of Supreme Court judge Shahid Bilal

Hassan for the apex court's constitutional bench. "The Judicial Commission of Pakistan unanimously decided to accord highest priority towards framing of rules relating to regulating its procedure including the procedure and criteria for assessment, evaluation and fitness for appointment of judges," the press release read.

The CJF was authorised to select members of the Judicial Commission for the new committee. The five-member committee will be led by Supreme Court Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail and comprises Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan, Senators Ali Zafar and Farooq Naek and lawyer Akhtar Hussain.

According to the press release, Judicial

Commission Secretary Niaz Muhammad Khan and two Supreme Court research officers will provide the committee support. The committee has been instructed by the CJF to produce a draft of the rules by December 15. "The Judicial Commission of Pakistan (Peshawar High Court) the agenda of appointment of Additional Judges for the Peshawar high court was deferred till 21st December, 2024," the press release added.

The deadline to submit nominations for the appointment of additional judges was extended until December 10. Similarly, it was decided that appointments for additional Sindh High Court judges was deferred until December 21. The deadline to submit nominations was also extended until December 10.



## LDA seals 139 properties in operation

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Development Authority (LDA) intensified its efforts against illegal commercial buildings across the city and sealed another 139 properties here on Friday.

Under the directives of LDA's Director General, Tahir Farooq, the operations were carried out in various areas including Gulberg, New Garden Town, Faisal Town, Khayaban-e-Firdousi, Gulshan Ravi, Canal Road, and Allama Iqbal Town.

The teams sealed 20 properties in Gulberg, New Garden Town, and Faisal Town, while 60 in Khayaban-e-Firdousi Road. Additionally, 28 properties were sealed in Gulshan Ravi and Canal Road and 31 in Allama Iqbal Town.

The sealed properties include a range of commercial establishments such as wedding halls, markets, property offices, marble factories, hardware stores, bakeries, shops, and offices. These properties had been issued multiple notices prior to the operation, yet continued to operate without complying with the required regulations. The crackdown was carried out under the supervision of LDA's Chief Town Planner, Asad ul Zaman, and Chief Town Planner II, Azhar Ali.

## Four persons injured in fire

LAHORE (APP): Four persons including an infant were injured in a house at OPF Colony, Raiwind Road, here on Friday. Police said that people were sitting in a room where a fire broke out. As a result, they received burn injuries. On information, Rescue 1122 vehicles reached the spot and started a rescue operation. They gave first aid to the injured and later shifted them to Jinnah Hospital. The injured have been identified as Shagufta, 25, Alveena 6, and Shehrooz, 15 days.

## Review of issues related to Minority Card

LAHORE (APP): The Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs, Ramesh Singh Arora, presided over an important meeting at his camp office regarding the issuance of minority cards for the minority community.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Secretary for Minorities, Ayesha Yaseen, representatives from Punjab Bank, IT department, and other relevant departments while the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) of all districts participated in the meeting through video link.

During the meeting, Ramesh Singh Arora stated that Chief Minister of Punjab, Maryam Nawaz, is keen on ensuring that the entire process of issuing minority cards is made easy and transparent, nor any misunderstanding or corruption will be tolerated in the distribution of these cards. He further mentioned that the cards are expected to be launched by the Chief Minister of

## CM launches free solar panel scheme

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has said that the purpose of the free solar panel scheme is to offer lasting relief to the public from the burden of expensive electricity.

While formally inaugurating the CM Punjab Free Solar Panel Scheme for 100,000 consumers in Punjab here on Friday, she said that Punjab consumers can apply under the scheme via SMS or online portal from today.

The CM said earlier 7.3 million consumers of Punjab benefited from the subsidy of Rs.14 per unit, adding that public resources will be spent only for the public convenience and relief.

Earlier, the Provincial Secretary Energy briefed Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif about the free

solar panel scheme, under which, 100,000 solar systems will be installed over a period of one year. He added solar systems will be given free to electricity consumers of the province who consume up to 200 units per month.

The CM was briefed that 52,019 consumers who consume 100 units per month will be given free 550-watt solar systems, while consumers consuming up to 200 units of electricity per month will be given free 1100-watt solar system. She was apprised that to register under the CM Free Solar Panel Scheme, one can visit the online portal "cmsolarscheme.punjab.gov.pk. Consumers of Punjab can also register for the scheme by sending an SMS to

8800. Verification will be done using the reference number and CNIC number mentioned on the monthly bill of the consumers. A computerized balloting will be conducted to ensure transparency in the Scheme. She was also briefed that a helpline will also be established to support and guide the consumers who will get free solar systems.

To protect the solar panel and inverter from theft, the solar panel and inverter will be linked to the computerized CNIC of the consumer. Installing 100,000 solar systems in Punjab will reduce carbon emissions by 57,000 tons. Free solar panel scheme will also reduce the burden of subsidy on the federal government.

## CM Murad issues guidelines for ADP preparation

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has issued detailed guidelines for the preparation of the Annual Development Program (ADP) for 2025-26 aimed at ensuring strategic planning for provincial development, focusing on post-flood rehabilitation, socio-economic uplift, and alignment with the government's broader development agenda.

Following the directive from the CM, Minister Planning and Development Syed Nasir Shah has issued detailed guidelines for the preparation of the next

ADP.

The CM emphasised the necessity of continuity in development efforts by building on the current ADP for 2024-25 and addressing critical issues, such as restoring infrastructure damaged during the catastrophic floods of 2022. He instructed the departments to prioritise high-impact projects that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and relevant sectoral priorities, including resilient infrastructure, improved healthcare and education, and climate-smart initiatives in agri-

culture and irrigation.

"Planning must reflect the current realities, particularly in dealing with post-disaster recovery and minimising the impact of inflation on vulnerable communities," the CM said, adding that encouraging all departments to integrate socio-economic objectives into their proposals.

According to the chief ministers' guidelines, the provincial departments are required to complete the approval process for new projects by March 31, 2025, to ensure timely inclusion in the ADP.

Mr Shah has emphasized allocating at least 80 per cent of the development budget to ongoing schemes while maintaining financial discipline and avoiding cost escalations.

The guidelines advocate for innovation, urging departments to explore public-private partnerships (PPP) for new projects to alleviate financial constraints.

"We must ensure sustainable and impactful development that benefits the people of Sindh, especially those affected by disasters," the CM reiterated.

## Ch. Shafay calls on US Consul General

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Industries and Commerce Chaudhry Shafay Hussain here Friday met with US Consul General H.E. Ms. Kristin K. Hawkins to discuss the issues pertaining to promoting trade relations between Punjab and the United States.

The Provincial Minister informed about the steps being taken to promote investment and quality technical education.

Chaudhry Shafay Hussain also spoke about investment opportunities in various sectors of Punjab. He said that USA is a major trading partner of Pakistan, however, more steps are needed to increase bilateral trade cooperation. The Provincial Minister said that he would welcome US

cooperation in promoting technical education in Punjab. He said that there are vast investment opportunities in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) of Punjab. The manufacturing of solar panels in Punjab and the promotion of electric vehicles are the government's top priorities. A garment city is being built in Quaid-i-Azam Business Park, Sheikhupura, to promote the textile sector and concrete steps have been undertaken to empower women economically.

He said that changes are being made in the universities act to increase enrolment in the technical universities of Punjab adding that TEVTA institutions, labs and courses are being upgraded, TEVTA's performance and financial

audit is being conducted.

Chaudhry Shafay said that under the Chief Minister's Skill Development Programme, free IT short courses are being provided to children. Job placement has also been arranged for those who complete training in TEVTA institutions and the scope of business facilitation centres is being expanded as well.


US Consul Ms. Kristin K. Hawkins, while appreciating investment promotion measures in Punjab and the establishment of business facilitation centres, acknowledged that the tourist and historical places of Punjab are worth seeing.

CEO Punjab Board of Investment Jalal Hassan and other officers were also present.

## PFA crackdown Eight wedding halls shuts, heavy fines imposed

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Food Authority (PFA) launched a major operation across the province to ensure the provision of safe and high-quality food at wedding events and imposed Rs.12.15 million fine for violations related to food safety standards.

On directions by PFA's Director General Asim Javed, over 1,450 wedding halls and marquees were inspected in Lahore and across Punjab and the operation resulted in shut down of eight wedding halls for using sub-standard food items, and 760 venues received corrective notices. The inspection revealed and seized over 500 kg of stale food, 300 liters of counterfeit drinks, 150 kg of banned ingredients, 160 kg of chinese salt, and 80 liters of used cooking oil.



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**NOTICE FOR INVITING E-BIDDING SYSTEM**  
**(Single Stage Single Envelope)**

Executive Engineer, Peshawar Canals Division, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, invites electronic Bids from eligible firms / bidders in accordance with KPRA procurement rules 2014 on Single Stage Single Envelope procedure for the following works :-

S#	Name of Work/ Sub Works	E/cost in (M)	Earnest Money + Stamp Duty + Professional Tax in Rs.	PEC Relevant Code
A	<b>ANNUAL MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR WORKS IN PESHAWAR CANALS DIVISION PESHAWAR DURING 2024-25</b>			
1	Silt Clearance of KRC from RD.50+000 to RD.83+000 in reaches including clearance of bridges & Syphons.	4.83	96600	CE-04 CE-10
2	Silt Clearance of KRC from RD.83+000 to RD.95+000 in reaches including clearance of bridges.	6.509	130180	-do-
3	Silt Clearance of KRC from RD.95+000 to RD.106+000 in reaches including clearance of bridges & Syphons.	5.773	115460	-do-
4	Silt Clearance of Hazar Khani branch from RD.00+0 to RD.9+000 in reaches i/c clearance of bridges.	3.542	70840	-do-
5	Silt Clearance of Hazar Khani branch from RD.9+000 to RD.14+520 in reaches i/c clearance of bridges.	3.795	75900	-do-
6	Silt Clearance of Hazar Khani branch from RD.14+520 to RD.18+705 in reaches i/c clearance of Secretariat conduit and Jail Road X-ing & Syphons.	5.9225	118450	-do-
7	Silt Clearance of City Tunnel at RD.18+705 to RD.20+300, Graveyard Tunnel at RD.27+300 i/c erection of bonds & dewatering of syphons at RD.16+920 (Shoba), RD.17+558 (Dabganj) & RD.20+700 (Kohati) Hazar Khani Branch.	3.2913	65826	-do-
8	Silt Clearance of Hazar Khani branch from RD.20+300 to RD.36+800 in reaches i/c clearance of Bridges & Syphons.	4.83	96600	-do-
9	Silt Clearance of Hazar Khani branch from RD.36+800 to RD.50+000 in reaches i/c Bara Supper Passage.	4.1285	82570	-do-
10	Silt Clearance of KRC from RD.106+000 to RD.133+000 in reaches including clearance of Bridges and Syphons.	3.703	74060	-do-
11	Silt Clearance of KRC from RD.133+000 to RD.165+000 in reaches including clearance of Bridges and Syphons.	3.105	62100	-do-
12	Silt Clearance of KRC from RD.165+000 to RD.198+000 in reaches including clearance of Bridges and Syphons.	3.22	64400	-do-
13	Silt Clearance of Hazar Khani branch from RD.50+000 to RD.70+000 in reaches i/c clearance of bridges and Syphons.	2.875	57500	-do-
14	Silt Clearance of Hazar Khani branch from RD.70+000 - Tail in reaches i/c clearance of bridges and Syphons.	2.875	57500	-do-
15	Silt Clearance of Kurvi Branch from RD.0+00 to RD.20+000 in reaches.	1.5475	30950	-do-
16	Silt Clearance of Kurvi Branch from RD.20+000 to RD.44+000 in reaches.	1.50	30000	-do-
17	Silt Clearance of Wazir Garhi minor from RD.0+00 to RD.24+500 in reaches i/c clearance of Syphon.	1.725	34500	-do-
18	Silt Clearance of Pabbi minor from RD.0+00 to RD.15+300	1.38	27600	-do-
19	Silt Clearance of Banda Mohib minor RD.0+00 to RD.16+000.	2.0125	40250	-do-
20	Silt Clearance of Banda Mohib Minor RD.16+000 to Tail including Branch Banda Mohib Minor	1.38	27600	-do-
21	Silt Clearance of Dheri Ishaq Minor RD.0+00 to RD.21+000 in reaches.	1.495	29900	-do-
22	Silt clearance of Jue Sheikh Canal from RD.0+00 to 61+000 in reaches.	3.40	68000	-do-
23	Silt clearance of Jue Sheikh Canal RD.61+000 to 88+000 in reaches.	5.70	114000	-do-
24	Silt clearance of Jue Sheikh Canal RD.88+030 to 105+000 in reaches.	5.378	107560	-do-
25	Silt clearance Jue Sheikh Canal RD.105+035 to 143+000 in reaches.	5.00	100000	-do-
26	Silt clearance of Shahi Mahal Minor RD.0-26200 in reaches & Yasin Abad Minor RD.0-8000, in reaches including clearance of Hydraulic/ Canal crossing structures.	3.88	77600	-do-
27	Silt clearance of Jue Zardad canal RD.0-43000 including clearance of bridges & Culverts.	2.20	104000	-do-
28	Silt clearance of Main Gujjar Canal RD.0-25600 i/c clearance of bridges & culverts.	2.53	506000	-do-
29	Silt clearance of Sheikhhan Branch RD.0-5000 including clearance of bridges & culverts.	0.80	16000	-do-
30	Silt clearance of Sangu Branch RD.0-4000 i/c clearance of bridges & culverts.	0.80	16000	-do-
31	Construction of R/Wall at RD.79+500 Jue Sheikh Canal.	1.20	24000	-do-
32	Restoration/ Extension of Retaining wall on Hazar Khani Branch Canal from RD.17+200 to RD.17+395 L/S.	3.51	70200	-do-
33	Restoration/ Extension of Retaining wall on Hazar Khani Branch Canal from RD.22+000 to RD.22+500 Left side & Right side in reaches.	3.00	60000	-do-
34	Restoration/ Extension of Retaining wall on Hazar Khani Branch Canal from RD.22+500 to RD.25+000 Left side & Right side in reaches.	2.181	43620	-do-
35	Restoration of Damages Horse Shoe Bund.	3.118	62360	-do-

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS:-**

- Bid Solicitation Documents containing all the terms and conditions and other relevant instructions for the work can be downloaded from the Department and or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Authority websites ([www.rrigation.gkp.pk](http://www.rrigation.gkp.pk)) ([www.kppra.gov.pk](http://www.kppra.gov.pk))
- Electronic bidding shall be done on "Above / Below System" on BOQ / Engineer's estimate.
- The bidder shall submit their bids on the following address "Executive Engineer Peshawar Canals Division Peshawar, Irrigation Department, Warsak Road, Peshawar" only through reliable courier Service on or before the deadline along with required documents as per details mentioned in Bid Solicitation Documents. The affixed labels of the Courier Services provider shall be authenticated for tracking before opening. Fake courier delivery shall be processed as per the law and would not be considered.
- All bidders are required to have valid registration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority.
- The bidder shall submit 02% bid security of the estimated cost as mentioned above, in the shape of deposit at call (Original) enclosed along with their bid before closing date and time in the name of Executive Engineer, Peshawar Canals Division, Peshawar.
- Non-refundable bidding entry fee @0.03% of tender cost in Shape of Call Deposit separately may be furnished (in original) to this office in the name of Executive Engineer, Peshawar Cannals Division, Peshawar.
- Notifications issued by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority pertaining to procurement process issued from time to time shall be applicable.
- If the evaluated electronic bid costs of two or more bidders are equal, then the successful bidder will be declared through past performance.
- Pre-Bid meeting will be held on **23-12-2024 at 11:00 A.M** in the Room of the Executive Engineer Peshawar Canals Division Warsak Road Peshawar.
- The last date & time for Submission of the Bid along with relevant documtns in **27-12-2024 up to 02:00 P.M** which will be opened on the same day at **02:30 P.M** in the office of the Executive Engineer Peshawar Canals Division Warsak Road, Peshawar in the presence of Contractors and their representatives who wishes to attend.
- Bid security of 1st, 2nd and 3rd lowest bidders will be retained till the approval of bids by the competent authority.
- All Govt. Notifications/ Rules/ Taxes updated from time to time shall be applicable.

**EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
INF/P3)293/24

**برائے فروخت**

خواہشمند حضرات متوجہ ہوں۔ دودعہ لبرڈار (Labrador) کئے برائے فروخت ہیں اور فروخت کی آخری تاریخ 16 دسمبر 2024 ہے۔

پتہ: ریجنل ڈائریکٹوریٹ اینٹی نارکوٹکس فورس 13/14 انٹر نیل انیٹیٹ محمود روڈ حیات آباد چشادور رابطہ نمبر 0345-3366103/091-9217310-11 (پشاور)

PID(P)No.302/2024

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To maintain the quality of services, there will be changes in the price of below Value Added Services effective 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2024.

Offers	Prepaid New Price	Postpaid New Price
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GPL	Rs. 12 inc. tax/day	Rs. 10.04 + tax/day
Crickert Fantasy	Rs. 12 inc. tax/day	Rs. 10.04 + tax/day
Foot Ball Fantasy	Rs. 12 inc. tax/day	Rs. 10.04 + tax/day
U Tune	Rs. 3.90 inc. tax/day	Rs. 3.26 + tax/day
My Tune	Rs. 3.90 inc. tax/day	Rs. 1.67 + tax/day
U Notification	Rs. 1.20 inc. tax/day	Rs. 1.00 + tax/day
Kaun Hai	Rs. 3.20 inc. tax/day	Rs. 2.67 + tax/day
Missed Call Notification	Rs. 3.00 inc. tax/day	Rs. 2.51 + tax/day
Bakhabar Kissan	Rs. 3.50 inc. tax/day	Rs. 2.92 + tax/day

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**OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SENIOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT TEHSIL HEAD QUARTER JUDBAH DISTRICT TORGHAR**  
**NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING**

sealed tenders based on MRS-2024 (1st Bi-Annual) / Non MRS - items for the below mentioned works are hereby invited on the basis of SINGLE STAGE SINGLE ENVELOPE PROCEDURE from the government contractors registered with PEC and enlisted with C&W Department as per Centralized Enlistment Policy of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for current financial year as per following schedule.

S#	Work Name	Estimated Cost (M)	Bid Security @2% (Rs)
1	Protection Wall Masjid Ambar Gari C/O Sher Afzal	3.5(M)	70,000/-
2	Causeway Tara Madakhail C/O sher Afzal	5.0(M)	100,000/-
3	Protection Wall Mara madakhail C/O Ryen sathe	0.8(M)	16,000/-
4	PCC Road Dourbala Basikhail C/O Ayub	1.2(M)	24,000/-
5	Storage Water Tank Sonia Madakhail C/O Hadat Khan	1.2(M)	24,000/-
6	Sewerage Line Sonia Madakhail C/O Hadat Khan	2.0(M)	40,000/-
7	Water Tank Masjid Bazed Khail Manjakot C/O Latifurehman	1.2(M)	24,000/-
8	Water drainage Mara Madakhail C/O Salhe	0.6(M)	12,000/-
9	Protection Wall Shagai Basikhail C/O Umer	1.0(M)	20,000/-
10	PCC Path Kander Basikhail C/O Abbass	1.0(M)	20,000/-
11	PCC Path Graveyard Shadaq Basikhail C/O Namat Khan	1.0(M)	20,000/-
12	2 Nos Water Bore Guldahri C/O Abdulrehman	1.0(M)	20,000/-
13	PCC Road Shagi Basikhail C/O Umair shareen	0.392(M)	7,840/-
14	Water Bore khanara Teli seydana C/O Muhtaram Shah	0.6(M)	12,000/-
15	Water Tank Jagal C/O Ghoar	1.2(M)	24,000/-
16	JanazGa Karor Madakhail C/O Ali Maher khan	1.2(M)	24,000/-
17	Water Bore Tabl Igi Markaz Gavi Akazal C/O Abdul Haleem	0.7(M)	14,000/-
18	Water Bore Shokhati Teli C/O Muhtaram Shah	0.6(M)	12,000/-
19	Solarization for Madrasa Sadia Judba Mera C/O Inhamulla	1.2(M)	24000/-

**Terms & Conditions**

- The financial bidding will be online through E-bidding system. Tender form and BOQ can be filled online and downloaded from the official website of LG&RDD ([www.lgkp.gov.pk](http://www.lgkp.gov.pk)) after one day of publishing NIT. The last date and time of submission of electronic tender form is 24 December, 2024 at 12:00 PM, while the date and time of opening of electronic bids is 24 December, 2024 at 01:00 PM.
- The contractors quoting their bids up to a limit of 10% below Engineer estimate shall submit bid security @ 2% only of Engineer Estimate in the shape of original call deposits for the schemes in the name of Assistant Director Senior, Local Government & Rural Development Department, Torghar and submit hard copy of the same printed electronic bid form to the Office of the Assistant Director Senior, Local Government & Rural Development Department, District Torghar.
- The contractors quoting their bids more than 10% below up to 20% below on Engineers' Estimate shall submit along with their bids 8% Additional Security of Engineer's Estimated cost in addition to 2% bid security. If the bid is not accompanied with the required amount of additional security, then will be considered as non-responsive and the 2% bid security shall be forfeited in favor of Government and the second lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly.
- Similarly, a contractor quoting bid more than 20% below shall submit with his bid an additional security on Engineer's Estimated cost equal to the differential amount of submitted bid and Engineers' Estimate along with detailed rate analysis. In case of more than 20% below bids, if the bid is not accompanied by the detailed rate analysis and / or required amount of additional security, then the said bid shall be considered as non-responsive. All the securities submitted along with such non-responsive bid shall be forfeited in favor of Government and the 2nd lowest bidder and so on will be considered accordingly.
- Bid Security of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd lowest bidder for the specific will be retained by the Department till the approvals of the bids.
- In case detailed rate analysis submitted with the bids is in view of the Procuring Entity, not convincing, the Head of the Procuring Entity may declare such bid as non-responsive without any forfeiture of bid securities and record reason thereof.
- Electronic bids and original call deposit's received through fax or by hand will not be acceptable. Sealed bids sent through registered mail/courier service should reach up to the specified time and date as mentioned above.
- The original envelop complete in all respect must be delivered through courier to the office of Assistant Director Senior LG&RDD Tehsil Head Quarter Judbah District Torghar while the duplicate copy may be delivered through courier to the Directorate General LG&RDD Plot No.20, Sector B-5, Phase V Hayatabad, Peshawar before closing time of bid.
- The time for completion of scheme shall be as per work order. The contractor or his representative can be present at time of opening of electronic bids opening.
- The call deposits i.e. bid security for the work / contract must be prepared after publishing of NIT and before closing time of the electronic bid apply.
- In case of tie / draw amongst the responsive bidders, the bid may be decided through free toss which shall be considered as final.
- The eligible bidder must have the relevant codes for the above mentioned works as per PEC.
- Any electronic bidder who provide false, or materially inaccurate or incomplete or do not send information in hard form will be disqualified as per KPRA Act Section 29 (1) read with KPRA Rule (43). Furthermore, the Office of the Assistant Director, LG&RDD, Torghar will recommend and sent cases for debarring / blacklisting and will initiate / take action in light of approved procedure / mechanism as per KPRA Act Section 29 (2) read with KPRA Rule (44). The contractor who is already debarred by the LG&RDD can't participate in these electronic tenders.
- All bidders are required to be registered with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act 2013(Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) Act No. XXI of 2013), for works, consulting and non-consulting service as listed in Scheduled-II of the Act bid. The PEC and KPRA registration (Active Tax Payer) must be valid for current Financial year.
- Electronic Bids will remain valid for 180 days from the closing date of bids.
- The Centralized Enlisted contractors with C&W department for the current financial year who wants to participate in tendering process may approach Directorate General LG&RDD, Phase-V, Hayatabad Peshawar within two days before closing time of electronic apply for uploading their names on the official website i.e. ([www.lgkp.gov.pk](http://www.lgkp.gov.pk)).
- The bidding documents can be downloaded from the official website.
- All material testing and all sorts of tests will be performed by the contractor on the demand of procuring entity.
- The procuring entity may reject all bids or proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of a bid or proposal in light of Rule No.47.
- Any addition made in the terms & conditions in the NIT advertised will be implemented as per KPRA Rules.

Assistant Engineer Senior  
LG&RDD Tehsil (HQ) Judbah  
District Torghar

Assistant Director Senior  
LG&RDD Tehsil (HQ) Judbah  
District Torghar





PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhar Jahan presiding over a meeting to discuss completion of Arbab Niaz Stadium renovation work.

## Minister directs expediting of work on Arbab Niaz Stadium

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhar Jahan has directed the officials of the Department of Communications and Works (C&W) to accelerate the pace of work on the ongoing development project of Arbab Niaz Stadium Peshawar.

In this regard, he further directed to work on the civil work in double shift so that the remaining work

of this crucial project could be completed speedily without any interruption and ensure the holding of PSL matches in it any case.

He said that funds will be released to the concerned department in this regard and previous arrears will also be cleared.

He issued these directives while presiding over a meeting held here with the officials of the Department of Communications and Works here on Friday.

Besides, the Superintendent of Engineering Mega Projects and other officer, officials of the Department of Sports also attended the meeting. In the meeting, the Provincial Minister was briefed by the C&W officers regarding the ongoing work on this important stadium at the provincial level and also informed about the challenges in this regard.

On this occasion, the provincial minister said that project has taken an unnecessary length of time

in construction and is to be completed in all circumstances in the early months of next year for international and PSL matches.

He said that the issue of the funds will be resolved in this regard and steps will also be taken to provide the arrears.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs also held a meeting with the representatives of the consultant firm for the installation of flood lights in Arbab Niaz Stadium Peshawar.

## Health and education are top priorities despite challenges: Ehtesham

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The second batch of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) nurses has successfully completed a five-week training program under the collaboration of Khyber Medical University (KMU) and RPS Chester University, UK.

A certificate distribution ceremony was held at KMU's Senate Hall, with Advisor to the Chief Minister for Health, Mr. Ehtesham Ali, as the chief guest. The program aims to equip nurses with advanced skills and knowledge to meet the healthcare demands of the 21st century.

Dr. Ijaz Hussain, Director at RPS Chester University, UK, highlighted the importance of international collaboration in enhancing nursing standards.

He stated that despite challenging circumstances

in KP, 16 experts from British universities have successfully trained KP nurses during the past few months. This reflects the provincial government's commitment, particularly by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and Advisor Health Ehtesham Ali, to ensure the provision of quality healthcare services in the region.

KMU Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq expressed his satisfaction with the initiative, stating that the program provides KP nurses with valuable opportunities for professional growth and skill enhancement.

"While doctors often have access to development opportunities, nurses are frequently overlooked. This program addresses that gap by training over 500 nurses to align them with modern healthcare requirements," he remarked.

Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq further highlighted KMU's pivotal role as the only university in the province offering education and research opportunities across all healthcare disciplines. He emphasized the significance of providing British-standard training to nurses at their doorstep.

In his address, the chief guest, Advisor to the Chief Minister for Health, Mr. Ehtesham Ali, reiterated the provincial government's commitment to prioritizing health and education despite financial constraints.

He praised KMU's efforts and assured continued support for health-related initiatives. "Every proposal I have presented to the Chief Minister for the health sector has received his full backing.

Those who have undergone training under this program are our valuable assets. They can repay their debt to this province by serving it with dedication," he stated.

The Advisor added that this training not only enhances professional skills but also strengthens the healthcare delivery system, representing a significant step toward professional development for nurses and guaranteeing a brighter future for KP's healthcare system.

Speakers at the ceremony, including Dr. Muhammad Saleem (Director General Health Services KP), Dr. Khalid-ur-Rehman (Head of Health Sector Reforms Unit), Dr. Najma Naz (Director KMU-INS), and Ms. Akhtar Bano (Director Nursing KP), highlighted the transformative impact of the program. The ceremony concluded with the distribution of certificates to 70 participants by the chief guest, celebrating their successful completion of the training program.



PESHAWAR: A man busy in preparing traditional Chitrali cap at his workplace. — INP photo

## NAB hosts seminar on uniting with youth against corruption

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa organized a seminar at its Regional Bureau in Peshawar to mark International Anti-Corruption Day on December 6, 2024. The seminar, titled "Uniting with Youth Against Corruption: Shaping Tomorrow's Integrity," emphasized the role of youth in combating corruption and building a future defined by integrity and accountability.

Honorable Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry attended the seminar as the Chief Guest. Distinguished speakers included Mr. Akhtar Hayat Khan, Inspector General of Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Dr. Jehan Zeb Khan, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Peshawar; and Mr. Aleem Shah Khilji, CEO of the University of Spoken English. Each speaker provided unique insights into the pervasive impacts of corruption and the collective responsibility to combat it.

Addressing the participants, Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry appreciated the vision and role of NAB for making conducive environment for civil bureaucracy and NAB's collaboration for effective utilization of civil services towards nation building. He highlighted the role of youth in building corruption free society and urged the youth to focus on character building and use their energies for positive change. He requested the members of academia for educating youth towards building national character.

Director General NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Waqar Ahmad Chauhan, underscored the vital role of youth in the fight against corruption, noting that over 60% of Pakistan's population is under the age of 30.

He stressed that corruption erodes public trust, depletes national resources, and deepens socio-economic inequalities. He further elaborated on NAB's vision of introducing conducive environment of working with state departments that has resulted in positive outcomes for both NAB and state institutions. He discussed ongoing initiatives planned by NAB to engage youth including provision of internship opportunities to students in NAB, arranging visits of groups of students to NAB office, arranging declamation contests in the educational institutions and forming WhatsApp group with prominent students of whole Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to keep them involve in the campaign against corruption. In addition to these measures, NAB also plans to sign MOUs with universities enabling students to conduct research and gain a deeper understanding of accountability systems to engage them in fight against corruption.

Mr. Akhtar Hayat Khan shared his views on inclusion of youth in fight against corruption and evil deeds. He urged the youth to focus on moral values and wisely choose their role model to have strong basis towards their career. He further stated that it is ever one's duty to take their authority as responsibility in order to build the country.

Dr. Jehan Zeb Khan highlighted that youth play pivotal role in building of society and urged the members of academia to channelize the energies of youth in positive ways to have better future for them and contribute to bright future of the nation as well.

Mr. Aleem Shah Khilji emphasized on inclusion of youth in becoming agents of change in order to compete the developed countries. He urged the youth to be in parity with modern world practices including use of advanced technologies, social media and artificial intelligence to shape the fortune of the country.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Waqar Ahmad Chauhan reaffirmed NAB's commitment to eradicating corruption. He extended his gratitude to the distinguished guests and participants for their valuable contributions to the event.



## Development funds of Rs3.2 billion released: Muzzammil

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Adviser to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Finance and Inter-Provincial Coordination Muzzammil Aslam while announcing good news to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa local government elected representatives and people has said that the provincial government has released development funds for the first time for local elected bodies.

Muzzammil Aslam said that the Provincial government has released Rs. 3.2 billion development funds for the local elected representative of settled districts while 374 million rupees were released for merged districts of the province.

Adviser to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Finance and Inter-Provincial Coordination Muzzammil Aslam further said that now elected representatives of local governments can directly spend development funds for the betterment of their areas. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Adviser said that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is moving towards success under the patronage of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur towards the vision of Chairman PTI Imran Khan.

## Sports Olumpiad of Peshawar Model College ends

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Sports Olympiad 2024, hosted by Peshawar Model Hayatabad Boys Campus, wrapped up, with Hayatabad Thunder claiming the championship title. Over the course of nine days, 28 teams from 14 campuses competed in eight different sports.

The Olympiad aimed to cultivate healthy competition, support mental growth, and encourage teamwork and friendship among young athletes. It provided participants with an opportunity to showcase their talents, improve their skills, and learn valuable lessons about sportsmanship and collaboration.

Hayatabad Thunder's participation in the Olympiad was a resounding success, as they successfully defended their title. The team's outstanding performance reflected their hard work, dedication, and pursuit of excellence.

The Sports Olympiad 2024 was hailed as a success, meeting its goals and providing a meaningful experience for everyone involved. The event set a high benchmark for future competitions, and organizers are eager to witness the rise of new talent and champions in the coming years.



PESHAWAR: Vendors decorate a wedding vehicle with colorful flowers at Tehkal Mor. — APP photo

## Sino-India relations in the past decade

**Maryam Noor**

OVER the past decade, the Sino-Indian relationship has been a complex interplay of cooperation and conflict. As the two world's most populous nations and fastest-growing economies, China and India have a significant role in the region. Their bilateral relations are marked by economic collaboration, geopolitical rivalry, and cultural exchanges. This insight provides a holistic analysis of their relationship over the past decade and lessons for Pakistan regarding its foreign policy.

In 2020, China's GDP stood at a staggering US\$24.27 trillion, securing its position as the world's largest economy, while India's GDP of US\$8.97 trillion ranked it third globally. These figures, accounting for 18.3% and 6.8% of the global GDP, respectively, underscore the economic might of these two nations. Their substantial military expenditures, with China at US\$252.3 billion and India at US\$72.9 billion, further highlight their growing influence on the global stage. This economic and military growth is of particular interest to major powers like the US, which is increasingly challenged by China's rapid ascent. Their bilateral trade in 2022 reached US\$136.26 billion, with China's trade with Pakistan estimated at US\$23.79 billion.

Sino-India relations indicate a rapid growth of bilateral trade over the last ten years despite conflicts between both countries. Notably, in 2015, when India and China clashed in Ladakh, the trade volume slightly increased from the preceding 2014 from US\$70.59 to US\$71.66 billion. Similarly, despite the Galwan clashes of 2020 and a significant military confrontation in the Galwan Valley of the Himalayas, the trade volume in 2021 continued to grow. It reached a record US\$125 billion, a 43.3% increase from 2020. In 2022, China emerged as India's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade totalling US\$136.26 billion. This development is a testament to the resilience of their economic relations, which seem to maintain stability despite escalating military tensions.

Amidst this complex relationship, it is crucial to note that India's influence in regional geopolitics, boosted by the US as the 'Net Security Provider' in the Asia-Pacific region, may eventually become a net destabiliser. The US-led West's active support for India, while enhancing its security, also fuels its ambitions to dominate the region, fostering its pursuit of regional hegemony. India is increasingly asserting its influence through participation in initiatives like the QUAD and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which focus on maritime security in the Asia-Pacific region. These initiatives are significant as they allow India to align itself strategically and economically

with major powers, challenging China's strategic interests.

Over the past decade, Sino-India diplomatic relations have grown significantly, with high-level visits and numerous agreements. This growth in diplomatic relations is a positive sign of the potential for peace and cooperation. In September 2014, President Xi Jinping's visit to India redefined the bilateral engagement, resulting in 16 agreements spanning various sectors.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to China in May 2015, the two governments signed 24 government-to-government agreements, 26 business MoUs, and two joint statements, including one on climate change. 2016 President Pranab Mukherjee visited China, signing ten MoUs in education and research. The first Informal Summit between Modi and Xi in Wuhan in 2018 and the second in Chennai in 2019 aimed to manage differences and deepen cooperation. Since June 2020, the two sides have been discussing disengagement at the border areas along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh through the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination (WMCC) and Senior Commander's Meetings (SCM), with 25 WMCC meetings held, the latest on 14 October 2022. On 25th March 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited India and held discussions with External Affairs Minister and National Security Advisor. On 18th May 2022, the 13th Expert-Level Mechanism (ELM) meeting was held virtually to maintain regular exchanges on cooperation in water resources.

Besides diplomatic relations, cultural exchanges are often regarded as a significant soft power tool. In China, Yoga and Indian movies have become popular attractions. Similarly, Chinese films and cultural exports have also gained traction in the Indian market, further strengthening the cultural ties between the two nations.

During the 2nd Sino-India Informal Leadership Summit in October 2019, both sides designated 2020 as the "Year of India-China Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges", a significant initiative to foster greater understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures.

The relationship between China and India, marked by cooperation and competition, has demonstrated resilience and a capacity for economic growth. Their ability to maintain and expand bilateral trade despite geopolitical tensions highlights a pragmatic approach to foreign policy, where economic interests often take precedence over political disputes.

This practical approach has allowed both nations to navigate rivalry and foster mutual financial benefits, offering a hopeful outlook on the potential for regional cooperation.

Writer can be reached at maryamnoor2358@gmail.com





## In brief

### Anti-corruption walk arranged F.P. Report

BUNER: The district administration and TMA Daggar have jointly organized an anti-corruption walk in Daggar in which ADC Waseem Ahmed AC Madam Bisharat AAC Sajjad Khan TMO Zahoor Ahmed Assistant Sadaqat Khan, officers of government departments, teachers and students participated in large numbers. They participants staged awareness walk in the Bazaar Daggar, during they were carried banners and also raised slogans against corruption. ADC Waseem Ahmed AC Madam Bisharat TMO Zahoor Ahmed in their short speeches said that the countries involved in corruption are facing financial difficulties while corruption free Japan is at the peak of development. They mentioned the well popular saying of last prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that both sides involved in corrupt will stay in Jahannum in their never ending second life. They argued being corrupt people have to face worst here in this ordinary world and there in the never ending life of Jahannum where they will be punished continuously. They added, so everyone should avoid corruption and perform their duties honestly for the development of the country and the prosperity of the people.

### Young man shot dead

SHIKARPUR (PPI): A young man was found dead from a gunshot wound on the Shikarpur-Jacobabad National Highway, in the vicinity of Lodra Police Station, on Friday. According to initial reports, the body of the victim, who was shot once, was discovered on a link road within the jurisdiction of Lodra Police. The local police were promptly alerted to the scene. Upon arrival, law enforcement officials transported the body to RBUT Civil Hospital in Shikarpur for medico-legal formalities and identification. The deceased was later identified as Gulbahar Jakhani, a resident of Jacobabad District. While the motive behind the killing remains unclear, police officials speculate that the murder may be the result of personal enmity. As of Friday evening, no formal FIR had been lodged. The police have launched an investigation and were collecting evidence from the scene of the crime.

### Agri University to host Thar festival F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Sindh Agriculture University (SAU) Tandojam is set to host the Thar Festival 2025 during the first week of February, celebrating the rich cultural heritage and agricultural achievements of the Thar region. The festival will provide a platform for intellectual, literary, cultural, and musical exchanges, emphasizing Thar's diversity and potential. A delegation from the Thar Students Council, led by Shankar Singh Sodho, met with SAU Vice Chancellor Dr. Fateh Marri to finalize plans for the much-anticipated event. According to a university spokesperson, the festival will feature academic discussions, cultural performances, and exhibitions highlighting Thar's history, geography, and agricultural innovations. Key attractions include research presentations on the region's resources and potential, as well as displays of organic produce, cultural artifacts, and local crafts. Renowned Sindhi singers and Sufi artists will perform, offering soulful music and artistic expressions that reflect the region's cultural richness.

## Orientation workshop for journalists conducted



F.P. Report

NATHIA GALI: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Integrated Tourism Development Project (KITE) is foreign funded (IDA Assisted) development initiative of GoKP under the overall administration and supervision of Department of Culture, Tourism, Archaeology and Museums Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The project has successfully conducted a three-day orientation workshop for journalists at Nathia Gali from December 3 to 5, 2024. This initiative was apprise media representatives of key contributions of the Department of Tourism, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, toward promoting sustainable tourism in the province.

The session, held in a local hotel in Nathia Gali, was attended by 18 prominent journalists, including one female journalist, reflecting KITE's commitment to gender inclusivity and ensuring the representation of women's voices considering the sustainable development goals.

Participants were given detailed presentations on legal frameworks such as the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and the Resettlement Policy Framework (RPF), along with highlights of the project's contributions. These included technical support, feasibility studies, and master planning for four Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZs).

The participants were informed that KITE has adopted multi dimensional approach towards sustainability of Tourism development that is on one side project aimed at opening of new planned tourism zones to safeguard the existing tourist destination against conjunction, whereas on the hand project has also carried out Destination Investment and Management Plans (DIMPs) besides Visitor's Management Plans (VMPs) to ensure that structural reform, up gradation of existing tourism assets and infrastructure is given due consideration and has not been obsoleted. Considering this vary fac-

tor studies have been completed for three key tourism sites-Upper Swat, Chitral, and Kumrat-have been handed over to the relevant special purpose development authorities (SPDAs) one each the destinations mentioned earlier. The presentations also highlighted achievements such as the installation of 73 prefabricated Washrooms and the conservation of key archaeological sites under KITE's environmental and social compliance efforts.

Mr. Shafqat Ali Khan, Social Development Specialist, presented the project's objectives, emphasizing the importance of KITE's role in enhancing tourism while preserving the region's cultural and natural heritage. A vibrant panel discussion titled "The Future of Sustainable Tourism in KP and the Role of Media" brought together KITE experts, tourism stakeholders, and ecotourism advocates. The discussion revolved around ecotourism, the preservation of natural resources, and the role of responsible reporting in shaping sustainable tourism narratives. Journalists actively participated in the discourse, with the panel emphasizing KITE's initiatives to engage local communities and its environmental conservation efforts to minimize the ecological impact of tourism.

Speaking to the media, Mr. Hashmat Ali, a KITE representative, stated, "Media play a vital role in shaping public perceptions, advocating sustainability of development initiatives and highlighting innovative and best practices adoption. Through this partnership, we aim to raise awareness about KP's tourism potential and our commitment to preserving the region's natural and cultural heritage." He further added that KITE project being a subsidiary of Department of Culture and Tourism Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will continue supporting public and private sectors contributing to Tourism Promotion in the province and helpful in transforming the tourism sector as medium of revenue generation for National and Provincial economy.

## Seminar on eve of anti-corruption week held



F.P. Report

KOHAT: The district administration Kohat has, in light of the directions of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, held a Grand Seminar in the District Council Hall Kohat on eve of the "Anti-Corruption Week" on Friday.

Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah was the Chief Guest while Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram was the Guest of Honor on this occasion. The Seminar besides the Commissioner Kohat and Deputy Commissioner Kohat was also addressed by the Assistant Professor of Kohat University Nageeb Hassan Shah, District Khatib Mufti Shafiqullah and other speakers and spoke on the causes of corruption, types, its stoppage, and its harmful effects on the country and society in

detail. School children also presented their speeches in Urdu, Pashto and English on the topic. Officers and officials of the district administration and Line Departments and people from different walks of life also participated in the Seminar.

Commissioner Kohat, Deputy Commissioner Kohat and other speakers in their addresses said that corruption is a scourge that has hollowed out every institution and sector of the country and it is only possible to get rid of it completely when it is eradicated. As a nation, everyone should start with themselves, that is, "me", and for this, we have before us the Quran, Ahadiths, the Oswa-e-Hassana of the Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (SAW) and the example of the state of Madinah, they added.

They regretted, despite the passage of 77 years, our

country is still in the under developed one and its main cause is corruption. They said the Pakistani Nation is no less than anyone in the world in terms of ability and capability, but due to the corruption, we are lagging behind. The speakers said, it is high time to consider the corruption abhorrent at every level of the society and it should be started from the family first. They said, it is the worst form of corruption, when it is considered as right.

Later, a Walk was organized led by the Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram in connection with the "Anti-Corruption Week" which was largely participated by the people of different schools of thought. The participants carried anti-corruption placards with slogans about corruption and its harmful effects on the society.

### Theater play on gender equality and violence staged Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) hosted the Rolling Resistance Theater on Wheels campaign in collaboration with UN Women Pakistan. The initiative aimed to highlight the urgent need to address and raise awareness about gender-based violence. The event was attended by heads of various university departments, faculty members, and a large number of students.

Speaking on the occasion, the Vice-Chancellor of KUST, Professor Dr. Muhammad Naseeruddin, emphasized the university's commitment to nurturing not only educated minds but also compassionate and responsible citizens who advocate for equality and reject violence.

A mobile theater truck served as the stage for the performance, which powerfully portrayed pressing social issues and their devastating impacts in a raw and realistic manner. The performance captivated the audience and received enthusiastic applause.

The Rolling Resistance Theater on Wheels is a nationwide campaign that has already made impactful stops in Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar, aiming to inspire meaningful dialogue on gender issues across Pakistan.

### Not possible to complete society sans strength of women F.P. Report

QUETTA: The rights given to women by the religion of Islam cannot be imagined in the West. These views were expressed by the chairperson of the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri in her statement. She said that women in the society are facing various problems for which we have to make comprehensive policy at every level and take steps to implement them.

He said that we believe in democratic values and the focus of our politics is the welfare of the people and the same rapid development. That country needs a strong and stable political and economic system at this time. For us, Pakistan's interests should come first and promoting constructive, positive and tolerant politics away from the politics of anarchy and chaos is the need of the hour.

Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that Pakistani women especially women of Balochistan are knowledgeable, brave and educated and are playing their role in every section of society including politics. She said that women are an important part of the society and a lot of work is being done for the rights of women in Balochistan. There is an important role and no society cannot complete without the participation of women.

Providing opportunities for the welfare and development of half of the population of Pakistan, ie women, is very indispensable. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that the protection of women's rights is guaranteed in the Constitution of Pakistan. No society can be strong without it and skilled and independent women can play an important role in the society. She said that the positive and constructive role of women in the development of society cannot be denied for the empowerment and protection of women.

## Quality education imperative for prosperity: Muqam

Shafi Ullah

MANSEHRA: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam here Friday said that quality education was vital for achieving sustainable economic growth and prosperity of Pakistan.

Addressing the Annual Parents Day function at Pakistan Scouts Cadet College Batrasi here, Engr Amir Muqam said that the country was confronted to various challenges including terrorism that would be addressed through collective efforts. He said that Pakistan was our country blessed with all natural resources and we need to work for its prosperity collectively to achieve heights of success.

He said the nation had shown resilience and strength to overcome on all challenges whether it was 2005 devastated earthquake, 2010 floods or terrorism issues. Lauding the educational services and rich contribution of the passed out students of Cadet College Batrasi in development of Pakistan, the Federal Minister said that students were the future of Pakistan as they

are the one whom would shoulder the future responsibilities.

He urged parents to keep close eyes on their children's education performance, sports and daily work imperative for their safe and bright future. Engr Amir Muqam said that a handful of propagandists through fake and misleading news on social media were trying to misguide the youth for their vested interests but such negative elements were not succeed in their nefarious designs.

He advised students to follow truths and reject all those elements whom were spreading lies in a bid to pollute young minds to achieve their nefarious goals. He said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif were working tirelessly to take the country's out of existing challenges.

Due to Govt effective monetary and economic policies, the price hike came to single digit and stock exchange moved to upward trajectory. Engr Amir Muqam recalled the October 8, 2005 devastated earthquake when almost the entire Hazara division especially Mansehra district were badly affected and lauded the management of

Cadet College Batrasi for continuation of the studies despite damages to its infrastructure by the powerful quake.

He said martyrs of Pakistan were our real heroes and due to their sacrifices today we are living without any fear. Engr Amir Muqam said that Cadet College Batrasi was a prime education institute where students of all provinces of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir were enrolled and getting quality education.

He said that people of erstwhile Fata had rendered great sacrifices for Pakistan and their seats in the College should be intact. He said that the passed students of the College has proved their mettle in all fields in the country and abroad. The Federal Minister advised the college management to prepare PC-1 of the required projects before starting practical work on it.

Earlier, Principal of the College presented welcome address and thanked the Federal Minister Engr Amir Muqam for gracing the patents day function as Chief Guest. Besides faculty and students, the function was also attended by students and their parents in large numbers.

## Ideas competition concludes at KKKUK



F.P. Report

KARAK: Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak (KKKUK) hosted a successful University Level Technical and Business Ideas Competition, jointly organized by the Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization (ORIC) KKKUK and the District Youth Office Karak.

The competition, which concluded on Thursday, saw a significant number of talented students from various departments participat-

ing and showcasing their innovative ideas. The event aimed to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among the youth of Karak district.

In his address, the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Naseer Ud Din, commended all the participants for their creativity and hard work. He expressed particular appreciation for the efforts of Dr. Muhammad Zubair, Director ORIC, and the winning teams.

The winning ideas will be incubated at KKKUK's

Business Incubation Center, providing them with the necessary resources and mentorship to transform their concepts into viable businesses.

Earlier, Afriasiab manager ORIC extended a warm welcome to all participants and said that the KKKUK remains committed to promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, and this competition is a testament to the university's dedication to nurturing the next generation of innovators.

## Collective efforts needed to eliminate corruption

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Speakers of different events held during the anti-corruption week activities urged masses to help the government eradicate the menace of corruption. They were of the view that elimination of corruption from society needed collective efforts. In this regard the government college of commerce and management sciences Timergara arranged a function here on Friday. Besides students, prominent religious scholar Prof Dr Inayatullah Islahi and Principal of the college Prof Bakht Munir spoke on the occasion.

They said that corruption was forbidden in Islam as the Holy Quran had several verses against it. The speakers said that different walks of life should unite against the menace of corruption. They said that corruption could not be eliminated through speeches but it needed a thorough overhauling from top to bottom.

Meanwhile, following the directives of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, the anti-corruption week activities under the supervision of district administration concluded with a closing ceremony held at the Government Girls Degree

College (GGDC) Timergara here on Friday. The two-days event was organized by the district youth affairs department in collaboration with the district administration, and aimed to raise awareness about the effects of corruption on society and individuals.

A variety of competitions like essay writing, poster painting and declamation in Urdu and English among students were designed to create critical thinking regarding anti-corruption measures. The GGDC Principal Kalsoom Javed, Miss Asmat Shah, and others spoke on the occasion. A panel of judges, comprising Mrs. Haseena, Mrs. Rabia and Mrs. Sidra evaluated the participants' performances in different competitions.

Principal, Mrs. Kalsoom Javed, presented certificates and shields to the winners of the various competitions, acknowledging their hard work and creativity. Shields were also presented to the judges and guests in recognition of their contributions to the event. She encouraged all participants to continue their efforts in promoting transparency and integrity within their communities. She emphasized the critical role of youth

engagement in the fight against corruption, praising the college fraternity for their commitment to fostering a culture of accountability and ethical behavior.

Also on Friday, the Lower Dir deputy commissioner Muhammad Arif Khan, MPA Shafullah Khan's son Kashif Kamal and Khurshid Alam distributed compensation cheques on behalf of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government among the 119 rain affected families of the district. A simple function in this regard was held at Timergara where the DC and representatives of local MPAs and MNAs distributed the cheques. The compensation amount was approved after the survey of the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA).

**Charas recovered:** The Chakdara police during a vehicle check at Chakdara recovered 18 kilogram of charas and arrested the accused identified as Zamin Khan, a resident of Bagh Dushkhel. Police registered a case against the accused and started further investigations. The DPO Salim Abbas Kulachi appreciated the Chakdara police and said that drug selling and smuggling would never be compromised in the district.

## Levies force countable shot dead in Gwadar

F.P. Report

GWADAR: A levies force countable was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Gwadar on Friday. According to rescue sources, the assailants gunned down levies constable Muhammad Jan, a resident of Kalug, in Gwadar area. The killers fled after

committing the crime.

Gwadar, located on the southwestern coast of Pakistan, is a significant port city in Balochistan. Over recent years, it has faced increasing security challenges, largely due to insurgent and criminal activities. These issues have been exacerbated by the region's geopolitical

importance, especially with the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has drawn both economic and security attention.

The Levies force, a paramilitary organization in Balochistan, plays a critical role in maintaining law and order, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas.

## Teachers demand arrest of colleague killer in Bara

F.P. Report

BARA: State-run schools teachers in Khyber demanded the authorities' concern to apprehend the killer of their deceased colleague, Rohul Amin Shaheed in a protest rally held in front of Bara press club on Friday. It is to be stated here that Rohul Amin was shot and injured by unknown armed persons last day who later on succumbed to his wounds.

In a joint demonstration organized and attended by large numbers of volunteers of All Tribal Teachers Association, Young Teachers Association, Malgari Ustazan Union, EATA and Tanzeem Asateza, Pakistan Khyber chapter expressed their deep

concern over the cold blood murder of a teacher and urged for provision of security to the teachers.

Addressing on the occasion head of All Tribal Teachers Association, Naser Shah, President Young Teachers Association, Shahid Gul, chief of Malgari Ustazan Union, Khyber Gulab Din Afridi, President EATA Hawas Khan and Tanzeem Asateza, Pakistan Khyber, Sharifullah Afridi, Principal Sir Nawab Gul and others calorically condemned killing of a teacher at the school gate and asked for immediate arrest of the murderer.

The teachers announced three day mourning to be observed since coming Monday over mishap and asked for provision of a Shaheed package

to the deceased teacher. Deputy Commissioner and other officials had been already informed of the deteriorated law and order situation in the area but to in avail, they added.

They demanded provision of fool-proof security to all schools across the district and asked for exemplary punishment for the officials who neglected their duties. They threatened that if the murderer of the late teacher, Rohul Amin was not arrested in three, then a five members committee comprised would formulate strategy for future agitation. The protesters were holding placards inscribed with statements in favor of their demands and chanted slogans against administration and security agencies.





VALLETTA : Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arriving to attend a plenary session of the 31st Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Ministerial summit, in Malta.

## Russian disinformation aims to drive a wedge between US, Ukraine

WASHINGTON (AP): As President Joe Biden uses his final days in office to boost Ukraine's defenses, Russia is playing a different game: spreading disinformation aimed at eroding US support for Ukraine before Donald Trump's return to the White House next month.

Since the US election on Nov. 5, the Kremlin has used state-run media and its networks of fake news sites and social media accounts to push divisive narratives about the war and America's Republican president-elect. Analysts say the content, translated into English for American audiences, is intended to turn sentiment against Ukraine at a pivotal time, with the hope of reducing US military assistance and ensuring a Russian victory.

Recent examples include fake videos supposedly showing Ukrainian soldiers burning effigies of Trump or his supporters. One clip depicts soldiers saying Trump must not be allowed to take office and should "never be president again." Multiple researchers have debunked the video, noting telltale signs of digital manipulation.

A different video claims to show Ukrainian soldiers firing at a mannequin wearing a red "Make America Great Again" hat and a Trump campaign shirt. That video was analyzed and determined to be fake by private analysts and Ukraine's Center for Countering Disinformation, a government agency that tracks Kremlin propaganda. Other versions - just as fake - depict Ukrainian soldiers burning Trump's books or calling him a coward. In the weeks after the election, the clips spread far beyond Ukraine and

Russia, circulating among Trump supporters and believers in QAnon, the conspiracy theory that claims Trump is fighting a war against a Satanic cabal of powerful world leaders.

It's part of Russia's continued push to divide Americans over the nearly 3-year war in Ukraine and paint Ukrainians as unreliable, dishonest allies, according to analysts who have tracked Russian disinformation and propaganda since the war began. By discouraging American support for Ukraine, the Kremlin is hoping to cut off the most vital source of military assistance that has kept Ukrainian hopes alive since Russia invaded in February 2022. Early in the war, Russian propagandists portrayed Ukrainian leaders as corrupt and self-serving. Russian state media claimed Ukraine's leaders held Nazi sympathies - even though President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is Jewish - or were involved in clandestine bioweapons research that Moscow sought to tie to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each false claim was used to justify Russia's invasion.

"It's planted by the Russians, this idea that 'Ukraine is so corrupt it shouldn't even be a state, and we are the right people to be running this place,'" said Rupert Smith, a retired British general and former NATO deputy supreme commander who now leads a Brussels-based consulting firm called Solvo Partners. "Now this is being used as an excuse for not supporting Ukraine." The fake video claiming to show Ukrainian soldiers firing on the Trump mannequin spread on platforms such as X, Telegram and YouTube, getting an early boost from

pro-Kremlin news sites before migrating to ones popular with Americans, according to an analysis by researchers at NewsGuard, a firm that tracks disinformation.

Some versions of the video were created long before the election but were passed off as more recent. Within days, the video was receiving hundreds of thousands of views and had been translated into several languages besides Russian and English, including German, Chinese and Polish, NewsGuard found. According to US intelligence, Russia sought to support Trump in the presidential election, believing he would reduce American backing for Ukraine and perhaps the NATO alliance. The incoming president has praised Russian President Vladimir Putin, criticized US military aid to Ukraine and NATO and promised to end the war in 24 hours, comments that appear to suggest he would press Ukraine to surrender territory now occupied by Russia.

In response to questions about Russia's role in spreading disinformation about Ukraine, a spokesperson for the Russian Embassy in Washington referred to past statements rejecting any involvement. In the time it has left, the Biden administration has urged Ukraine to quickly increase the size of its military by drafting more troops and has stepped up upweapons shipments while forgiving billions in loans provided to Kyiv. So far, the White House has pushed more than \$56 billion in security assistance to Ukraine and expects to send billions more before Biden leaves office on Jan. 20, 2025.

## Obama hails 'power of pluralism' as some Democrats push to pass the torch

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Former US President Barack Obama, who has mostly stayed quiet in the weeks since Vice President Kamala Harris' election loss, urged a new generation of American leaders to talk with people they disagree with.

In a speech at a "Democracy Forum" sponsored by his foundation, the former president said he was convinced that a renewed commitment to pluralist principles was essential to ensure the survival of democracy. "The alternative is what we've seen here in the United States and in many democracies around the globe - not just more gridlock, not just public cynicism, but an increased willingness on the part of politicians and their followers to violate democratic norms, to do anything they can to get their way."

Obama discussed the "power of pluralism" with thousands of live and online attendees at a deeply divided time in US history and an unsettling one for Democrats as Republican Donald Trump returns to

the White House. Building lasting majorities that supported justice required "framing our issues, our causes, what we believe in, in terms of 'we' and not just 'us and them,'" he said. But that did not mean rolling over when opponents abused power, he said. "That's a problem. And when that happens, we fight for what we believe in."

While Obama, 63, remains in high demand to campaign for his fellow Democrats, some in the party are calling for a crop of younger leaders to take the baton after Harris lost every battleground state and the popular vote and Democrats lost control of the House of Representatives and the Senate. "I think he'd be the first to agree," David Axelrod, former senior adviser to Obama, told Reuters. "I think he would say he's run his race and we need others to step up." "Time marches on, and I think that he would say ... we need a whole array of leaders, and there are young leaders in the Democratic Party who are

dynamic and very much in touch with the times who can step up and play a big role."

November's disappointing results for Democrats, including support eroding among working-class and Latino voters, sparked an angry blame game inside the party and an effort by some to push for fresh talent. "I've always been an advocate for a new generation of leadership in the party and I think that people are yearning for that," Representative Seth Moulton, a Democrat from Massachusetts, told Reuters. "It doesn't mean that the Obama magic is totally gone, but Obama's not going to be a future president. Obama's not running for Senate. We need to hear from newer voices that can better represent the fears and struggles that Americans face today."

Obama and his wife Michelle campaigned around the country and remain enormously popular within the party base, wielding influence behind the scenes through fundraising and a deep network of allies and for-

mer staff. But despite fundraising success and resonant speeches, Obama was unable to help propel Harris to victory this year. Democratic nominee and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also failed to win the presidency in 2016 despite his backing. Advisers from his one-time inner circle who joined Harris' campaign after President Joe Biden stepped aside are drawing fire for failing to admit any mistakes in how they handled the 2024 cycle.

A day after the Nov. 5 election, the Obamas issued a statement congratulating Trump and saying "progress requires us to extend good faith and grace - even to people with whom we deeply disagree." Obama made history as the first Black president of the United States and racked up comfortable margins of victory over his Republican opponents when he ran: more than seven percentage points in 2008 and nearly four in 2012. But American politics has changed since then, some strategists say.

## Escaped convicted murderer puts California town on edge

CALIFORNIA (AP): A search for a convicted murderer in a California town has put residents on edge, with schools closing and Christmas events being postponed.

Cesar Hernandez, who was sentenced in 2019 to 80 years to life with the possibility of parole for first-degree murder, escaped shortly after arriving at the Kern County courthouse in Delano, a city of around 50,000 in central California. State prison officials said that he had likely fled the area and no

longer posed a security risk to the town.

He was being transported to appear in court after pleading no contest to manufacturing a weapon and possessing alcohol or drugs in prison when he evaded staff and jumped out of the van, officials said. "Hernandez is considered dangerous," Delano police said in a social media post. "If you see him, do not approach."

Cesar Guzman, 32, was only blocks away at his barber shop from the intersection where Hernandez

escaped. It's been the "number one topic at the shop" since. "Everyday we talk about it," Guzman said. "The clients are, they're scared because they haven't found him. We're really close to where it happened." Delano has been inundated with a heavy law enforcement presence since Hernandez's escape, with police knocking on doors and helicopters whirling overhead. Guzman said it's the first time something like this has happened in the town, where he has lived his

whole life.

Several local schools locked down, and they remained closed as the search continued, local school districts posted on Facebook. The city postponed its tree-lighting ceremony originally scheduled, and the Delano Chamber of Commerce delayed its annual Christmas parade scheduled. Hernandez remaining at large puts a damper on the festivities, which Guzman and his family have attended every year.

### French govt collapse raises questions over Ukraine support

PARIS (Reuters): The fall of France's government and the failure to pass a budget could make it difficult for Paris to ramp up its support for Ukraine despite President Emmanuel Macron's repeated promises to help Kyiv for as long as necessary.

France in November completed the training of some 2,000 Ukrainians, including providing armoured vehicles for troop movements and reconnaissance, Caesar howitzers, anti-tank missile units, surface-to-air missiles and battlefield radars. It also sent new missiles in recent weeks using funds from frozen Russian assets and plans to provide Mirage fighter jets in the first quarter of 2025.

However, Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu, a potential future prime minister, already said in October that France would fall short of a 3 billion euro (\$3.16 billion) pledge for 2024 with the figure being above 2 billion euros. Speaking ahead of a no-confidence vote that saw Michel Barnier's government collapse, Lecornu said there would be an impact on France's support for Ukraine. "A large part of the Ukrainian support is the transfer of old equipment from the French army that is then replaced with new equipment," Lecornu told Le Parisien newspaper.

"If we slow the order of new equipment then we will have a slowdown of deliveries for Ukraine." By not passing the 2025 budget, which will in essence mean the 2024 budget will be reconducted next year, the defence budget would not reach its 50 billion euros target and signify a loss for the army of 3.3 billion euros, Lecornu said.

### Iran frees jailed Nobel laureate Narges for 21 days

TEHRAN (AP): Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi was released temporarily from prison after undergoing a complex surgery in Iran that saw part of a bone in her right leg removed over cancer fears, her supporters said.

Video footage from the capital, Tehran, showed Mohammadi, 52, taken out of the back of an ambulance, her black hair fanned out without the required hijab, or headscarf, covering it as she called out into the street. Her right leg was covered in a fabric cast. "Hello freedom!" she shouted. "Women, life, freedom! Freedom is our right! Long live freedom!"

Campaigners said she would be free for 21 days, but would have to serve the remaining prison time later. The government did not acknowledge the medical furlough for Mohammadi, which her supporters demanded should involve her being permanently freed. "A 21-day suspension of Narges Mohammadi's sentence is inadequate," the campaign group said. "After over a decade of imprisonment, Narges requires specialized medical care in a safe, sanitary environment - a basic human right. As doctors have emphasized, a minimum of three months' recovery is crucial for her healing." It added: "Narges should never have been imprisoned in the first place for her peaceful advocacy for human and women's rights - the very work that earned her the Nobel Peace Prize."

Mohammadi is serving 13 years and nine months on charges of collusion against state security and propaganda against Iran's government. She has kept up her activism despite numerous arrests by Iranian authorities and spending years behind bars. That includes backing the nationwide, women-led protests sparked by the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, which have seen women openly defy the government by not wearing the hijab. Mohammadi suffered multiple heart attacks while imprisoned before undergoing emergency surgery in 2022, her supporters say. Her lawyer last month revealed doctors had found a bone lesion that they feared could be cancerous. "We are hugely relieved by Narges Mohammadi's temporary release today from Evvin prison, which is an important step in the right direction," said Rebecca Vincent, director of campaigns at Reporters Sans Frontières.

## Blinken, Lavrov clash on Ukraine at a security meeting

VALLETTA, Malta (AP): Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov clashed indirectly with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken at an annual security meeting, accusing the West of risking escalation over Ukraine but walking out before Blinken and other speakers could respond.

Speaking at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe ministerial meeting in Malta, Lavrov accused the West of reviving the Cold War and provoking a direct conflict with Russia. He said the US actions were driven by a desire to "return NATO to the political spotlight." "After the Afghan disgrace, there was a need for a new common enemy," Lavrov said during his first stop in an EU nation since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

"The result is the reincarnation of the Cold War, but now with the far greater risk of its escalation into the hot phase." Blinken, who spoke after Lavrov left the room, put the blame for escalation in the region back on Russia, noting that the Russian foreign minister, the fourth speaker, did not stick around to listen to other speakers. "Let's talk about escalation," Blinken said, citing the deployment of North Korean forces in

Europe, the use of an intermediate-range ballistic missile to attack Ukraine, Russia's move to lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, and attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

"Mr. Lavrov spoke about the sovereign right of every member-state to make their own choices," Blinken said. "That's exactly what this is about: the sovereign right of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people to make their own choices about the future, not to have those choices made in and by Moscow."

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, who was the first to address the panel, walked out as Lavrov took the podium, along with the foreign ministers of Poland and Estonia. Before leaving the podium, Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Andrii Sybiha, called his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov a "war criminal."

"Ukraine continues to fight for its right to exist. And the Russian war criminal at this table (Lavrov) should know this: Ukraine will succeed and justice will prevail." The visit marked Lavrov's first visit to an EU member nation since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It has been relatively rare for Lavrov to attend forums

involving senior Western officials, although he recently took part in the United Nations General Assembly and the G20 summit in Brazil. Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said on her message app that Malta had annulled her visa to accompany Lavrov. The Maltese foreign affairs office said that three OSCE member countries had objected to extending the visa to Zakharova, who is under a travel ban. Lavrov is subject to EU sanctions, but faces no travel ban.

Lavrov attended the event last year in Skopje, North Macedonia, but Poland denied him a visa the previous year in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Blinken traveled to Malta from Brussels, where he attended what was likely to be his last NATO meeting of the outgoing Biden administration. Ukraine's foreign minister was also attending, after Ukraine boycotted last year over Lavrov's attendance. Reporters Without Borders called on the OSCE to release 38 journalists detained by Russia, including 19 Ukrainians arrested in illegally occupied territories. It said in a statement that Russia is the world's fifth-largest jailer of journalists.

## China trying to set a 'red line' for incoming Trump govt

TAIPEI (Reuters): China is trying to set a "red line" for the incoming Trump administration and US allies by stepping up military activities in the region, a senior Taiwan security official said, including likely war games this weekend around the island.

China, which claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory over Taipei's rejection, has held two rounds of war games around the island so far this year, and its forces operate nearby on a daily basis. The official confirmed concerns expressed by other security officials in the region who have previously told Reuters that China could launch new drills to coincide with Taiwan President Lai Ching-te's trip to the Pacific this week which included visits to Hawaii and the US territory of Guam.

"They want to clearly establish that the First Island Chain is China's red line and its sphere of control before the new US gov-

ernment takes office on Jan. 20," the official told a briefing in Taipei, offering the government's assessment of China's activities. The First Island Chain is an area that runs from Japan through Taiwan, the Philippines and on to Borneo, enclosing China's coastal seas.

Neither China's Taiwan Affairs Office nor its defence ministry responded to a request for comment. The Taiwan official, briefing on condition of anonymity to be able to speak more freely, said China could launch new war games shortly before or after Lai's return to Taipei from the Pacific.

"They want to tell the new US government that this area is controlled by China and that you must discuss with China everything that happens here," the official said, pointing to recent Chinese military activities around Taiwan including joint manoeuvres with Russia near the island's east coast earlier this week. "They want other countries - the United

States or Europe - to know that this is their sphere of influence and that they should be taken seriously."

China has deployed close to 40 vessels in the region this week, including a Chinese aircraft carrier group led by Liaoning in the East China Sea as well as other naval and coast-guard boats in the South China Sea. Reuters first reported that a north bound Russian naval fleet approached close to Taiwan's contiguous zone 24 nautical miles (45 km) off its southeastern coasts and conducted joint simulated attacks on "foreign vessels and aircraft" with a Chinese destroyer nearby.

China urged the United States last week to exercise the "utmost caution" on relations with Taiwan, ahead of Lai's Pacific tour. Beijing opposes any foreign interactions or visits by Taiwan leaders. Lai and his government reject Beijing's sovereignty claims, saying only the island's people can decide their future.

## Dwarfed by China in shipbuilding

WASHINGTON (AP): The US severely lags behind China in shipbuilding capacity, lawmakers and experts have warned, as the Biden administration tries to build up the country's ability to develop and produce weapons and other defense supplies to fend off war.

Speaking at a congressional hearing, Rep. John Moolenaar, the Republican chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, said the country lacks the capacity to "deter and win a fight" with China and called for action. "Bold policy changes and significant resources are now needed to restore deterrence and prevent a fight" with China, Moolenaar said.

China's navy is already the world's largest, and its shipbuilding capacity, estimated to be 230 times larger, dwarfs that of the US Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, the ranking Democratic member of the committee, told Fox News last week that "for every one oceangoing vessel that we can produce, China can produce 359 in one single year."

The US government has come to see China as its "pacing challenge," and officials have warned that Beijing is pursuing the largest peacetime military buildup in history, raising concerns about how the US would respond and ensure victory in case of a conflict in the Indo-Pacific, where tensions are high in the

Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. Krishnamoorthi warned that a weak military industrial base could invite aggression and argued that strengthening it is necessary to avoid war with China.

"History tells us we need a healthy defense industrial base now to deter aggression and make sure the world's dictators think again before dragging the US and the world into yet another disastrous conflict," Krishnamoorthi said. National security adviser Jake Sullivan called it a "generational project" to fix the problem after the American shipbuilding industry had its "bottom fell out" in the early 1980s.

"Part of it is we don't have the backbone of a healthy commercial shipbuilding base to rest our naval shipbuilding on top of," Sullivan said at the Aspen Security Forum in Washington. "And that's part of the fragility of what we're contending with and why this is going to be such a generational project to fix." The challenge in shipbuilding has been "especially immense," stemming from the hollowing-out of the US manufacturing base where its workforce shrank and suppliers left, Sullivan said. And it is part of the broader problem of a weakened US military industrial base, as manifested in the weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine, Sullivan said, when Kyiv in eight weeks

"burned through a year's worth of US 155-millimeter artillery production."

"Decades of underinvestments and consolidation had seriously eroded our defense industrial base, and there was no way around it," Sullivan said. The head of US Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Samuel Paparo, warned last month that the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East were eating away at critical US weapons stockpiles and could hamper the military's ability to respond to China should a conflict arise.

He said providing or selling billions of dollars worth of air defenses to both Ukraine and Israel were hampering US ability to respond to threats in the Indo-Pacific. "It's now eating into stocks, and to say otherwise would be dishonest," he told an audience at the Brookings Institution in Washington on Nov. 19.

Several researchers at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies said China's rapid military buildup could allow the country to prevail over the US, especially in case of a prolonged conflict. "China's massive shipbuilding industry would provide a strategic advantage in a war that stretches beyond a few weeks, allowing it to repair damaged vessels or construct replacements much faster than the United States," the researchers wrote in June.



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## New bridges

REPUBLICANS are outspoken about certain geopolitical realities that suggest a shift in American attention away from Europe. Meanwhile, transatlantic relations are politicized, contributing to a divide across Europe itself, particularly under a Trump presidency. Governments in East-Central Europe have certain comparative advantages through defense spending at home and political ties to the White House. These are valuable, as they can help in easing transatlantic tensions under a second Trump term.

American internationalism faces challenges often attributed to Republicans. Indeed, conservatives are more outspoken when it comes to reshifting attention from Europe to East Asia [1] or the burdens of defense from the US to Europe. [2] These views reflect the reality that American geopolitics is primarily focused on the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the age of renewed great power competition. The latter idea has become ubiquitous, but its origins [3] were in the first Donald Trump presidency. The novelty of Trump's foreign policy was that it brought a realist and often nationalist hammer to liberal and often idealist beliefs about international relations. Since Europe has been home for the latter, it is wary of a second Trump presidency.

While Donald Trump does use harsh language against Europeans, most of his complaints reflect frustrations that are decades old. The fact is that transatlantic relations are politicized: Western European leaders love to hate Republican presidents, while Democrats tend to overlook East-Central European leaders in the European Union (EU). In a certain sense, Donald Rumsfeld's division of "old and new Europe" [4] remains relevant, especially under a Trump presidency. Donald Trump made his most important foreign policy speech in Warsaw, where he talked about defending the West [5] in 2017. As always, it was deemed controversial [6], but it also provided the basis for the Trump administration's Europe strategy [7], which primarily focused on East-Central Europe. [8]

Trump's foreign policy will continue to carry a big stick in many forms. Washington's onshore balancing remains relevant in Europe, where the political value of allies may be a function of their respective defense investments. East-Central Europeans have an advantage here, as most outperform [9] their Western allies in terms of defense spending as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These efforts can be turned into political gains. For example, in its final year, the first Trump presidency tried to decrease US troop numbers in Germany: while many saw this as an attempt to withdraw from Europe, it was aimed at repositioning some of those forces as new deployments to Poland. People in the Republican Party acknowledge [10] East-Central European merits in defense investment and call for similar American rewarding measures for the future.

Of course, the hard realities of great power competition remain. Ukraine's fate in the face of Russian aggression or Europe's relationship with China carries the potential of a further deteriorating security environment. The transatlantic alliance is likely to suffer frictions on these issues. Still, East-Central European allies may use their comparative advantages to help cooler heads prevail in Washington and Brussels, respectively. In other words, they can try to form bridges for transatlantic security and political discourse during Trump's second term in office.

## Last NATO meeting

ON Dec. 3-4, NATO foreign ministers are meeting in Brussels for the first time with the new Secretary General Mark Rutte, and for the last time under the Biden administration. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will be attending the event, which will also feature the first gathering of the NATO-Ukraine Council, bringing together NATO and Ukrainian representatives at the level of foreign ministers. At the core of debates will be, as has been the case for the last two-and-a-half years, NATO's support to Ukraine, as well as the defense posture of the alliance. Yet, hallway discussions will focus on one issue exclusively - the potential impact on the Atlantic alliance of Donald Trump's comeback as US president.

Concerns are many among European leaders that Trump will distance himself from an alliance he has often dismissed, one that also clashes with his "America First" slogan. Documents produced by his camp in the last two years mention a "radical reorientation of the Alliance," a "dormant NATO," or a "two-tier alliance," in which members that make a decent effort for their defense would get more security guarantees from the US than others that do not. The most radical scenario is a withdrawal of the US from NATO and although unlikely, this is not to be ruled out. What is almost certain, however, is renewed friction and a diminished US commitment. The issue of defense spending has been one of Trump's recurrent critiques of European states, which he accuses of not meeting the NATO pledge of spending 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense. As of 2024, though, improvements have been noted, with 23 allies, including the UK, France, Germany, Poland, and Türkiye, having reached the threshold from the total 32. In Brussels, NATO representatives will no doubt discuss how best this can be communicated to the president-elect when he takes charge in January. Yet, the argument is increasingly made that 2% will not be enough in the face of an ever-changing security environment. Europeans may also have to shoulder more responsibilities in reinforcing the alliance's defense posture on its Eastern flank.

It is partly with these possible talks in mind that the Biden administration has recently authorized the use of long-range ATACMS missiles on Russian territory so that Ukraine would be in a slightly better position when talks start. Not much is known about what would be offered to Russia in return for a stop to the war, but it might include suspending the pledge made to Ukraine to join NATO. As a matter of fact, this has been suggested by the forthcoming US envoy to Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, as he was writing on the issue in April 2024. Would the last NATO meeting before Trump takes office allow for important decisions to "Trump-proof" the alliance and Ukraine? This is very unlikely, as there is practically nothing that Trump could not then undo when he comes to power. On the contrary, as they meet for the last time before the second Trump term, NATO representatives are more likely to be seeking to show unity and purpose. In other words, they will aim to demonstrate that the alliance is strong and useful and that Europeans are fully playing their part so that the new US administration is less inclined to make unwanted and highly disruptive decisions.

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Bilawal ready to speeds in...



## How and why was the People's Tribunal on Gaza established?

Hilal Elver

THE idea of establishing a people's tribunal to expose ongoing genocide and atrocities in Gaza came from a small group of concerned Turkish citizens who were trying to respond and raise public awareness in May 2024. Coincidentally, in August, Bogazici University organized the conference "International Law after Gaza" in Istanbul and invited scholars working on the Israel-Palestine conflict from an international law point of view.

Under the leadership of Richard Falk, chair of Global Law at Queen Mary University of London and UN former special rapporteur on human rights violations in the occupied Palestine territories since 1967, we, as a group of concerned scholars who have been working on Palestine, further discussed the idea of a people's tribunal to judge, expose, and condemn the government of Israel and its close allies supporting the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The failure of the UN Security Council to attain a ceasefire deal because of the veto power of the permanent members, especially the US, as well as the silence and complicity of several Western governments and growing global public outrage of opinion, were the main motivations for this initiative.

The idea of establishing a people's tribunal to adjudicate severe human rights violations and/or war crimes is not new. The inspiration for people's tribunals originated with the Russell Tribunal established in 1966 by British philosopher Bertrand Russell and French writer/philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. The original Russell Tribunal critically examined the US military intervention in Vietnam and set a precedent for subsequent people's tribunals. Although unofficial and lacking enforcement power, the Russell Tribunal sought to hold those in power accountable by mobilizing public opinion. At that time, the tribunal made a huge impact among American people who were against the war, as well as global public opinion that was helpful in delegitimizing the American government's war against the Vietnamese people.

After the Russell Tribunal, the model expanded globally, addressing various human rights violations. In 1975, Basso Foundations established a Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) in Italy, not

only dealing with war crimes but also focusing on various violations of human rights, such as apartheid in South Africa, human rights violations in Latin America and the Philippines, and later environmental wrongdoings. For instance, in 2000 in Japan, a women's tribunal focused on gender-based violence and discrimination, specifically focusing on the "comfort women" during World War II. In 2016, the International Monsanto Tribunal in Brussels addressed corporate crimes involving the environment and human health. In recent years, several initiatives have been directed at ecocide (for deliberate large-scale environmental harm) and environmental crimes of transnational corporations.

These non-binding, non-governmental initiatives serve as a platform for addressing grievances and violations of rights as well as exposing injustices, particularly in cases where official legal mechanisms are perceived as inadequate, inaccessible, or complicit. These tribunals aim to provide moral authority and bring attention to issues that might otherwise remain overlooked, marginalized, or suppressed. The Gaza Tribunal is set rather differently than earlier models, and it is not structured strictly to mimic judicial institutions. There is an ongoing genocide, and at least two important international courts have Gaza on their agendas. The first one began in 2023 with South Africa's application to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) under the rules of the 1948 Genocide Convention. Starting from January 2024, the ICJ has so far issued three sets of provisional measures pronouncing positively as to the "plausibility of genocide." The ICJ ordered Israel to immediately stop committing severe human rights violations and war crimes, such as starvation. The full investigation and final ICJ decision about genocide is likely to take several years.

The second international legal initiative was taken by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), who recommended the issuance of an arrest warrant against the leadership of Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. After a delay of six months, the Pre-trial Chamber of the ICC announced the issuance of

arrest warrants on Nov. 20. This is an important development and will undoubtedly impact not only the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but should strengthen the ICC's institutional legitimacy.

Considering these ongoing court proceedings, the Gaza Tribunal is structured to be flexible, faster, and designed to serve a far more comprehensive investigation than is typical of strictly legalistic inquiries by international courts. The Gaza Tribunal has been planned to consider the wider impacts and complications of Israeli behavior in addition to genocide. This includes the historical foundation of Israel as a Western settler-colonial project, which has led directly to the long-suffering of the Palestinian people living under a cruel occupation that has included ethnic cleansing, dispossession, repression, humiliation, apartheid, and destruction, preparing the way for the current genocide. The Gaza Tribunal will extend its mandate to famine crime, ecocide (crime against nature), scholasticism (crime against education), democide (crime against housing), saniticide (destruction or exploitation of health care), and sociocide (crimes exploiting or destroying cultural tradition and historical identity) in Gaza and occupied territories. The Gaza Tribunal also deals with the wider implications of Israel's attack on neighboring countries, threatening peace and security in the region and the wider world.

People's tribunals are typically organized by activists, academics, and non-governmental organizations, with strong engagement from affected societies. The Gaza Tribunal is a global independent project free from any direct or indirect influence of governments, active politicians, and diplomats. The structure of the tribunal consists of a small Steering Committee, chaired by the president, that is responsible for administering the entire machinery of the Gaza Tribunal, including a larger Advisory Policy Council (APC) gathered from among globally respected intellectuals and members at large invited to take part based on their expert knowledge of Palestinian issues. Selection criteria took account of race, gender, and geographical diversity. A jury of independent experts, comprising

lawyers, academics, cultural and moral authority figures, as well as activists, will collectively assess the evidence and testimonies that will be assembled to underpin the work of the Gaza Tribunal. Palestinian civil society organizations, as well as the global solidarity movement, will play a vital role at every stage of the Gaza Tribunal.

The Gaza Tribunal seeks to cooperate with reliable and influential international media, especially those operating in the Global South. So far, the mainstream Western media has either played no role in delimiting the crimes of Israel or deliberately manipulated public opinion in ways detrimental to the Palestinians and advantageous to vulture profiteering from Israeli criminality.

The tentative schedule is set to hold a first hearing in April 2025 in a country whose government is receptive to the Gaza Tribunal approach without compromising our independence. The final hearing is currently planned to take place in Istanbul in October 2025. We are also considering alternative possibilities, including Malaysia and Indonesia. Because this is an ongoing genocide, we believe that it is desirable to be flexible with respect to timetable, location, and overall logistics.

The Gaza Tribunal is aiming to meticulously collect evidence, especially visual materials that document the most serious of Israel's violations. An objective of the Gaza Tribunal is to contribute to the formation of an accurate and comprehensive historical record of the genocide and to provide guidance for future legal proceedings.

Finally, while the judgments of the people's tribunal are not legally binding or directly enforceable, they carry symbolic and moral weight, often influencing public opinion and policy and triggering further legal and civil society action that could contribute to reaching a just and durable peace. We hope the Gaza Tribunal amplifies the voices of Palestinians marginalized and victimized by mainstream media and the dominant political system. By shedding light on systemic injustices and pushing for accountability, the Gaza Tribunal challenges the status quo, catalyzing legal, social, and political change for the future, not only with respect to the Palestinian ordeal but for the benefit of all vulnerable, repressed groups.

## Putin's overseas empire collapsing all at once

Jonathan Sweet & Mark Toth

IT has been another bad week for Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government collapsed faster than Afghanistan's had in August 2021. Syrian rebels caught Putin's armed forces by surprise and swept through Aleppo, forcing the Russians to vacate several military bases.

The Russian commander, Lieutenant General Sergey Kisel, had previously commanded Russia's 1st Guards Tank Army in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine, where they were driven back by a Ukrainian counterattack in late 2022. Now a two-time battlefield failure, he would do well to avoid open windows when he is recalled back to the Kremlin. The fighting rages on, with Damascus clearly the goal. Unlike Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Assad passed on the ammo and "took the ride" with his family. He was safely evacuated to Russia, where his "extended family and associates own \$40 million worth of luxury apartments in Moscow's skyscraper district."

And with Assad's regime likely coming to an end, Russian influence in the region may be ending, too. At risk now are two key military facilities: the Khmeimim airbase, from which Russian aircraft have been launching attacks against Syrian Rebels and civilians, and Tartus, home to Syria's only naval base. And without these two bases, Russian operations in the Middle East, the Sahel region of Africa, and Sudan will likely grind to a halt as well.

Russian tactics remain the same as ever. Instead of attacking the Syrian rebels, they are targeting civilians in "liberated" population centers. But this tactic is having minimal effect on the foreign rebels leading the charge - the Turkish-backed collation of Islamist militant groups Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Designated as a terrorist group by the UN Security Council, this coalition has direct ties to al-Qaeda. In hindsight, this is the result of Hamas's ill-conceived Oct. 7 terrorist attack against Israel - likely directed by Iran with Russia's support. Already preoccupied with their own problems, neither Russia nor Iran nor Hezbollah are in any position to come to Assad's aide. Putin's war with Ukraine has drained Russian resources, and Israel has weakened Iran and its proxies. The regional kaleidoscope is now shifting, and conditions are ripe for the "wider regional conflict" that the Biden administration feared.

For Moscow, there is more at risk than just Syria's Mediterranean port. Putin also faces the possible loss of the Ochamchire district in the Georgian breakaway republic of Abkhazia - the seaport to which he wants to move his Black Sea fleet, since Ukraine's successful attacks forced it out of Sevastopol. Russian colonialism is wearing thin in the Caucasus, too. In mid-November, protesters stormed the parliament of Abkhazia, demanding the resignation of Aslan Bzhania over an unpopular investment agreement with Moscow, "which critics feared would clear the way for wealthy Russian individuals and businesses to buy up property in the lush Black Sea region, pricing out

locals." Georgians are still reeling from October's election results, which President Salome Zourabichvili alleges was stolen as part of a "Russian special operation." On November 28, they took to the streets in the capital city of Tbilisi when Dream Party Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced he was suspending talks to join the European Union. Since then, the protests have grown. Demonstrations have taken place in at least eight cities as "tens of thousands of Georgians took to the streets again Sunday as mass nationwide protests entered their fourth night."

Russia is overextended. Should the pro-Russian Dream Party-led government collapse, Abkhazia and South Ossetia could come back into play for Georgia. A significantly weakened conventional Russian military may not be able to retain these Russian-occupied territories. The loss of the port in Abkhazia would be detrimental to Russian influence in the Black Sea. Adding to these issues was another public humiliation oriented towards Putin. During his visit to Astana, Kazakhstan, to attend the Collective Security Treaty Organization summit, Putin referred to Kazakhstan as a "Russian speaking country." But when he visited Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev addressed the summit audience, he did so in his native Kazakh. Anton Geraschenko, a former advisor to Zelensky, described the incident as "trolling at a prohibitive level."

Yet through it all, Putin remains steadfast in his determination to win the war at any cost. Despite an economy in turmoil, he continues to double down on Ukraine. On Dec. 1, he approved a 2025 budget plan that hikes military spending from 28.3 percent to 32.5 percent - 13.5 trillion rubles (currently worth \$145 billion). That does not sound like a man open to negotiations. Putin evidently believes he can outlast Ukraine and the West. What he does not have - trained soldiers and munitions - he can purchase from North Korea and Iran, his "arsenals of evil."

Putin's Jenga tower is listing hard. Neither the Biden nor Trump administrations should consider anything short of a complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, and the restoration of its 1991 borders. All instruments of national power - Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economic - should be leveraged to end the war on the best terms possible for Ukraine. Getting Putin to the negotiation table will require a Mike Tyson-like punch to the face. The unrestricted use of precision deep strike weapons is part of the solution - a condition set by the US. So is allowing Ukraine to interdict Russian and North Korean troops, equipment, and their munitions at the seaports, airfields, railheads and assembly areas in Russia before they arrive on the Ukrainian battlefield. These capabilities create room to maneuver for Ukrainian troops on the front lines so that they can eventually push Russian forces out of their country. The US must harness the warrior ethos of Generals Patton and Grant and enable Ukraine to wedge out that last Jenga piece: no sanctuary, relentless pressure and violence of action.

The Hill

## Last push for a Gaza agreement

Dr. Ali Bakir

failed attempts to achieve a cease-fire in Gaza, the US administration is racing against the time to make its final push toward realizing this agreement.

However, Israel's assassination of Hamas political leaders has weakened the capacity to communicate effectively with the Palestinian group, which is essential for reaching a viable agreement. With Hamas leaders reportedly out of Qatar at present and Doha announcing the suspension of its mediation efforts in November until "the necessary seriousness" is evident in negotiations, the US administration appears to be running out of options, especially as the window of opportunity closes in about a month. Consequently, the Biden administration's decision to utilize every possible effort in this last push for a cease-fire in Gaza, including those from Türkiye, despite previous efforts to sideline Ankara, reflects a pragmatic

shift in US diplomacy aimed at leveraging Türkiye's position and influence in the region.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has consistently expressed Türkiye's readiness to contribute to establishing a lasting cease-fire in Gaza. At the onset of the crisis, Ankara proposed a "guarantor system," which was dismissed by both Israel and the US, with some Arab governments also showing little enthusiasm for the offer.

The protracted conflict in Gaza has highlighted the limitations of excluding influential regional actors from peace processes. Türkiye's involvement is seen as crucial for achieving a comprehensive and enduring cease-fire, given its geopolitical significance and relationships with key parties. The US administration recognizes that a durable resolution requires the inclusion of all stakeholders capable of

influencing the situation on the ground. Engaging Türkiye aligns with the broader objective of stabilizing the region, even if it involves collaboration with partners who have complex and sometimes contentious relationships with other US allies.

Hamas has consistently expressed its readiness to agree to a credible deal that includes the release of captives in exchange for freeing Palestinian detainees held by Israel, ensuring unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza, and the withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces with an established security agreement to prevent future escalations. Recently, Hamas released a video of the captives, aiming to rally support for a deal, including from the Israeli public and families of the captives, and to put pressure on the Israeli government.

Last week, Israeli

President Isaac Herzog revealed that there are ongoing contacts between Israel and Hamas for a cease-fire and hostage release deal, asserting, "Now, after the agreement in Lebanon, it's time to make a deal and bring the captives home." While specific terms are still under negotiation, the process has proven complex, particularly with Israel's assassination of Hamas political leaders and senior officials who were among the Palestinian negotiation team.

One theory suggests that Netanyahu may now be open to a deal for two reasons. First, he may not want to challenge the upcoming US President-elect Donald Trump, who has reportedly urged him to wrap up military operations before taking office in January. Second, despite Trump's strong support for Israel, personal ties between Trump and Netanyahu have not been that good. At the end of his presidency, Trump concluded

ed that Netanyahu did not genuinely want peace with the Palestinians and had used him against Iran. This implies that Netanyahu might seek to open a new chapter, at least at the beginning of Trump's new term, and reaching an agreement on Gaza could be beneficial for him in this context.

Incorporating Türkiye into the Gaza cease-fire negotiations represents a recalibration by the Biden administration, acknowledging the complex nature of the problem. By engaging Türkiye alongside Egypt and Qatar in the process, the US aims to harness all available diplomatic channels to facilitate a cease-fire, secure the release of hostages, and ultimately work towards an acceptable deal. All parties are expected to contribute, and the urgency of the situation cannot be overstated. However, whether the US administration can realize this deal within a month or whether Netanyahu will sabotage this opportunity again remains to be seen.



# Kazakhstan must break free from its economic alliance with Russia

Madi Kapparov

**LAST week, Russian President Vladimir Putin attended a summit for the Collective Security Treaty Organization in Astana. However, for some Kazakhs, the Russian president's presence in the country's capital was overshadowed by the plummeting exchange rate of the Kazakh tenge against the US dollar. The tenge tracked the ruble in its decline following the recently imposed sanctions against Gazprombank, a Russian state-owned bank that facilitates the trade of hydrocarbons and other resources, making it a major source of foreign currency for the Kremlin until recently. Last week alone the tenge lost 2.6% in value against the dollar.**

It is not the first time the tenge experienced a sharp decline as a consequence of US sanctions against Russia - earlier this year the Kazakh currency devalued almost 5% in less than three weeks following the Moscow Exchange suspending trade in dollars and euros after being hit by US sanctions. Since then, the ruble is effectively a non-floating currency with the exchange rate formally determined over-the-counter and informally by Russia's Central Bank and Ministry of Finance. The Kazakh tenge on the other hand is still floating. There is a caveat though - the ruble has largely remained in the band of 4.8 to 5.5 tenge per ruble in the past year supported by bilateral trade governed by the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

So, what is the EAEU? Established in 2015, the bloc superseded the Eurasian Customs Union and was touted by Moscow as the region's counterpart to the European Union. However, unlike the EU, the EAEU has done little to achieve true economic integration that benefits all member states, which include Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan. While the

two largest economies of the EU, France and Germany, comprise just over 40% of the EU's GDP, Russia makes up over 80% of the EAEU's combined economy. It uses its out-sized position in the union to pursue its own goals oftentimes with little regard to the interests of other members. Considering the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it should be abundantly clear that the Kremlin is willing to pursue its geopolitical ambitions at immense economic costs which are indirectly imposed on the non-warring EAEU members. When Russia launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Alibek Kuantayrov, the then Kazakh National Economy Minister, quickly pointed out that the war in Ukraine could have a negative impact on the Kazakh economy.

Perhaps, the EAEU's true nature is best encapsulated by Kataryna Wolczuk of Chatham House: "Moscow created the EAEU as a vehicle to reverse Russia's loss of power in the region following the demise of the Soviet Union, rather than to pursue deep economic integration with smaller states."

The Moscow-centric EAEU is consequently used by the Kremlin as a soft-power tool to extract political and economic gains from member states. Russia frequently disregards the organization's rules and supercedes its governing bodies in trade negotiations, as was the case with Putin agreeing to "connect the initiative of the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt put forward by the Chinese side with the construction of the Eurasian Economic Union of the Russian side" in a 2015 meeting with China's Xi Jinping, with no prior consultation with any members of the EAEU. Ironically, China and Kazakhstan finished their parts of the highway planned to connect China with Europe, leaving Russia as the only country failing to fulfill their

obligation. In 2022 Russia decided to reroute the highway through Iran.

In other instances, Russia used the EAEU as an economic extortion scheme. In 2014 Russia used EAEU's antecedent organization, the Customs Union, to pressure Belarus into aiding Russia in sanctions circumvention, imposed following the occupation of Crimea. At the time Russia banned Belarusian agricultural imports produced by 23 companies. In 2016, Putin unilaterally banned the transit of Ukrainian goods through Russia to Kazakhstan slashing Ukrainian exports to the country by 45.5%. Russia also frequently imposes unilateral non-tariff trade limitations against Kazakh companies either as a protectionist measure or as an economic pressure tool while de jure fulfilling its duties under the terms of the EAEU.

However, not all EAEU terms are beneficial to Kazakhstan. EAEU standards and requirements are often optimized for Russian producers or simply set at levels that are prohibitively costly to abide by for companies in other member states. Russian companies typically don't get punished for standards violations.

Moreover, the EAEU's protectionist measures overwhelmingly benefit Russian firms. Almas Chukin, a member of the Council for the Kazakh National Economy Ministry, points out: "With the emergence of the Customs Union we do not have an independent customs policy. We received many non-tariff restrictions on foreign trade with preferences given to our partners but not to the rest of the world ... Protectionist duties on foreign goods entering the EAEU have made our lives more expensive."

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's remarks at November's summit that Kazakhstan and Russia should not compete against each other in the EAEU's domestic mar-

kets, in the opening paragraph acknowledges what has been known to the Kazakh government since the inception of the union: Russia and Kazakhstan are direct competitors in global markets. Both economies are heavily dependent on the exports of hydrocarbons and other natural resources. One of the few notable ways they are complementary is in the nuclear energy sector, where Kazakhstan is the largest uranium producer in the world and Russia possesses the largest uranium enrichment capacity in the world. However, there too the terms are skewed in Russia's favor. Rosatom acquired the largest uranium mine in the world in Kazakhstan, while Kazakhstan has no ownership in enrichment facilities in Russia.

The continued isolation of Russia and the Kremlin's acceptance of incurring ever-increasing sanctions as a consequence of their imperial pursuits pose significant economic risks for Kazakhstan. Membership in EAEU pre-2022 had some rationale especially considering that 80% of Kazakh oil exports traveled to the global markets through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) in Russia.

However, with China overtaking Russia as Kazakhstan's primary trade partner and the Kazakh government taking active steps to reduce the country's dependence on the CPC pipeline, there are viable conditions for an EAEU exit. Moreover, the tenge's exchange rate shocks discussed earlier highlight the unfavorable transfer of risks from Russia to Kazakhstan. The threat of sanctions should also not be forgotten - in an interview with Izvestiya, French MEP Thierry Mariani stated that Kazakhstan as a member of the EAEU could be subjected to secondary sanctions. Secondary sanctions would be catastrophic for the Kazakh economy and could push the country deeper into Moscow's orbit.

*The Moscow Times*

# Why Russia's Opp must not abandon Russian flag

**ON November 17, a major protest demonstration of the Russian opposition in exile took place in Berlin. Some of the participants carried Russian flags, not the white and blue triband used by some campaigners, sparking conflicts among the protesters. Personally, I associate Russia's tricolor with Alexei Navalny's 2017-18 presidential campaign. There is much that can be said about why Navalny achieved such extraordinary political success - running a dynamic campaign, becoming widely recognized, and engaging tens of thousands of Russians in politics.**

But in the context of the flag, one thing stands out: Navalny made dignity still within its control. The inaction is not society's fault - it is just a reaction to historical circumstances, decades of rights being stripped away, all those years of lies and abuse.

This is what the opposition has been trying to combat - via empowering and the discourse of dignity: We are the country, not Putin, and we will never let them treat us this way. The opposition has tried to conjure a positive vision of the future - a free, prosperous, and happy Russia. Through patriotism without chauvinism, which was also symbolized by the Russian flag.

The Russian flag also served another vital purpose: it signaled the opposition's commitment to Russia and its people. The regime's myth that the opposition serves Western masters and seeks to harm the country has been promoted for decades. It has always been a lie, but it needed countering. Navalny's genuine patriotism, shared by thousands of his supporters, their love for Russia and desire for freedom and democracy were expressed in the Russian flag. The tricolor reminded us that our country and our future were at stake. It sent a powerful signal to the broader public: we are fighting for you and your future. Navalny's acclaim demonstrated that people believed in this - and they were right.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a devastating blow to both this discourse of dignity and to the Russian flag. Russia's democratic opposition and its supporters were horrified, overwhelmed by guilt for what was happening and their inability to stop it.

Timofei Martynenko

"We have failed as a nation", wrote Ilya Krasilshchik, former publisher of Meduza, in a column early in the war. In this self-perception, there was no room for dignity - or for the Russian flag.

Wracked with guilt and shame, much of the opposition abandoned using the Russian flag in their messaging and at protests abroad. Along with it, they discarded a political discourse centered on identity, dignity, patriotism, and the interests of Russia and its people. After all, what dignity could there be when civilians were being bombed in Ukraine in our name? How could one speak of our own interests or future when another country's future was being destroyed? How could the Russian flag be used when it now flow over occupied Ukrainian cities?

This loss has distanced the opposition from the broader public and from its own goals. It feels as if we have nothing left to say to Russians. True, we are against the war. But what do we want for ourselves, our country, and our future? Who are we, as Russians - spineless slaves or a nation deserving at least compassion while being trapped under a dictatorship?

Should we be ashamed of our symbols, of fighting for our interests and speaking about our future? Do we even deserve a dignified, free, prosperous, and happy future? At best, these questions remain unanswered by the Russian opposition.

Obviously, it is incredibly challenging to have dialogues about such things during a war. But I believe that the Russian opposition shall not forget: there has never been, and never will be, a more important task than winning the hearts and minds of Russians and instilling in society a belief in itself and a better future.

The best we can offer to the world is not a burden of guilt and shame, nor proof of how virtuous and righteous we are. The best we can offer is peace, freedom, and democracy in Russia - none of which can be achieved without the support of the majority of the country. No one understands better than we do how to continue the fight for freedom, and that is why the most important thing we can do for the world is to stay true to ourselves, embrace our roots and support the discourse of dignity - and the Russian flag.

# New dynamics in Russia-Ukraine conflict

**AS the Russia-Ukraine war progresses from a bilateral power struggle, the diversity of actors on the battlefield introduces new dimensions to the conflict. Both Ukraine and Russia are integrating foreign fighters into their military operations, transcending the use of traditional armed forces. This development has significant implications for the trajectory of the war and profoundly impacts international diplomacy and geopolitical balances.**

Mehmet Furkan Dundar

States are creating foreign military legions to fulfill the need for flexible and rapid response forces that can support their traditional military capabilities.

From French and Spanish forces in the colonial wars to modern groups such as Russia's Wagner Group and Western military volunteers in Syria, foreign legions are present in conflicts as military and ideological-political assets.

Similarly, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, and Nigeria, foreign fighters motivated by ideology provided support to local resistance movements, while international coalition forces and volunteer soldiers played a significant role in state-level interventions. On Nov. 12, 2024, North Korea and Russia approved a strategic partnership agreement, thereby taking a significant step in strengthening the military ties. The 23-article agreement serves to institutionalize defense cooperation between the two countries, with a particular focus on providing comprehensive support against external aggression.

The North Korean military is renowned for its secrecy and discipline. It comprises approximately 1.28 million active personnel and 600,000 reserves. The mandatory military service period lasts up to 10 years for

men and 8 years for women. Ideological training and loyalty to the regime are the core structural elements of this period. Nevertheless, shortcomings in military technology and a paucity of international experience give rise to substantial skepticism regarding the actual combat effectiveness of the armed forces.

Speculation regarding the deployment of North Korean troops in support of Russian military operations has elicited a range of responses from the international community. Despite the Russian government's refutation of these allegations, which it asserts are limited to the exchange of military expertise, the prospective consequences are significant for both Russia and North Korea.

For Russia, North Korean troops could assist in addressing manpower deficiencies on the battlefield. Additionally, due to their discipline and ideological commitment, they may offer advantages in specific missions. For North Korea, participation could facilitate the lifting of international sanctions and contribute to the strengthening of bilateral relations with Russia.

Nevertheless, the alliance entails certain risks. The deployment of North Korean troops could potentially lead to morale issues among local Russian forces and result in coordination challenges on the ground. Such actions could also prompt the imposition of more stringent sanctions by Western powers. For North Korea, the potential for significant casualties or failures among its troops carries with it the risk of unavoidable media attention, which could ultimately damage the regime's international standing. On Oct. 25, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy enacted legislation that permits foreign volunteers in the Ukrainian

International Legion to serve as officers. This decision appears to be a strategic move at a critical juncture in the war. Initially regarded as a symbolic entity, the Ukrainian International Legion, comprising fighters from over 50 countries, has assumed greater significance as the war persists and the necessity for seasoned leadership intensifies. The appointment of foreign officers is regarded as a strategic measure to address the deficit of technical expertise and combat experience.

Nevertheless, this course of action entails certain risks. It is possible that Ukrainian soldiers may react unfavorably to receiving orders from foreign officers, which could result in a decline in morale and the emergence of internal tensions. Furthermore, the deployment of foreign officers may reinforce the perception that Ukraine's military operations are heavily reliant on external assistance.

The mounting reliance on foreign military forces by both Russia and Ukraine may be an indication of strategic preparations for a prolonged conflict. Nevertheless, this reliance entails inherent risks for both parties with regard to the equilibrium of power and motivation.

Language barriers and operational challenges reduce the effectiveness of foreign fighters on the battlefield for both Ukraine and Russia, leading to coordination issues during combat. These difficulties limit the contributions of foreign units and increase the burden on local soldiers and commanders. In conclusion, the course of this war will be shaped not only by the actions on the battlefield but also by the ability of each side to maintain international support. The strategic withdrawal of the party experiencing a loss of power and motivation will ultimately determine the final outcome of the conflict.

# Korea, Russia and China watch on as crisis unfolds in key US ally South Korea

Simone McCarthy

**A night of political upheaval in South Korea has upended stability in a key democratic US ally - sending shock waves through the region and Washington at a moment of acute global tension. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law on Tuesday night in a surprise decree that was reversed hours later following overwhelming opposition across the political spectrum for what was widely seen as a breach of the country's vibrant democracy.**

The move, which Yoon claimed was necessary to "save the country against anti-state forces" trying to destroy the "constitutional order of liberal democracy," was met by protests in Seoul and mounting calls for the president's resignation. The stunning development appeared to catch Washington off guard. That's an unnerving reality for the United States military, which has nearly 30,000 troops and its largest overseas base in South Korea, serving as a check against a belligerent North Korea and counterweight to an aggressive China in a strategically critical region.

The turmoil has the potential for significant ramifications at a moment of deepening geopolitical fault lines in Asia, where both North Korea and China are strengthening their alignment with Russia as it wages war on Ukraine. Leaders in Pyongyang, Beijing and Moscow are likely watching the developments in Seoul with an eye to its potential to undermine a key bastion of US power in the region - and all eyes are now on North Korea, which may be keen to use the political chaos to its advantage.

The US-South Korea alliance

has long been seen by both countries as a cornerstone of peace in the region, where North Korea continues to threaten South Korea and the US with its illegal weapons program. That threat has only become more acute as North Korea has ramped up its partnership with Russia, sending ammunition, missiles, and soldiers, intelligence officials say, to aid Moscow's war against Ukraine.

"Any instability in South Korea has major ramifications for our Indo-Pacific policies," retired US Col. Cedric Leighton told CNN's Wolf Blitzer, pointing to how US troops in the country are geared for a "fight tonight" scenario against North Korea. "The less stability there is in South Korea the worse it gets for us to fulfill our policy goals." US President Joe Biden has worked assiduously during his time in office to bolster the US partnership with South Korea, meeting Yoon multiple times, referring to the South Korean leader as a "great friend," and earlier this year passing his "Summit for Democracy" to Yoon to host in South Korea. Biden's efforts also included a landmark 2023 summit at Camp David with Japan and South Korea, where the US president navigated around historic mistrust between the two US allies to broker enhanced trilateral coordination.

A US National Security Council spokesperson expressed "relief" after Yoon reversed course on what the spokesperson described as his "concerning declaration," adding that "democracy is at the foundation" of the US-South Korea alliance. Despite US assurances

that the alliance remains "ironclad," the surprise move by Yoon could cast a level of doubt on the partnership and weaken the burgeoning Japan-South Korea partnership, observers say.

It also adds another level of uncertainty on the eve of the return to the White House of President-elect Donald Trump, who has previously expressed skepticism about the financial arrangement between the US and South Korea on hosting US troops. "Yoon's actions most likely will raise questions about South Korea's reliability and predictability as an ally and a partner in the eyes of the United States and Japan," said Rachel Minyoung Lee, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center think tank in Washington.

"This is serious in light of the fact that there is now a stronger-than ever nuclear component in the (US-South Korea) alliance," she added, pointing to a 2023 mechanism upgrading cooperation on nuclear deterrence between the US and South Korea, which does not have its own nuclear weapons but relies on the US arsenal. The political turmoil also raises a potential opening for Kim Jong Un to capitalize on the chaos.

The North Korean leader is known to choose opportune political moments for major weapons tests - for example firing a new intercontinental ballistic missile days before the US presidential election last month. "We know that North Korea likes to lampoon South Korea's democratic system whenever there is tumult in Seoul," said Edward Howell, a lecturer in

politics at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, who focuses on the Korean Peninsula.

"We should not be surprised if Pyongyang exploits the domestic crisis in South Korea to its advantage, either rhetorically or otherwise," he said. The developments - and the potential, now, for a change of leadership in South Korea - are also likely being closely watched by Beijing and Moscow, who both deeply oppose US military presence in Asia.

In response from queries from reporters, China's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday said it has "no comment" on South Korea's internal affairs. Chinese leader Xi Jinping and his officials in particular have watched with ire as the US has strengthened its partnerships with allies in the region - in the face of concerns in Washington about a growing threat from Beijing and its deepening security coordination with Moscow.

And Yoon, who's taken a harder line on North Korea than many of his predecessors, has been a willingly staunch partner of the US. The Yoon government has also suggested that deployment of North Korean troops into Ukraine could cause it to reassess the level of military support it gives to the war-torn country, to which it does not directly supply lethal arms.

All that raises the international stakes for the current political moment, whatever its outcome for Yoon, according to Howell. "At a time when South Korea's interests in the Ukraine war have gained prominence, given North Korea's now full-fledged involvement, Seoul's cooperation with allies cannot be hampered by domestic division," he said.

# Troubled history of martial law

Nectar Gan

**LAST year, a blockbuster movie gripped South Korea with a dramatization of a painful memory from its authoritarian past, when the assassination of President Park Chung-hee in 1979 led to a military coup and plunged the country into the iron grip of martial law.**

So when South Koreans watched in shock and anger as their current president, Yoon Suk Yeol, declared martial law on live TV last night, some feared their democratic country was veering dangerously close to reenacting that dark chapter. Yoon was forced to back down and lifted the martial law order just hours later, after lawmakers unanimously voted to block the decree amid a fierce national outcry. The night of extraordinary events sent shock waves across the country.

"Who would have thought that in this day and age that martial law would be declared? But it happened. And it was a surprise for all of us," retired army Lt. Gen. Chun In-bum told CNN. But the political whiplash is far from over.

Six opposition parties submitted a bill on Wednesday afternoon calling for Yoon's impeachment, Yonhap News Agency reported. "The president lacks independent power now," said Sungmin Park, a political analyst at Min Consulting in Seoul, saying Yoon's decree had been "political suicide." An ignominious departure for Yoon would be far from an anomaly; many of

his predecessors also fell from high office into disgrace. South Korea's presidential history has been marked by coups, imprisonment, impeachment and an assassination as the country transitioned from decades of military dictatorship into a vibrant democracy. The republic's first president following independence from Japan after the Second World War was forced into exile by a student revolt in 1960. His successor held office for less than two years before being ousted in a coup.

Park, the next authoritarian president who ruled for 18 years, was shot dead in 1979 by his own intelligence chief, unleashing an era of turmoil and brutal dictatorial rule that left an indelible mark on the nation's political psyche. Soon after Park's death, Chun Doo-hwan, an army major general, seized power in a coup and declared martial law, arresting opponents, closing universities, banning political activities and stifling the press. That was the last time martial law was declared in South Korea. For many citizens who lived through that era, Yoon's decree, however short-lived, served as a painful reminder of the oppression and terror of military rule.

In 1980, when student-led pro-democracy demonstrations broke out in the southern city of Gwangju to protest his use of martial law, Chun sent in the military to crush the uprising, killing nearly 200

people. He ruled with an iron fist until 1988, after he was forced by mass protests to allow open presidential elections demanded by a nationwide pro-democracy movement. In the 1990s, Chun was prosecuted for the coup and the Gwangju crackdown. He was sentenced to death but later pardoned. Since the late 1980s, South Korea has transformed into a robust democracy, with regular protests, free speech, fair elections and peaceful transfers of power. But its domestic political scene remains polarized and fractious, with presidents on both sides of the political divide often facing calls for impeachment and prosecution.

Roh Moo-hyun, president from 2003 to 2008, committed suicide while under criminal investigation for alleged corruption after leaving office. His successor, Lee Myung-bak, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for corruption after stepping down. And Park Chung-hee's daughter Park Geun-hye, South Korea's first female president, was impeached by the National Assembly over influence peddling by her top aide and friend. She was sentenced to 24 years in prison for corruption and abuse of power. She was later pardoned.

Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said South Korean democracy takes a high-stakes approach to both leadership and accountability. "Political parties often rise and fall

with charismatic individuals rather than provide institutional continuity based on ideology or policy," he said. "A scandal-hungry media and a public quick to mobilize mass demonstrations make it difficult for presidents to sustain public approval. Legacies of developmental dictatorships include significant authority being concentrated in the top office but also a constitution that limits the president to a single five-year term.

"As a result, corruption and abuse of power are frequent risks, but so is retributive justice once or after the leader has lost the moral mandate to govern." Yoon's political future now hangs in the balance, as calls for his resignation mount across the political spectrum, as well as the impeachment proceedings. The main opposition Democracy Party said it had begun formalizing plans for treason charges against Yoon and his defense and interior ministers, Yonhap News Agency reported.

Yoon also faces rising discord within his party, which has opposed his move to introduce martial law and called it unconstitutional. The ruling People Power Party is considering demanding the resignation of Yoon's entire Cabinet and the dismissal of his defense minister, Yonhap reported. It is discussing whether to demand Yoon's resignation, Yonhap said. Yoon's chief of staff and other top officials have already submitted their resignations.

CNN









## In brief

## Pakistan team departs for WSF World C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): The national squash team of Pakistan departed on Friday to compete in the prestigious WSF World Squash Team Championship 2024 in Hong Kong, China. The championship, which brings together top players from 26 countries, promises to be a showcase of world-class squash talent. The Pakistani contingent includes players Muhammad Asim Khan, Noor Zaman, Nasir Iqbal and Abdullah Nawaz. Muhammad Asim Khan and Noor Zaman will join the team directly from South Africa. The team will be led by team manager Air Cdre (R) Amir Nawaz, with Fahim Gul serving as the head coach and Wasim Umer as the fitness coach. Pakistan's opening match in the championship is scheduled for December 9.

## Pakistan Women's U19 camp begins

KARACHI (APP): The 15-member Pakistan U19 squad for the six-team ACC Women's U19 T20 Asia Cup has convened at the Hanif Mohammad High-Performance Centre in Karachi for a five-day camp. Zoofishan Ayyaz-led Pakistan will depart for Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 12 December. Pakistan team will undergo net practice, fielding sessions, match simulations and T20 practice matches during the five days under the supervision of head coach Mohsin Kamal and assistant coach Muhammad Hanif Malik. Former Pakistan women's player Nahida Khan is the fielding coach of the side. Pakistan are placed in Group A and will face India on 15 December and Nepal on 16 December before the Super Four stage begins on 19 December. The final is scheduled for 22 December. Pakistan Women's U19 squad: Zoofishan Ayyaz (captain), Komal Khan (vice-captain), Aleesa Mukhtiar, Areesha Ansari, Fatima Khan, Fizza Fiaz, Haniyah Ahmer, Maham Anees, Mahnoor Zeb, Quratlain, Ravail Farhan, Rozina Akram, Shahar Bano, Tayyaba Imdad, Wasifa Hussain. Player Support personnel: Aisha Jalil (manager), Mohsin Kamal (head coach), Muhammad Hanif Malik (assistant coach), Nahida Khan (fielding coach), Muhammad Usman Shahid (analyst), Rabia Siddiq (physio-therapist), Muhammad Rafi Ullah (media and digital manager).

## Players are used to pressure: Slot

LONDON (Agencies): Arne Slot says his Liverpool players are used to the pressure of having to win as they seek to maintain their advantage at the top of the Premier League. Slot's side are seven points clear at the top going into Saturday's derby at Everton (12:30 GMT). Liverpool did stretch their lead to nine points by beating Manchester City last Sunday, but that was trimmed on Wednesday as they drew 3-3 at Newcastle while Chelsea and Arsenal, their closest challengers, both won. Premier League champions City, meanwhile, are nine points behind the Reds after beating Nottingham Forest on Wednesday. "I think if you play for Liverpool, every day you feel pressure because you play at a big club," head coach Slot said. "Everybody expects two things from us - that we win and that we play good football. That's also the good thing - that these players are used to this being expected from them - so, if we are top of the league.



ADELAIDE: Mitchell Starc pins R Ashwin lbw.

## Australia on top in 2nd India Test after Starc takes six

ADELAIDE (AFP): Australia lost opener Usman Khawaja but took first day honours at the day-night second Test in Adelaide Friday after a Mitchell Starc onslaught saw India crumble to 180 all out.

At the close, the hosts were 86-1 with Nathan McSweeney not out 38 from 97 balls and Marnus Labuschagne on 20 after the visitors were dismissed on the cusp of tea after winning the toss and opting to bat.

A menacing Starc was India's chief destroyer. He gave the hosts a dream start in removing Yashasvi Jaiswal with the first ball of the match and ended with 6-48 -- his best Test figures. In reply, Australia weathered 10 overs of the pink ball at dusk before Jasprit Bumrah's persistence paid off, finding extra movement and with it a thick edge from Khawaja (13) that carried to Rohit Sharma at slip.

McSweeney took 17 balls to get off the mark and had a life on three when dropped by wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant. But he made the most of his fortune, showing maturity in his second Test, while Labuschagne survived a nervy start as he targets a big score after a lean spell.

"It's been my role for a while to attack the stumps and try and make early inroads," said Starc. "Good way

to start a Test. A good day all up.

"To finish the day just one down... to fight through that sustained pressure from a quality bowling attack is fantastic." India came into the clash riding high after a 295-run victory at the first Test in Perth, but Australia have a formidable record in Adelaide, winning all seven pink-ball Tests they have played at the venue.

The visitors retained Jaiswal and KL Rahul as openers in preference to Rohit, who missed the first Test on paternity leave and came in at six.

But the plan backfired as Starc sensationally trapped Jaiswal lbw from a swinging first ball, with the left-armers' pumped-up celebration showing how much it meant.

Jaiswal scored 161 in his last innings. The returning Shubman Gill then stroked two boundaries in an eventful first over. But the runs dried up and Rahul was at the crease for 40 minutes without scoring when he was given out, caught behind off Scott Boland. Rahul was walking off, but a no-ball was called and he survived. Five balls later and he had another let-off, dropped by Khawaja.

Undeterred, he battled on before Starc wove his magic again to remove him for 37. Virat Kohli roared back to form in Perth with an unbeaten centu-

ry but he was no match for Starc this time, out for seven when Steve Smith collected a slip catch. Gill weathered the storm, but his luck ran out just before the first break when he fell lbw on 31 to the relentless Boland.

'Still in the game'

"I thought Australia did well, they set us up nicely with some of the dismissals, but also I don't think 86-1 is a true reflection of how we bowled," said India bowling coach Morne Morkel. "I know the score looks like a big gap between the two teams, but we still feel we're in the game." Six wickets tumbled in the second session, including Rohit (3) and Pant (21).

Pant should have gone for five, but McSweeney spilled a sharp chance in the gully off Boland, in the side for the injured Josh Hazlewood. But the 35-year-old got his reward four balls later, beating Rohit's bat to trap him lbw. Pant fell to a vicious climbing ball from Pat Cummins before a hostile Starc returned and took care of Ravichandran Ashwin (22) and Harshit Rana (0) in the space of four balls.

With India in trouble, Nitish Kumar Reddy took charge, clobbering two big sixes in one Boland over for his highest Test score of 42 before he and Bumrah fell to Starc and Cummins respectively.

## Kyrgios to make Grand Slam return in Australia

SYDNEY (Agencies): Nick Kyrgios has used his protected ranking to secure a place in the main draw of January's Australian Open.

Kyrgios, 29, has not played at a Grand Slam since September 2022 when he lost in the quarter-finals of the US Open. Britons Jack Draper, Cameron Norrie, Katie Boulter, Emma Raducanu, Sonay Kartal and Jodie Burrage have also been confirmed on the main draw list. The Australian Open begins on 12 January.

A series of knee, foot and wrist injuries have interrupted Kyrgios' career over the past two years. The Australian has not competed since June 2023 but he is planning a return to action at the World Tennis League event in Abu Dhabi from 19-22 December. Kyrgios, who was beaten by Novak Djokovic in the 2022 Wimbledon final, is due to feature in his first competitive tournament at the Brisbane International later in December. Like Kyrgios, Tokyo 2020 gold medalist Belinda Bencic is also set to use her protected ranking to enter the Australian Open main draw after missing all of this year's Grand Slams following the birth of her daughter Bella in April.

British number one Draper has never gone beyond the second round at the Australian Open but will be hoping to build further momentum after reaching the semi-finals of the US Open in September. Kartal, 23, will make her main draw debut in Melbourne, while Burrage, 25, had a first-round exit in 2024.

Defending champions Jannik Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka, who top the men's and women's rankings, are both on the main draw list, while 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic, who is targeting a record 11th Australian Open crown, is also confirmed for the event. Former world number four Kei Nishikori is another player using his protected ranking to return to the Australian Open for the first time since 2021.

## Bangladesh beat Pakistan in U19 Asia Cup semi-final

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): Bangladesh U19 beat Pakistan U19 in the first semi-final of the ACC U19 Men's Asia Cup by seven wickets here at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium (DICS) on Friday afternoon. Chasing a modest target of 117 runs, Bangladesh cruised to victory in 22.1 overs.

Earlier in the day, Pakistan lost opening batters inside the first three overs after being put in to bat first. Usman Khan and Shahzaib Khan were dismissed for ducks by left-arm pacer Maruf Mridha.

No. 3 batter, Mohammad Riazullah (28, 65b, 2x4s) and skipper Saad Baig (18, 41b, 3x4s) knitted 42 runs for the third wicket but were removed by player of the match Iqbal Hossain Emon. Farhan Yousaf, who walked in to bat at 74-5 hit three sixes and one four in his run-a-ball 32 and fell in the 34th over with the score reading 113-7.

Bangladesh wrapped up Pakistan's innings for 116 in 37 overs as Iqbal bagged four wickets for 24 runs. Maruf Mridha registered bowling figures of 2-23 while Al Fahad and Debasish Deba picked up one wicket each.

In turn, captain Azizul Hakim struck an unbeaten 42-ball 61 including seven fours and three sixes with Mohammad Shihab James chipping in with 26 off 36 balls with the help of four boundaries. For Pakistan, Naveed Ahmed Khan, Abdul Subhan and Ali Raza dismissed one batter each.

Scores in brief:

Bangladesh U19 beat Pakistan U19 by seven wickets, Dubai International Cricket Stadium

Pakistan U19 116 all out, 37 overs (Farhan Yousaf 32, Mohammad Riazullah 28; Iqbal Hossain Emon 4-24, Maruf Mridha 2-23)

Bangladesh U19 120-3, 22.1 overs (Azizul Hakim 61 not out, Mohammad Shihab James 26; Naveed Ahmed Khan 1-13)

Player of the match - Iqbal Hossain Emon (Bangladesh U19).

## Lionel Messi named MLS Most Valuable Player for 2024



NEW YORK (Reuters): Lionel Messi has been named the 2024 Landon Donovan MLS Most Valuable Player following a campaign in which he captained Inter Miami to their first-ever Supporters' Shield as top club in the regular season, the league said on Friday.

In his first full MLS season after joining Miami in July 2023, Messi had 20 goals and 16 assists in 19 matches while his club set a league record with a 74-point campaign before a stunning first-round elimination from the playoffs. "I would have liked to receive this award in another situation, being able to play the final (on) Saturday," Messi said in comments provided by MLS from MVP ceremony.

"We had a big dream of being MLS champions this year. It didn't happen, but next year we'll come back stronger to try again." For Messi, the MVP award is yet another accolade in an illustrious career that includes a World Cup winner's medal and a record eight Ballon d'Or awards as the world's best soccer player.

The 37-year-old Argentine is the first player in Inter Miami history to earn the MLS's highest individual honour, which was renamed in 2015 after former MVP Donovan, who played a key role in establishing the league.

The Miami captain also joined Mexico's Carlos Vela in 2019 (LAFC, 34 goals, 15 assists) and Italy's Sebastian Giovinco in 2015 (Toronto FC, 22 goals, 16 assists) as the only players in MLS history with at least 20 goals and 15 assists in a season. Messi beat out Columbus Crew forward Cucho Hernandez, Portland Timbers midfielder Evander, D.C. United's Christian Benteke and Miami teammate Luis Suarez to take home the award.

"Leo, congratulations. On behalf of our entire league, all of our country, and everybody that loves the game here and throughout the world, we're honoured to have you in our league," said MLS Commissioner Don Garber. "To have the best player in the world be the best player in Major League Soccer is something that dreams are made of for all of us."

## Norris fastest as Leclerc hit with 10-place grid penalty

ABU DHABI (AFP/APP): British driver Lando Norris led Australian team-mate Oscar Piastri in second practice on Friday as McLaren turned up the heat in their bid to secure the constructors' title at the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc had topped the opening practice session at the Yas Marina Circuit ahead of Norris and Lewis Hamilton, but the Monegasque driver was then penalised for taking a new battery pack on his car.

Leclerc's 10-place grid penalty for Sunday's race compromises the Italian team's bid to capture a first constructors' title since 2008. Ferrari are seeking to overturn a 21-point deficit on leaders McLaren, who last won the constructors' title in 1998, this weekend.

Norris clocked one minute and 23.517 seconds to beat Piastri by two-tenths of a second, ahead of third-placed

Nico Hulkenberg of Haas. Carlos Sainz was fourth fastest in the second Ferrari followed by seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, the British driver in his last race weekend with Mercedes.

Leclerc was sixth in the second Ferrari ahead of Sauber's Valtteri Bottas, Kevin Magnussen in the second Haas, Williams' Alex Albon and RB's Yuki Tsunoda. The feuding George Russell of Mercedes and newly-crowned four-time world champion Max Verstappen struggled to find the pace and wound up 13th and 17th, respectively, in a largely uneventful twilight session.

It began in cooling conditions after a hot day as the sun set in Abu Dhabi, RB's Liam Lawson setting the early pace in 1:25.537, before Leclerc took over and then Norris. Hamilton slotted into second to repeat the top three from opening practice.

- Verstappen baby news -

Verstappen, complaining about his front axle performance, had sat out the earlier run as news that he is to become a father for the first time with Kelly Piquet, daughter of Brazil's triple world champion Nelson Piquet, was confirmed in a social media post. Piquet has a daughter, born in 2019, with former Red Bull driver Russian Daniil Kvyat.

"The understeer is ridiculous," reported the Dutchman on team radio, while Russell, with whom he has fallen out in spectacular, acrimonious fashion, said his "cockpit is still reasonably toasty", referring to the temperature of 27 degrees Celsius (80.6 Fahrenheit). Between the sessions, Red Bull's chief Christian Horner had hit back at Mercedes boss Toto Wolff's description of him as a "yapping little terrier" for interfering in the Verstappen-Russell feud by describing the Mercedes driver as "hysterical".

## Champions T20 Cup begins with a double-header on Saturday

RAWALPINDI (Monitoring Desk): The Champions T20 Cup, scheduled from December 7 to 25 at Rawalpindi Stadium, is set to not only crown a champion among five competitive teams but also serve as a critical platform for Pakistan's preparations for the upcoming white-ball mega-events in 2025 and 2026, including the ICC Champions Trophy and the ICC T20 World Cup.

The tournament, which features 22 matches over 19 days, including six double-headers and eight single-headers, will begin with a double-header as Imam-ul-Haq-led Nurbur Lions will take on Ifthikhar Ahmed's UMT Markhors in the first match at 11am tomorrow while in the second match Mohammad Haris' Allied Bank Stallions will take on Shadab Khan-led Lake City Panthers at 3.30pm.

Double-header matches will begin at 11am and 3.30pm, while single-header games are set for 12pm. The tournament will be broadcast live on leading sports channels, ASports HD, Geo Super and PTV Sports while the fans can catch up on the exciting action by streaming the games on Myco and Tamasha.

Five formidable teams—ABL Stallions, Engro Dolphins, Lake City Panthers, Nurbur Lions and UMT Markhors—will compete in a double-league format, with each team playing the others twice. The top team from the league stage will advance to the 25 December final while the second and third placed teams will compete in a Qualifier, ensuring an intense battle for supremacy.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has strategically planned the Champions Cup events to provide players with high-pressure opportunities that bridge the gap between domestic and international cricket. The first event of the Champions Cup series, played in List-A format, was held successfully in Faisalabad in September, throwing some good talent.



Recognising the challenges faced by emerging talent transitioning to the international stage, the initiative aims to enhance their adaptability and readiness for global competition. The first step towards the next T20I mega event has already been taken through the induction of some new players in the T20I series in Australia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Adding to the tournament's appeal is the mentorship of cricketing legends Saqlain Mushtaq, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Shoaib Malik, Misbah-ul-Haq and Waqar Younis. Their guidance is expected to hone players' skills and instill the fearless, high-impact style of cricket that has become essential in the modern T20 game.

Tournament director Wahab Riaz is confident the event will be a launchpad for young players. "PCB has been working really hard to improve and to give a lot of exposure to young players and I think with this tournament players will learn a lot by sharing the dressing room with those who have played international cricket and under the guidance of mentors the learning will be precious.

"From here on, once they enter the international arena they don't have to worry about the pressure and would be equipped to meet the demands," said Wahab.

Continuing from the trend in the Champions One-Day Cup and in order to give the players quality exposure, the PCB has also paired each of the five teams with a major media house, ARY News-Allied Bank Stallions, Geo News-Engro Dolphins, Hum News-UMT Markhors, Samaa News-Nurbur Lions

and Dunya News-Lake City Panthers, which will also boost the tournament's reach to the fans.

The players and the teams will benefit from the presence of these media houses on board as they will bring the fans closer to the action and the day to day happenings of the tournament. Packed with abundant talent and backed by seasoned mentors, the Bahria Town Champions T20 Cup promises to deliver thrilling contests while laying a strong foundation for Pakistan's next generation of cricket stars.

The fans in Rawalpindi are known for filling the Stadium in various colours and always enjoy the game to the maximum. Ram-slam style of cricket will be warming them in the cool winter weather. Top hitters like Fakhar Zaman, Mohammad Haris, Shadab Khan, Azam Khan, Asif Ali, Haider Ali, Ifthikhar Ahmed, Khushdil Shah, Abdul Samad and Muhammad Akhlaq et. al will be main attraction for the fans. The likes of Zaman Khan, Ubaid Shah, Musa Khan will not only stop the flow of runs but are also expected to send the stumps cartwheeling.

**Squads:** Stallions: Mohammad Haris (captain, wicket-keeper), Azam Khan (subject to fitness), Hussain Talat, Maaz Sadaqat, Mehran Mumtaz, Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Amir Khan, Mohammad Mohsin, Shamyl Hussain, Shoaib Malik, Tahir Hussain, Taimur Khan, Ubaid Shah, Usman Tariq (subject to fitness), Yasir Khan and Zaman Khan

Reserves: Ahmed Safi

Abdullah, Jahandad Khan (to join after 14 Dec), Nasir Nawaz and Shoaib Akhtar Jnr

**Dolphins:** Faheem Ashraf (captain), Asif Ali, Kashif Ali, Mirza Tahir Baig, Mohammad Huraira, Mohammad Rameez Jnr, Mohammad Suleman, Muhammad Akhlaq, Muhammad Ghazi Ghor (wicket-keeper), Qasim Akram, Sahibzada Farhan, Salman Irshad, Sameen Gul, Saqib Khan, Shayam Sheikh and Umar Amin

**Reserves:** Ihsanullah, Salman Khan Afridi, Waqar Ahmed

**Panthers:** Shadab Khan (captain), Abdul Wahid Bangalzai, Ahmed Bashir, Amad Butt, Danish Aziz, Haider Ali, Irfanullah Shah, Mohammad Ibtisam, Mohammad Umar (subject to fitness), Mubasir Khan, Rehan Afridi, Rizwan Mehmood, Sajid Khan, Sharjeel Khan (subject to fitness), Umar Siddiq (wicket-keeper) and Usama Mir

**Reserves:** Ali Asfand, Aqib Liaqat, Azan Awais, Mohammad Zeeshan and Yousef Babar (stand-by for Sharjeel Khan)

**Lions:** Imam-ul-Haq (captain), Aamer Yamin, Arif Yaqoob, Faisal Akram, Hasan Nawaz, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Junaid, Mohammad Salman, Mohammad Taha, Muhammad Awais Zafar, Musa Khan, Rohail Nazir (wicket-keeper), Shahab Khan, Shahid Aziz, Sharoon Siraj and Zeeshan Malik

**Reserves:** Afaq Afridi, Mohammad Awais Anwar, Mohammad Faiq and Sajjad Ali Hashmi

**Markhors:** Ifthikhar Ahmed (captain), Abdul Samad, Akif Javed, Bilawal Bhatti, Bismillah Khan (wicket-keeper), Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay, Mohammad Faizan, Mohammad Imran Jnr, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Sarwar Afridi, Muhammad Imran Randhawa, Muhammad Shehzad, Nisar Ahmed, Saad Masood and Zahid Mehmood.





## In brief

### Meta's e-commerce platforms in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Prime Minister Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan has said that the government was taking steps to improve the digital ecosystem while Meta Company's e-commerce platforms were very popular in Pakistan. He said this while talking to Meta's company team here on Friday. Mashhood said that Pakistan's digital space challenges were different from other countries and joint efforts were needed to deal with on-line threats. He said that Pakistani youth could utilize Meta-applications positively and make them beneficial for themselves. On the occasion, Meta's team representatives said that PMYP was a good initiative for empowering future generations and Meta was interested in working with PMYP mutually.

### IESCO notifies power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Friday issued a power suspension programme for Sunday for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work. According to IESCO Spokesperson, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period From 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM. Rawalpindi City Circle, Peshawar Road, Charing Cross, Jhangi, P&T Wani, EME Complex, Quaid-e-Azam International Hospital, Shams Colony, Azharabad, CWO, Golra, Saham Feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, Rawalpindi 3-, VIP, Bank Road II-, Pakistan Railways, City Center Feeders, GSO Circle, from 10:00 AM to 05:00 PM, 132KV Kahuta KRL Feeders, from 09:00 AM to 04:00 PM, Rajaabad, Westridge, Jhangi, Peshawar Road, P&T, EME, Quaid-e-Azam, Saham, Rajaabad, Feeders and surrounding areas.

### 10 criminals held

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police on Friday apprehended 10 outlaws involved in different criminal activities including drug peddling and possessing illegal weapons, recovered weapon and drug from their possession. A police spokesperson told APP that the ICT Police Sumbal, Industrial Area, Shams Colony and Khanna police teams took legal action against accused involved in possessing illegal weapons and drug peddling. He said the police team arrested six accused namely Faisal, Abdullah, Hameed, Muhammad Adil, Aftab and Muhammad Irfan and recovered 1,625 gram heroin, 1,735 gram hashish and two pistols from their possession. Moreover four absconders were also arrested from various areas of the city during the last 24 hours. SSP Operation Muhammad Arslan Shahzaib said that the Islamabad Police is actively working to ensure the safety of citizens' lives and property in the federal capital, emphasizing that no elements will be allowed to disrupt citizens' peace. Protecting the lives, property, and dignity of citizens is the Islamabad Police top priority. Citizens are urged to report any suspicious activities to the relevant police station, emergency helpline "Pukar-15" to help make the city crime-free through cooperation between the police and the public.

# Naqvi announces completion of Serena Chowk interchange in 3 months

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi on Friday visited the Serena Chowk Interchange project. He highlighted that the Serena Chowk Interchange project will now be completed in 3 months instead of 10 months. He tasked the CDA to complete the project ahead of schedule.

He reviewed the construction work and inspected the ongoing construction activities on the project. He gave directions for the timely completion of the project. The Interior Minister said that the completion of this mega project will resolve the problem of traffic in the

capital for years.

He assured that people from other cities coming to Islamabad would also get convenience in transportation. He added that Serena Chowk Interchange will now be built in just 3 months instead of 10 months and the task has been assigned in this regard.

Mohsin Naqvi said that under the Serena Chowk Interchange project, 2 underpasses and connecting roads are being built. He stated that he was personally monitoring the project to ensure its completion within the stipulated period. He instructed that the project should be com-

pleted within the stipulated period by continuing 24/7 construction work.

The Interior Minister stressed that during the construction work, the alternative traffic plan should be strictly implemented.

He emphasized that the best management must be made to ensure the flow of the traffic. The Interior Minister was given a detailed briefing regarding the construction of Serena Chowk Interchange.

Chairman CDA, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad and other senior officers were also present on the occasion.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting Serena Chowk Interchange Project.

## Public grievance redressal is top priority: IGP

ISLAMABAD (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, held a Khuli Katchery (open court) at the Central Police Office on Friday.

During the khuli katchery, he listened to the issues of citizens and police officers and issued directives to senior police officers on the spot for timely resolution of their concerns, a police spokesman told APP. He said that resolving citizens' issues on merit is our top priority. Negligence and carelessness in duties will not be tolerated. Citizens facing any issue related to the police can come to the Khuli Katchery. My office is always open for my citizens, the IGP said.

IG further directed the officers to resolve the citizen grievances on merit within the stipulated time frame and report back to the Central Police Office. He directed all SDPOs and SHOs to adhere to the designated office hours and prioritize resolving citizens' issues.

# Govt committed to protecting citizens' rights online: Khan

ISLAMABAD (APP): PML-N Senator

Afnanullah Khan Friday announced that the government is taking steps to amend social media laws and prevent the spread of misinformation and baseless propaganda, while also safeguarding freedom of expression from internal and external interference.

In an exclusive interview to a private news channel, Senator Afnanullah Khan said the government is committed to protecting citizens' rights online and is taking steps to regulate social media which aims to prevent the spread of misinformation and ensure that social media platforms are used responsibly.

He said our goal is to regulate social media which should create a

safer and more responsible online environment for all citizens. He emphasized that the current laws are not only demoralizing but also perpetuating misinformation, posing a significant threat to the country's social fabric.

He stressed that a comprehensive overhaul of these laws is imperative to prevent the spread of fake news, protect citizens' rights and maintain social harmony. According to Dr Afnan Ullah, certain malicious elements are exploiting disinformation as a means to coerce and blackmail both the government and the general public.

Responding to a query about the issue of slow internet, Dr Afnan Ullah acknowledged the frustration caused by the slow

internet and emphasized his commitment to resolving the issue promptly.

Dr. Afnan further stated that he will revisit the matter in upcoming meetings, where he will provide a comprehensive update on the progress made.

He expressed optimism that a swift resolution to the issue is on the horizon, bringing relief to those affected by the slow internet connectivity.

According to Dr Afnan Ullah, the primary cause of the slow internet connectivity is attributed to technical issues related to link firewall management and data transmission. He assured that these matters will be thoroughly discussed and promptly addressed to ensure a swift resolution to the problem.

## Speakers condemn Israeli genocide against Palestinians

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senator Lieutenant General (Retd) Abdul Qayyum on Friday strongly condemned the brutal genocide of the oppressed Palestinians by the Israeli forces demanding an immediate and unconditional cease-fire and end to brutalities against the Palestinian people.

Addressing the Palestine Conference organized by the Islamabad Crescent Lions Club at Anam School Foundation in connection with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinians, Qayyum said that the so-called modern world has undoubtedly made immense progress in

science and technology but in terms of adherence to international laws, decisions of the International Court of Justice, protection of human rights and acceptance of high human values, the world still seems buried in a huge deep pit with a disgusting face.

"We express our unwavering support for the inalienable right of the people of Palestine and Kashmir to self-determination and for the relevant OIC and UN resolutions on Palestine that call for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Palestinian territories, and for a peaceful and negoti-

ated solution to the conflict."

Former Federal Secretary Syed Naseer Gilani on the occasion said that Israeli attacks against schools, hospitals, places of worship, shelters and refugee camps and its killing of aid workers and journalists in unprecedented numbers was an absolute violation of international humanitarian law.

He urged the international community to take urgent measures to prevent Israel from further undermining regional peace and stability, including the prevention of Israeli aggression against Lebanon and other regional countries.



ISLAMABAD: Former Federal Minister of National Heritage Jamal Shah addressing a press conference to brief about Grand Launch of Silk Road Culture Centre Pakistan.

## Shaza calls for joint Efforts to ensure Online Safety

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication, Shaza Fatima Khawaja has said that online safety is a significant challenge requiring collective efforts to address online threats.

"Children are particularly vulnerable to online dangers. Online safety is a big challenge, and joint efforts are crucial to counter these threats. We must unite to combat online threats," she said during a meeting with Miranda Sissons, Global

Human Rights Policy Lead for Meta.

According to a press release, the meeting focused on matters of mutual interest, particularly digital safety. Meta's Public Policy Head in Pakistan, Dania Mukhtar, also attended the meeting.

Shaza Fatima highlighted the growing risks associated with online threats in today's digital age, particularly for children and young people. "The increasing prevalence of online threats places inter-

net users, especially children, at greater risk," she added.

The minister reiterated the government's commitment to strengthening cybersecurity and improving the digital ecosystem nationwide. She also stressed the importance of ensuring the availability of quality content on social media platforms.

The meeting was attended by Member IT, Syed Junaid Imam, and Member International Coordination, Imad Memon.

## Senate panel slams CDA over missing property files, warns of action

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Senate Committee on Government Assurances on Friday criticized the CDA's handling of missing property files for houses in Islamabad's I-10/4 and F-11/3 sectors and warned that the matter would be raised with the Senate Chairman if not resolved within the specified time-frame.

The committee meeting, chaired by Senator Abdul Shakoor Khan, discussed the issue of missing property files for houses in Islamabad's I-10/4 and F-11/3 sectors.

The Capital Development Authority (CDA) stated that they have launched an internal inquiry and are re-verifying all cases, revealing that the allotment of a plot in I-10/4 was fraudulent. The secretary of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs emphasized the sensitivity of the matter, suggesting a review of the original court orders to confirm if an appeal was filed.

The missing file of the plot in Sector F-11/3 was also deliberated. The Secretary of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs noted that this matter had not been raised as an assurance in the House and emphasized the need to follow proper procedures within the Senate Committee's mandate. The Committee Chairman, with the agreement of members, directed that the case be addressed through the appropriate channels.

The Committee also reviewed the assurance made by the Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication during the Senate session on 04 August 2022 regarding the lack of 4G data and voice call services in the Dheri Mera area, Abbottabad district.

Senator Kamran Murtaza, who brought up the issue, expressed frustration over the lack of progress and the ongoing poor conditions. Other Committee members pointed out that areas in Balochistan and Waziristan face even greater challenges and suggested including all regions with connectivity issues in the list of recommendations. An update on this matter will be discussed at the next meeting.

The Committee also reviewed the assurance provided by the minister for National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination during the Senate sitting on January 4, 2022, regarding the provision of an MRI machine at the Federal Government Polyclinic Hospital and the repair of the MRI machine at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), Islamabad. It was reported that the MRI machine at PIMS has been operational since September 2023.

The MRI machine for the Polyclinic Hospital, however, will be installed in February 2025, as per negotiations with the Government of Japan. Although the machine has

already arrived at the hospital, the installation was delayed due to the current situation in the country, with the Government of Japan now scheduling it for February next year.

Additionally, the Committee discussed the challenges associated with the claims process provided by Jubilee Insurance for Bahria University employees. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) reported that out of 5,706 cases, 5,693 have been approved, with only 13 cases pending.

These remaining cases are anticipated to be resolved within 10 working days. Similarly, the issue of a road constructed by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) on Quaid-e-Azam University's land was addressed. It was reported that the compensatory land has now been allocated.

Sensors present included Gurdeep Singh, Kamran Murtaza, Dost Muhammad Khan, Kamil Ali Agha, and Haji Hidayatullah Khan, along with the Secretary of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, the Special Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, the Special Secretary of the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, and senior officials from the relevant departments.

# Round Table Discussion on "From Promises to Progress: An Overview of Pakistan's Fight Against Gender-Based Violence"

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Women Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) in collaboration with the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) held a significant round table discussion titled "From Promises to Progress: An Overview of Pakistan's Fight Against Gender-Based Violence" at the National Assembly. The event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including civil society members, prominent women parliamentarians, legal experts, students and young activists to address the pressing issue of gender-based violence (GBV) in Pakistan.

The event commenced with introductory remarks by the Executive Director of CPDI, Mr. Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, who highlighted the persistent issue of gender-based violence in Pakistan despite the existence of numerous laws. The speaker emphasized the need to bridge the gap between legislation and implementation, particularly

addressing structural violence embedded within societal norms and institutions.

Dr. Shahida Rehamani, Secretary of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC), underscored the significance of the WPC as a platform for advocating women's rights and promoting gender-sensitive legislation. She highlighted the importance of media in raising awareness about GBV and the crucial role of women parliamentarians in championing women's rights.

The Chief Guest, Senator Sherry Rehman, President of the Pakistan National Group of the Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), emphasized the importance of rigorous data collection and research to understand the true extent of GBV in Pakistan. She highlighted the alarming rates of honor killings, acid attacks, and domestic violence, urging for stronger implementation of existing laws and the development of new legislation to address emerging forms of GBV. Ms. Saba Sadiq, Member of

the National Assembly, addressed the issue of systemic discrimination against women and girls. She highlighted the need to challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality at all levels of society. Sadiq emphasized the importance of sensitizing law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to effectively handle GBV cases.

Ms. Shehla Raza, Member of the National Assembly, emphasized the need for a holistic approach to combat GBV, addressing both structural and individual-level factors. She advocated for greater awareness and sensitization campaigns, as well as stricter enforcement of existing laws. Ms. Shehla also highlighted the importance of empowering women through education and economic opportunities.

Ms. Ghazala Gola, Deputy Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, shed light on the unique challenges faced by women in Balochistan, particularly in terms of cultural and societal norms that perpetu-

ate GBV. She shared her efforts to raise awareness about GBV and advocate for legal reforms at the provincial level. Ms. Ghazala emphasized the importance of community engagement and the role of religious leaders in promoting positive attitudes towards women.

Ms. Fauzia Viqar, Federal Ombudsperson for Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace, discussed the role of ombudsperson offices in providing redressal mechanisms for victims of workplace harassment. She highlighted the challenges faced by victims in accessing justice and called for increased awareness and support services.

Dr. Yusra Gillani, a disability rights activist, emphasized the need for inclusive policies that address the specific needs of women with disabilities. She highlighted the intersectional nature of discrimination faced by women with disabilities and called for greater attention to their rights.

Ms. Tanzeela Mazhar, a

renowned journalist, writer, and anchor, discussed the role of media in shaping public discourse on gender-based violence. She highlighted the importance of responsible journalism and called for media outlets to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming.

Ms. Umme Laila Azhar, Acting Chairperson of the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), highlighted the Commission's efforts to digitize data on GBV to inform evidence-based policymaking. She added that the NCSW is set to launch a national portal in March 2025 to provide comprehensive data and analysis on GBV trends and patterns.

Ms. Tahira Aurangzeb, Member of the National Assembly, concluded the event by emphasizing the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration to address GBV. She called for increased coordination between government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners to develop com-

prehensive strategies to prevent and respond to GBV.

Ms. Nowshheen Khurum and Ms. Sarwat Jahan from CPDI thanked the participants for their valuable insights and reiterated the importance of the Domestic Violence Bill, urging women parliamentarians to expedite its approval in the National Assembly.

The round table discussion concluded with a strong call to action for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, and the general public to work together to create a safer and more equitable society for all.

About CPDI: The Center for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) is a non-profit organization committed to promoting peace, development, and human rights in Pakistan. CPDI works on key public health issues, environmental sustainability, education, and social justice, with a focus on advocating for policies that improve the health and well-being of communities across Pakistan.



### Air pollution sparks health concerns

KABUL (TOLONews): Some residents of Kabul are complaining about the increasing air pollution during the winter season. They say that even though the winter season has not fully started yet, air pollution has already risen significantly. If this trend continues, it will lead to the spread of various diseases among the population. "People use anything for fuel, even tires. These materials cause air pollution."

### US Embassy reports increase in forced and early marriages in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan has expressed concern over the increasing number of forced and child marriages of Afghan girls, calling for their protection. In a video message on Friday, December 6, marking the 16-day campaign against gender-based violence, the embassy highlighted that the rate of forced and early marriages has risen since schools were closed.

## Afghanistan's economy showing signs of growth: WB

KABUL (Pajhwok): Following two years of shrinkage, Afghanistan's economy is showing signs of modest growth, the World Bank says.

The GDP growth of 2.7 percent was driven by private consumption, the Associated Press reported, citing the World Bank's latest development update.

Issued late Wednesday, the report noted the slight

recovery and declining food prices helped spur household welfare in a gradual manner. In 2023-24, the report said, the country's exports remained stable, but imports rose, leading to a trade deficit.

Reliance on imports for essential goods such as fuel, food and machinery, might hamper the country's economic stability, the World Bank warned.

World Bank's Country Director for Afghanistan Faris Hadad-Zervos stressed the need for improving the overall business environment to ensure long-term growth.

He also called for increased investment, providing access to finance to small businesses and supporting educated and skilled women entrepreneurs.

## EU donates 15 million to Afghanistan for climate change aid



KABUL (TOLONews): The World Food Program (WFP) has announced that the European Union has provided 15 million in aid to Afghanistan to combat climate change and mitigate its effects.

Meanwhile, the head of the European Union Delegation to Afghanistan stated that the EU is committed to continuing such assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Eric Beaume, head of the EU Delegation to Afghanistan, said about this aid: "The European Union is particularly pleased to reinforce its partnership with the World Programme in Afghanistan in support to the people of this country. We have been doing so for some time together. We are looking at how we can best address the incidences of cli-

mate change in Afghanistan, looking at how we can reinforce resilience of communities, supporting both men and women."

Harald Mannhart, deputy country director of the WFP Afghanistan, commented on the EU's aid: "The World Food Program (WFP) expresses deep gratitude to the European Union for its vital support in aiding Afghan families facing food insecurity. Through collaborative programs, immediate food assistance is provided to families, while efforts are also directed at fostering longer-term resilience and addressing the urgent challenges of climate change."

Some residents of Uruzgan, displaced due to recent floods, report losing all their belongings and are in urgent need of humanitarian

ian assistance. They claim they have yet to receive aid from any organization.

Siddiqullah, a resident of Uruzgan, told TOLONews: "We have suffered losses. The flood swept away our lands, even homes and possessions of some people."

Eid Mohammad, another resident, added: "The floods destroyed people's properties, such as gardens and farmland. In Uruzgan, we have not received any help so far, and we call for assistance."

The Ministry of Economy noted that Afghanistan has been severely impacted by climate change, particularly by floods and droughts, and requires international support. Abdul Latif Nazari, Deputy Minister of Economy, stated: "In recent years, Afghanistan has suffered greatly from climate change, with droughts and floods being the two most significant factors."

Therefore, we need the support and assistance of the international community in this regard." According to WFP, so far this solar year, more than 160,000 people have been affected by floods, with nearly 20,000 homes and thousands of hectares of agricultural land destroyed.

## Prominent politicians form new coalition

KABUL (Amu.tv): A group of prominent political leaders has announced the formation of a new coalition, the National Assembly for the Salvation of Afghanistan, aimed at addressing the country's current crisis and opposing Taliban rule.

The coalition, unveiled during a virtual meeting on Friday, includes key political figures such as Ahmad Massoud, Atta Mohammad Noor, Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum, Karim Khalili, Salahuddin Rabbani, Omar

Rahmatullah Nabil, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, Mohammad Ismail Khan, Yunus Qanooni, Sarwar Danish, Rahela Dostum, Shah Jahan, Abdul Haq Shafaq, Tadeen Khan, and Sadeq Madbur.

The coalition's stated goal is to coordinate efforts to rescue Afghanistan from its current state of turmoil and provide a unified front against the Taliban's governance.

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, several anti-Taliban military and political factions have emerged.

The National Assembly for the Salvation of Afghanistan is one of the most significant and broad-based coalitions formed in response to the Taliban's rule.

During the inaugural virtual meeting, coalition members discussed Afghanistan's worsening crisis and explored strategies to address the challenges facing the country.

The coalition emphasized the need for unity among political and social forces, arguing that only through coordinated efforts can a viable solution to Afghanistan's crisis be achieved.

## Ban on female education threatens health care: MSF

PAKTIA (Khaama Press): Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has warned that the Taliban's ban on women studying medicine poses a severe threat to Afghanistan's healthcare system.

The organization highlighted that this move could have serious consequences for women's health across the country. MSF stated that this ban is another step toward removing women from public and professional life in Afghanistan. The organization emphasized the impact of such policies on both healthcare access and the overall well-being of Afghan women.

With an already small number of female healthcare workers in Afghanistan, the ban further hampers access to medical care, especially as hospitals are segregated by gender. MSF noted that this situation is exacerbating the country's healthcare challenges. The recent ban is expected to limit women's access to quality healthcare even further. MSF expressed concern that it will deepen the divide in healthcare availability, particularly for women, in a country already facing severe medical needs.

Michaël Le Paih, MSF's representative in Afghanistan, stated, "No healthcare system exists without educated female medical staff." He pointed out that over 41% of the medical staff employed by MSF in Afghanistan are women, underlining their crucial role in the healthcare sector.

He emphasized that the Taliban's decision excludes women from both education and the provision of impartial healthcare services. This limits not only the personal growth of women but also affects the overall functioning of the medical system.

MSF also highlighted the urgent need for more female medical workers in Afghanistan to address the growing medical demands. The organization called for more training and education for women to respond to these needs.

According to MSF, restrictions over the past three years have significantly reduced women's access to medical education in Afghanistan.

MSF stressed that access to essential healthcare must be available for all individuals, regardless of gender.

The organization reaffirmed its commitment to defending women's rights to medical education and the right to provide healthcare, continuing its advocacy for these rights in Afghanistan.

The need for more trained female healthcare workers remains urgent to address the medical needs in the country.

## Norway downgrades diplomatic relations with Taliban over human rights concerns

OSLO (Amu.tv): Norway announced on Thursday that it would downgrade its diplomatic relations with the Taliban in response to their escalating restrictions on human rights, particularly those targeting women and girls.

"We have made it clear to the Taliban that approving a new Afghan ambassador to Oslo is out of the question," said Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide in a statement. "We need contact, and Norway's engagement with Afghanistan will continue, but we are downgrading the diplomatic relationship."

The move comes after the Taliban intensified human rights violations, including the enforcement of a so-called morality law that imposes strict behavioral rules on Afghan men and women. Recent reports of further restrictions disproportionately affecting women and girls prompted Norway's decision.

Earlier this year, the de facto authorities in Afghanistan dismissed the diplomats serving at the Afghan Embassy in Oslo. Norway's Foreign Ministry has now decided not to accept any new ambassadorial



appointment from the Taliban regime.

"Norway has consistently urged the Taliban to uphold the human rights of the Afghan people since they took control of the country," Mr. Eide said. "The recent measures, which particularly harm women and girls, have led us to take this step."

Norway also clarified that it would not accredit a Norwegian ambassador to Afghanistan under the current circumstances, underscoring its adherence to international law. "Under international law, Norway can refuse to accept a new Afghan ambassador," Mr. Eide said.

The Foreign Ministry emphasized that this decision does not sever all lines of communication with the

Taliban. Norway will continue to engage with the de facto authorities to address critical issues, including consular services for Afghans in Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, as well as other functions typically handled by an embassy.

"This is a consequence of the political developments in Afghanistan, not a shift in Norway's policy," Mr. Eide added. "We will maintain contact with those in power in Afghanistan, but not through an ambassador in Oslo. Dialogue is essential to hold the Taliban accountable and advocate for a better political course, particularly regarding the rights of women and girls."

Mr. Eide noted that the decision aligns with advice from Afghan civil society groups within the country. The downgraded diplomatic relationship will involve appointing only a bureaucratic representative to manage consular affairs, visas, and urgent matters. He said that Norway is also coordinating its response with neighboring countries and remains in communication with the Taliban to ensure humanitarian and practical needs are addressed despite the political strains.

## Badghis journalist freed after 34 days in Taliban custody

KABUL (Amu.tv): Abdul Raziq Siddiqi, the editor-in-chief of Radio Sada-e-Badghis, has been released from Taliban custody after spending 34 days in detention, the Afghanistan Journalists Center said in a statement on Friday.

Mr. Siddiqi, who had been held by the Taliban's intelligence agency in Kabul, was freed by order of the Second Zone Urban Court in the capital on Wednesday evening, Dec. 4, according to the organization. He plans to return home to Qala-e-Naw, the capital of Badghis province, on Friday, the AFJC added.

The Afghanistan Journalists Center condemned his detention as a violation of the country's mass media law, stating that his freedom should never have been taken away.

"The arrest of this journalist was contrary to the media laws of the country, which guarantee freedom for reporters in their professional work," the organization said.

Mr. Siddiqi was summoned to



Kabul by the Taliban's intelligence agency on October 31 and subsequently detained. The arrest followed accusations from the Taliban's Directorate of Information and Culture in Badghis that he had reported on sensitive issues, including the employment of women at a private company, for foreign media outlets. The Taliban claimed his reporting violated their government's regulations.

The Afghanistan Journalists Center pointed out that under Afghanistan's mass media law, as

enforced by the Taliban, journalists and media outlets are legally allowed to carry out their professional duties without interference. Article 4 of the law stipulates that "no individual or entity can prohibit, censor, or restrict the free operation of media or interfere with their publications."

Despite these protections, press freedom in Afghanistan has deteriorated significantly under Taliban rule. At least six journalists remain imprisoned in the country, four of whom have been sentenced to two to five years in prison, according to the journalists' center.

The United Nations, in a recent report on the state of media in Afghanistan, revealed that at least 334 journalists and media workers have been arrested by the Taliban over the past three years.

Mr. Siddiqi's case highlights the mounting challenges faced by Afghanistan's press, which continues to operate under the constant threat of arrest and censorship.

## UNICEF warns over 12 million children to require aid in 2025

KABUL (Amu.tv): More than 12 million Afghan children will need humanitarian assistance in 2025, part of a larger crisis that will leave 22.9 million people in need across the country, according to a report from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

The report paints a grim picture of Afghanistan's humanitarian outlook, noting that the drivers of need have shifted from conflict to economic hardship, climate-induced shocks, and significant operational barriers.

"A combination of politics

and policy has upended the lives of children and their families across Afghanistan," UNICEF said, adding that women and girls continue to face severe restrictions on their rights and freedoms.

UNICEF highlighted the growing challenges of providing aid, as the operational space for humanitarian organizations continues to shrink due to increasing impediments. Essential services, it stressed, are critical to preventing further deterioration for vulnerable children.

"The lack of investment, particularly in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH),

has exacerbated humanitarian needs and prevented communities from building resilience against climate and economic shocks," the report stated.

Children remain at the center of Afghanistan's multi-faceted crisis, the report noted, bearing the brunt of political upheaval, natural disasters such as floods, landslides, droughts, and earthquakes, as well as the ongoing effects of climate change. The mounting restrictions on women and girls have further heightened protection risks and humanitarian needs within families.

"Humanitarian needs across all sectors have expanded since 2021, reflecting a lack of resilience among vulnerable communities and the consequences of reduced investment in meeting basic human needs," the report said.

To address the escalating crisis, UNICEF announced it requires \$1.2 billion to support 19 million people in Afghanistan, including 10.3 million children. The funds would be used to deliver lifesaving assistance and basic services aimed at sustaining communities and preventing further decline.

## Daikundi residents complain deteriorated condition of connectivity roads

NEILLI (Pajhwok): Some residents of central Daikundi province have complained against the worsening condition of connectivity roads in the province and asked relevant authorities to pay attention to the reconstruction of roads.

They said the deterioration and lack of public transportation in this province have made people's daily lives difficult.

Zaman Muradi, a resident of Daikundi province, complained against the dilapidated condition of roads and said main roads in the province were below the standard due to which people always suffered losses.

Except for a few kilometers of road in Neilli city, the center of Daikundi and Shaharshan district, all public roads are dirt and substandard, and most of the time, people are deprived of government services due to the deteriorated condition of road and risks of journey.

"Because the roads are bad and cars are not able to



get there, most of the time, emergency patients have not reached the hospital and have died, women who have given birth have also died on the way because they got stuck in the ditches and did not reach the hospital in time, and sometimes their children have died," he said.

Ali Jan, a resident of Miramour district, said Daikundi's roads are narrow and often get damaged, which caused them to be blocked for long periods of time, making access to health services and other daily activities impossible.

"The roads are narrow. If drivers are even slightly careless, their cars will overturn. If a car comes

from the front, they will have difficulty passing each other. Last year, a car on the Vanke bypass overturned because the road went under its tires, killing nine people," he said.

Mohammadi added that roads are one of the most important needs of people's lives and the government needed to pay attention to this area so that people have access to health services and other daily needs, he added that due to these bad roads, food and non-food items are sold at very high prices in Daikundi compared to other provinces.

Rashid Tabish, the representative of one of the Transport Company, said

due to the dilapidated condition of roads vehicles damage soon and last for a short time. He added the deteriorated condition of roads also discourage people from travelling.

He added that the Daikundi-Kabul highway is the only highway in the country that did not have workers for maintenance and repair and is repaired by the people once a year, but after a little rainfall, it is destroyed again and forgotten until the next year.

Tabesh added that due to the deterioration of the roads and the impassability of the communication routes, dozens of fatal traffic incidents occurred annually on this route. On the other hand, as the winter season approached, people and motorists are more concerned and are demanding the government's attention to keeping the communication routes open.

Daikundi is one of the cold and snowy provinces, and in the winter season, most of its communication routes between the center

and districts and the center to other neighboring provinces and the center of the country are closed.

Mawlawi Ikramullah Abdul Raafai, head of the Daikundi Public Works Department, due to the harsh and mountainous geography of this province, there are serious problems in the transportation sector and the majority of the routes are substandard, which caused many traffic incidents.

"The general route from Daikundi to Kabul, some areas of the Kandahar route, and several kilometers of roads in Khadir and Ashtarli are almost up to standard, but the rest of the routes are substandard."

Head of the Public Works Department said in the upcoming winter, a snow-clearing program covering 277 kilometers of roads in eight districts of the province has been contracted with private companies, and the 97-kilometer Daikundi-Bamyan highway along the Kotal-e-Qonag route will be cleared of snow by this department's machinery.

## 9 arrested in Paktia province for illegal logging

PAKTIA (Khaama Press): Following the ban on deforestation in the country, authorities in Paktia province have reported the arrest of 9 individuals in connection with illegal logging in the region.

Abdul Hadi Hidayat, the head of the Environmental Protection Department in Paktia, stated that these individuals were arrested in the Wazi Zadrin district.

According to local authorities, the 9 individuals were apprehended by officials while cutting down trees with their own tools.

These arrests come after Baz Mohammad Faizan, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, announced during his visit to Paktia that deforestation is now banned in Afghanistan, and no one has the right to cut down trees.

The ban on logging has been implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, especially as the price of firewood has risen in the country with the onset of the cold season. At the same time, some residents of the capital have called on the govern-



ment to reduce the price of firewood due to economic hardships. It is worth noting that Afghanistan, due to its dry climate, generally lacks widespread forest cover.

However, certain areas of the country, especially those with a more favorable climate, have extensive tree cover.

Large areas of the eastern provinces, including Khost, Paktia, Pakтика, Nangarhar, Kunar, and Nuristan, are covered with non-fruit-bearing forests. Similarly, the northern and northwestern provinces, including Takhar, Kunduz, Samangan, Jowzjan, Balkh, Faryab, Badghis, and parts of northeastern Herat, have vast areas of fruit-bearing forests, such as pistachio and wild

almond trees. This initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture reflects the growing concern about deforestation and its environmental consequences. The increasing price of firewood, however, highlights the difficult balance between conservation efforts and the needs of the population.

Continued monitoring and enforcement of this logging ban will be essential to protect Afghanistan's forest resources and prevent further environmental degradation. Moreover, addressing the rising cost of firewood and providing alternative sources of energy could alleviate some of the challenges faced by residents, especially in the winter season.





GAZA STRIP: Palestinian men carrying body of a victim of an Israeli strike in Daraj neighbourhood.

## Modi's BJP says US State Dept targeting India

NEW DELHI (Reuters): Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has accused the State Department and "deep state" elements in the US of trying to destabilise India in conjunction with a group of investigative journalists and opposition leader Rahul Gandhi.

The accusation comes as a surprise as New Delhi and Washington have forged a strong relationship in the last two decades and both have vowed to further strengthen ties despite some differences and irritants.

Gandhi's Congress party used the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)'s articles that "singularly focused" on the Adani Group and its alleged closeness to the government to undermine Modi, the ruling party said on Thursday. Group chair Gautam Adani and seven others were indicted last month in the US for being part of a \$265 billion scheme to bribe Indian officials — allegations the group has termed "baseless".

OCCRP's articles have

also accused state-sponsored hackers in India of using Israeli-made Pegasus spyware to target government critics. The government has previously denied both allegations. The BJP has previously accused Gandhi, the OCCRP and 92-year-old billionaire financier-philanthropist George Soros of attacking Modi.

On Thursday, it cited a French media report that said that OCCRP was funded by the US Agency for International Development and "other deep state figures" like Soros.

"The Deep State had a clear objective to destabilise India by targeting Prime Minister Modi," the BJP said in a series of messages on X. "It has always been the US State Department behind this agenda...OCCRP has served as a media tool for carrying out a deep state agenda," it said.

Sambit Patra, a BJP national spokesperson and lawmaker, repeated the accusations at an official media briefing by the party on Thursday. "A French investigative media group...has revealed that...

50% of OCCRP's funding comes directly from the US State Department," Patra said. "OCCRP has served as a media tool for carrying out a deep state agenda."

The State Department, US AID, Soros and the Congress party did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The Indian foreign ministry also did not respond to a request for comment on the ruling party's accusation against the State Department. OCCRP said in a statement it was an independent media outlet and not associated with any political party.

"The US government, while providing some funding to OCCRP, has no say in our editorial processes and no control over our reporting," it said. The government has lately been facing heat over the US indictment of Gautam Adani, who opposition leaders say Modi has always protected, and the country's parliament was suspended multiple times last week as opposition lawmakers demanded a discussion on the issue. Modi's BJP and Adani have denied the accusations.

## BD diplomat receives threatening letter

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A senior Bangladeshi diplomat has filed a complaint with the Kohsar Police Station after receiving a threatening letter and reporting harassment by unidentified individuals..

According to reports, the First Information Report (FIR) was registered under Section 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Pakistan Penal Code. According to the complaint, the Bangladeshi diplomat alleged that unknown persons have been following him, monitoring his movements, and even taking his photographs without consent.

A few days ago, a threatening letter was delivered to the Bangladeshi Embassy, causing fear and concern among the diplomatic staff. The police have initiated an investigation to identify and apprehend the individuals involved in harassing and threatening the Bangladeshi diplomat.

## Qureshi clashes with inspector

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi engaged in a heated exchange with police officials over the type of vehicle being used for his transfer back to Kot Lakhpat Jail.

According to the channel report, the disagreement arose when police attempted to switch the double-cabin vehicle, originally assigned for transporting inmates, with a single-cabin vehicle for Qureshi's return from court.

As per the report, former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi harshly argued with Police Inspector Sheikh Hammad, expressing his displeasure over the change. Shah Mahmood Qureshi, citing severe back pain, refused to travel in the single-cabin vehicle, opting instead to wait in the courtroom until a double-cabin vehicle was arranged. "I will not return in this vehicle. I have back trouble and cannot endure the discomfort," Qureshi stated firmly to the police inspector. The altercation caused a temporary delay in Qureshi's transfer to the jail.

## ATC extends interim bail of PTI leaders

F.P. Report

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) on Friday extended the interim bail of PTI Lahore President Imtiaz Mehmood Sheikh until December 18 in three cases related to the May 9 riots.

ATC Judge Manzoor Ali Gill conducted proceedings on the pre-arrest bail applications, during which Imtiaz Mehmood Sheikh appeared in court as his interim bail expired. At the start of the proceedings, a member of the Joint Investigation Team, DSP Javed Asif, along with the investigation officer, appeared before the court. They informed the court that the PTI Lahore president had also been found guilty in two cases involving the torching of police vehicles near Jinnah House.

## KP CM reviews progress of 'New Peshawar Valley' project

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on Friday chaired a meeting to review the progress of the "New Peshawar Valley" project. Officials briefed the CM on the project's location, access roads, master plan, land acquisition, and other developments. The meeting also addressed obstacles delaying progress, with departments directed to resolve issues quickly.

The chief minister emphasized improving the master plan to meet modern housing needs and ensuring health-care and education facilities are centrally located for easy access. He also ordered faster land acquisition and immediate work on access roads. To oversee implementation, the chief minister proposed forming a committee of experts. "This project is for public benefit, not profit," he said, highlighting its importance for Peshawar's growing population.

KP LUBCC approves master plans for seven more cities: Provincial Land Use and Building Control Council (LUBCC) on Friday approved the concept of master plans for seven additional cities including Peshawar, Abbottabad, Haripur, Mingora, Chitral, Jamraud, and Landi Kotal whereas concerned authorities were directed to prepare detailed designs and PC-Is for various development activities under these approved plans and present them for approval.

The 4th meeting of the Land Use and Building Control Council was held here at Chief Minister's Secretariat with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. Provincial cabinet members Arshad Ayub Khan, Major (R) Muhammad Sajjad, Pir



Musawir Shah, Abdul Karim Tordher, Senior Member Board of Revenue Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah, and other members of the council attended the meeting.

The forum was briefed in detail on implementation status of decisions taken in previous meetings of the council and the proposed master plans for the earlier mentioned urban cities. It was highlighted that these plans have been developed with extensive input from experts, keeping in view modern urban development requirements and the needs of these cities for the next 20 years. The Chief Minister stressed the importance of implementing these plans effectively for the realistic development of urban areas, urging all relevant departments to fulfill their responsibilities diligently. He also issued directives for establishing a one-window facilitation mechanism at the district level to assist investors.

He made it clear that a comprehensive unit comprising expert representatives from departments including environment, forestry, agriculture, and local government be set up for convenience of potential investors adding that, the unit would provide investors with all necessary information and procedural details in one place, eliminating the need for them to visit multiple offices.

As part of the ease-of-doing-business policy, the Chief Minister directed for the removal of unnecessary processes to streamline procedures for investors. He emphasized that facilitating investors would directly contribute to the successful implementation of these master plans.

Additionally, the Chief Minister directed for steps to regulate unauthorized/un-approved private housing societies and colonies in all urban centers. He offered these societies a one-time opportunity to obtain No Objection Certificates (NOCs) in accordance with the law. He also directed GIS mapping of both government-owned properties and private colonies and societies. The Chief Minister stressed that land transfers must align with approved plans to avoid future complications.

Moreover, to address water scarcity in the future in the provincial capital, Peshawar, the Chief Minister directed for sustainable solutions to meet future demands. He directed immediate action on proposed projects for water supply to Peshawar from Mohmand Dam and Jabba Dam and directed for detailed briefings on the matter. "We must take water issues seriously now to avoid major challenges in the future," he remarked.

## Romanian top court annuls presidential election result

BUCHAREST (Reuters): Romania's top court annulled an ongoing presidential election after accusations of Russian meddling and said on Friday the entire process, which had been due to conclude this weekend, would have to be re-run. The second round had been scheduled for Sunday and voting has already begun in polling stations abroad. It would have pitted Calin Georgescu, a far-right, pro-Russian candidate, against pro-European Union centrist leader Elena Lasconi.

"The electoral process to elect Romania's president will be fully re-run, and the government will set a new date and ... calendar for the necessary steps," the court said in a statement. Georgescu scored single digit numbers in opinion polls before the first round vote on Nov. 24 but then surged to a first-place finish that raised questions over the result.

Georgescu wants to end Romanian support for Ukraine against Russia's invasion. If he won the presidency it would upend the pro-Western politics of the EU and NATO member, pushing Romania closer to a belt of states in central and eastern Europe that have powerful populist, Russia-friendly politicians, including Hungary, Slovakia and Austria. Friday's court ruling plunged the country into institutional chaos. Current President Klaus Iohannis's term ends on Dec. 21 and it was unclear who would be head of state after this date.

Analysts said the ruling may erode institutions, trigger street protests and ultimately still endanger the nation's pro-Western course. It was not yet clear if Georgescu would be allowed to take part in the re-run election. Romania's top security council declassified documents on Wednesday that

said the country was a target of "aggressive hybrid Russian attacks" during the election period. Russia has denied any interference in Romania's election campaigns. The top court, which had validated the first presidential round on Monday, said in its Friday reversal that it was "seeking to ensure the fairness and legality of the electoral process", adding that a detailed explanation of its ruling would be released at a later date.

There was no immediate comment from Georgescu, but he was due to make a statement at 1900 GMT on Friday. George Simion, the leader of the opposition hard-right Alliance for Uniting Romanians (AUR) called the court ruling a "coup d'etat", adding "nine politically appointed judges, scared that a candidate outside the system had all chances to become Romania's president, decided to annul Romanians' will". Simion came fourth in the first round. He and AUR then endorsed Georgescu. Lasconi condemned the court's ruling. "The constitutional court's decision is illegal, amoral and crushes the very essence of democracy, voting," she said.

However, Social Democrat Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu supported the move, calling it "the only correct solution". Romania's anti-organised crime prosecuting unit DIICOT said it was launching an investigation into Georgescu's campaign after analysing the declassified documents. "Prosecutors are looking at the commission of the crimes of illegal operations with computer devices or programmes, the attempted crime of disrupting the functioning of computer systems and the attempted crime of illegal access to a computer system," it said in a statement.

ment.

Sunday's run-off vote would have been the third consecutive ballot after the first presidential round and a Dec. 1 parliamentary election in which far-right parties gained a third of seats, though the ruling Social Democrats emerged as the largest grouping and hope to cobble together a pro-EU coalition government. The parliamentary vote was unaffected by Friday's court ruling. In one of the declassified documents, Romania's intelligence agency said Georgescu was massively promoted on social media platform TikTok through coordinated accounts, recommendation algorithms and paid promotion. Georgescu has declared zero funds spent in the campaign.

TikTok denies giving Georgescu special treatment, saying his account was labelled as a political account and treated like any other. The intelligence service also said access data for official Romanian election websites was published on Russian cybercrime platforms. The access data was probably procured by targeting legitimate users or by exploiting the legitimate training server, the agency said. It added that it had identified more than 85,000 cyberattacks that aimed to exploit system vulnerabilities.

Some experts predicted Georgescu would be barred from running again. "It is extremely likely that the court will not allow Calin Georgescu to run again," said Sergiu Miscoiu, a political science professor at Babes-Bolyai University. Earlier this year, the court banned ultra-nationalist party leader and European Parliament member Diana Sosoaca from running for president in a move that analysts said overstepped court powers.

## North Gaza hospital director says Israeli strikes hit facility

GAZA (AFP): The director of north Gaza's Kamal Adwan hospital and the territory's civil defense agency said Israel conducted several strikes on Friday that hit the facility, one of the last functioning health centers in the area.

"There was a series of air strikes on the northern and western sides of the hospital, accompanied by intense and direct fire," Hossam Abu Safieh said, adding that four staff were killed and no surgeons were left at the site.

The Israeli army has not yet responded to AFP requests for comment on the strikes. Mahmud Bassal, Gaza's civil defense spokesman, said on Friday morning that the Israeli army entered Kamal Adwan hospital, evacuated patients and arrested several Palestinians. The city of Beit Lahia has been the

site of an intense Israeli military operation for the past two months that has intensified in recent days, forcing thousands to flee amid bombing, the civil defense agency said.

The Israeli army has stormed Kamal Adwan on several occasions since the start of the war nearly 14 months ago, while the hospital said that its intensive care unit director Ahmad Al-Kahlut was killed in an air strike late last month. The army's storming of Kamal Adwan comes just days after the UN's World Health Organization said an emergency medical team had reached it for the first time in 60 days.

With little to no aid reaching Kamal Adwan since the start of the Israeli operation in Gaza's far north in early October, the hospital had run out of most supplies, including fuel. The Israeli army says

its operation in the north aims to keep Hamas militants from regrouping there. Rights groups have accused it of pursuing a plan to evacuate or starve all those remaining there, which it denies.

Israeli government spokesman David Mencer said on Thursday that residents of the north would not be allowed to move back there as long as the military operations are ongoing. The war in Gaza was sparked by Hamas's surprise October 7, 2023 attack which resulted in the deaths of 1,208 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official data. Israel's retaliatory military campaign in Gaza has resulted in at least 44,580 deaths, mostly civilians, according to data from the territory's Hamas-run health ministry, which the UN considers reliable.

## Thousands flee Homs

BEIRUT / AMMAN (Reuters): Thousands of people fled the central Syrian city of Homs overnight and into Friday morning, a war monitoring group and residents said, as militant forces sought to push their lightning offensive against government forces further south.

The head of the Syrian faction leading the sweeping assault told CNN that his group — a former Al-Qaeda affiliate now known as Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) — aimed to "build Syria" and bring Syrian refugees back home from Lebanon and Europe. It was Abu Mohammed Al-Golani's first interview since his group began seizing territory from Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces on Nov. 27. Militants have captured two major cities so far and are now thrusting toward Homs, a key crossroads city linking the capital Damascus to Assad's coastal heartlands.

After years locked behind frozen front lines, the insurgents have burst out of their northwestern Idlib bastion to reel off the swiftest battlefield advance by either side since a street uprising against Assad mushroomed into civil war 13 years ago. Assad regained control of most of Syria after his key allies — Russia, Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah group — came to his support. But all have recently been diverted by other crises, giving Syrian Sunni Muslim militants a window to fight back.

Hezbollah sent a small number of "supervising forces" from Lebanon to Syria overnight to help prevent anti-government fighters from seizing the strategic city of Homs, two senior Lebanese security sources told Reuters. A Syrian military officer and two regional officials close to Tehran also said that elite forces from Iran-backed Hezbollah had crossed over from Lebanon overnight and had taken up positions in Homs. Hezbollah has suffered major blows in its war with Israel in Lebanon, which assassinated some of its top leaders.

Meanwhile, the militants said they had taken over the towns of Talbisa and Rastan, bringing them within kilometers of Homs. In another alarming development for Assad, the head of the US-backed Syrian Kurdish force said the radical Daesh group, which ran a reign of terror in large swathes of Iraq and Syria until it was defeated by a US-led coalition in 2017, had now taken control of some areas in eastern Syria. "Due to the recent developments, there is increased movement by Islamic State mercenaries in the Syrian desert, in the south and west of Deir Ezzor and the countryside of Al-Raqqa," Mazloum Abdi told a press conference, referring to areas in the east of the country.