

Navy Ship seizes narcotics
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) MOAWIN seized a large cache of narcotics during a counter-narcotics operation in North Arabian Sea. The seized narcotics are estimated to be worth approximately USD 01-million in international market. The cache was being transported via sea to international destinations, says a statement released by the DG Public Relations (Pakistan Navy).



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXI

No. 340

Regd. No. 241

RAJAB 01 1446 -- THURSDAY, JANUARY 02 2025

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

Peace accord signed to resolve Kurram dispute

KP CM welcomes peace agreement

Ikram Ullah Khalil

PESHAWAR, KOHAT: An agreement has been reached on the Kurram dispute, as both parties signed a peace accord during the Kohat grand jirga. The jirga, held to address the situation in Kurram district, successfully concluded with mutual consensus on the agreement.

Jirga member Malik Sawab Khan confirmed the signing, with 45 representatives from each side endorsing the 14-point agreement. He further stated that plans were being made to open routes and establish peace. Those who violate the agreement will be handed over to the government, and efforts will be made in collaboration with law-enforcement agencies to ensure peace and order, he added.

On the other hand, the agreement stipulates that compensation for damages will be provided, and heavy weapons will be surrendered to the government. Adviser to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister on Information, Barrister Saif, confirmed the signing of the peace agreement.

"Both parties have signed the peace agreement. A few days ago, one party signed, and today the other party has also signed," said Barrister Saif. He added that both parties agreed on the surrender of weapons. He congratulated the people of Kurram on the signing of the peace agreement.

"This peace agreement will usher in a new era of peace and prosperity in Kurram," he stated. He also mentioned that with the signing of the peace agreement, daily life would soon be fully restored. Kurram has been isolated from the rest of the country due to violent tribal clashes that erupted in November, resulting in over 100 deaths. All roads in Kurram, including the Parachinar-Peshawar highway, have been closed since Nov 21, following an attack on a convoy in the Bagan area, which killed at least 50 people.

The attack sparked intense clashes, leading to numerous casualties on both sides. The violence escalated when two individuals were killed and decapitated after being ambushed while heading toward Parachinar in the Bagan area. The road closures have fuelled protests, with a sit-in continuing at the Parachinar Press Club and a separate protest now in its ninth day in Karachi.

On Tuesday, another protest took place in Bagan, Kurram, against the destruction of shops and homes, with protesters demanding the reopening of roads and aid for those affected. In Lahore, a protest is also ongoing outside the Press Club, calling for justice for the killings in Parachinar and the reopening of roads in Kurram.

Sindh govt warns protesters to open roads or face action

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Home Minister Zia-ul-Hassan Lanjar, addressing a important press conference at the Karachi Police Office regarding the ongoing protest sit-ins, stated that the residents of Karachi are well aware of the disruptions caused by road blockades over the past week.

He expressed deep sorrow over the situation in Parachinar and condemned the atrocities there. However, he emphasized that the Sindh government will not allow Karachi's roads and highways to be blocked, providing an opportunity for disruptive elements to achieve their malicious objectives. He noted that the road closures and sit-ins have not only affected ordinary citizens, businesses, and flights but have also caused difficulties for patients trying to reach hospitals.

The Home Minister stated that the Sindh government strongly condemned the atrocities in Parachinar and urged the KP government to resolve the issue through measures promoting inter-sectarian harmony, while also demanding improved conditions there.

He clarified that the incident in Parachinar does not justify blocking the roads of a peaceful city. The Sindh government had offered the protesters an alternative venue for their demonstration, but regrettably, this offer was rejected. He asserted that the government will not allow any provocation or challenge to the rule of law.

The minister mentioned that a delegation comprising provincial ministers and the Mayor of Karachi have been in constant communication with the protesters and their representatives,



MWM links calling off sit-ins to opening of roads

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Relief still eludes Karachiites as Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM) Chairman Allama Raja Nasir Abbas on Wednesday announced that they would only call off their protest after the roads leading to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's restive Kurram district are opened for general traffic. His remarks came shortly after the two warring tribes in Kurram have inked a 14-point peace accord aimed at establishing peace in district. Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, Senator Abbas blasted the Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur-led provincial government — with whom the MWM is still an ally — saying: "Closure of roads leading to Parachinar is the failure of the provincial government."

He held the KP CM responsible for the closure of the roads leading to the violence-hit district. "KP government has not cooperated [with us] so far," he admitted. Expressing his satisfaction over the Jirga-brokered peace agreement, the senator said that the tribal elders had fulfilled their responsibility. He hoped that the peace accord would be implemented in its true spirit.

holding scheduled meetings. However, no significant progress has been made so far regarding resuming traffic flow or ending the protest.

He further stated that the Sindh government is in contact with the protesters, including youth and other elders involved, and is working tirelessly to uphold the rule of law. An impartial investigation is also underway to determine who is responsible for injuring police personnel through gunfire and their

affiliations. He reported that during the protests, nine police personnel, including an officer, have been injured while ensuring the safety and security of citizens.

The Home Minister appealed to the protesters to consider the situation carefully and end their protest while supporting the police in maintaining the rule of law. He assured them that the government understands their pain and stands with them in this difficult time.

Pakistan, India exchange lists of nuclear installations

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and India on Wednesday exchanged the lists of their respective nuclear installations and facilities. This annual exchange was carried out under the Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India, a press statement issued by the Foreign Office Spokesperson said.

Signed on 31 December 1988, the agreement, inter alia, provides that both countries shall inform each other of their nuclear installations and facilities, falling within its definition, on 1st January of each calendar year.

The list of nuclear installations and facilities in Pakistan was officially handed over to a representative of the Indian High Commission in Islamabad at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Simultaneously, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs handed over the list of India's nuclear installations and facilities to a representative of the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi.

As the Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between Pakistan and India entered into force on 27 January 1991, the two countries have been exchanging the lists since 1st January 1992, the statement added.

Federal govt introduces pension reforms

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan government has 'introduced' pension reforms for retired employees, according to a notification issued by the finance ministry. Under the new rules, retired employees will not be entitled to both a salary and pension simultaneously if they rejoin any organization.

The reforms specify that retirees will only receive a pension, and if they resume employment, they will forfeit their pension for life. In cases where the retired employee's spouse is still working, they may continue receiving the pension until the spouse's retirement. Furthermore, the pension will be calculated based on the average salary of the last 24 months of employment.

The new policy is expected to result in lower pension payouts, as the annual increase in pensions will also be based on the average salary. The reforms were introduced following recommendations from the Pay and Pension Commission, with the aim of controlling the annual pension bill.

Govt, PTI bodies meeting revised

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The schedule for the meeting between the government and opposition committees was revised on Wednesday. According to a spokesperson, the National Assembly session, initially scheduled for 11:30 am Thursday, will now take place at 3:30 pm.

The spokesperson further clarified that the change in timing was made following requests from the committee members. The session will be chaired by NA Speaker Ayaz Sadiq. It is to be recalled that the PTI leader Asad Qaiser on Tuesday revealed two demands to be presented in a meeting with the government's negotiation committee on Jan 2.

Speaking to media outside the Peshawar High Court, he said the PTI would demand the release of all party prisoners, including Imran Khan, and a judicial investigation into the May 9 and Nov 26 incidents. The government and major opposition party PTI's negotiation committees are scheduled to meet again on Jan 2, with National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq set to preside over it.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting of federal cabinet.

Premier hopeful of achieving economic targets

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday expressed the hope that due to untiring efforts of the economic team, the government would achieve the economic targets in next six months.

Speaking at the cabinet meeting, the prime minister noted that during first five months of current fiscal year, the remittances posted record \$15 billion that he hoped would expand to \$35 billion by the end of the fiscal year. He said that the government managed to achieve the macro economic stability despite the fact that the opponents made no stone unturned to sabotage the efforts of the government.

Wishing the participants of the meeting happy new year, the prime minister said that the sun of 2025 will rise with the promise of progress and prosperity for Pakistan. He prayed that the economic, political and law and order crises that the world faced in 2024 would be overcome by positive progress in the new year.

He said the ambitious homegrown five-year plan titled "Uraan Pakistan" that was launched yesterday would prove to be a milestone for the country's future provided "we remain on track and work hard to achieve the goals set in the plan". He specifically appreciated the efforts of Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and other cabinet members along with the relevant government officials.

He said having achieved economic stability, the country had now entered the growth stage. "If we want to achieve the economic development, then we will have to focus on export-led growth and we have no other option."

The prime minister also appreciate the efforts of Deputy PM Ishaq Dar,

PM expresses satisfaction over inflation rate plummeting to 81-month low

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday expressed satisfaction over inflation rate falling to 4.1% which is 81-month low. He said in a statement issued from the Prime Minister's Office, macro-economic stability was achieved but this was just the beginning. PM Shehbaz Sharif said it was a welcoming progress that inflation rate came to 4.1% in December 2024. He said the government had launched a project like Uraan Pakistan-Pakistan's Takeoff that would put Pakistan among the leading countries of the world. "Government is pursuing a policy of economic reforms. The current account has gained surplus after 24 years. Inflation has come down from 38% to 4.1%, stock market has become the second-best market in the world," the PM added. PM Shehbaz Sharif added that the policy rate has come down from 22% to 13% and with the hard work of the government's economic and financial team, the economy was moving towards stability. "We [the government] are aware of the people's difficulties, and therefore worked day and night to solve the problems of the masses. Insha Allah [God willing], the lives of the people will improve further," the PM said.

Governor State Bank of Pakistan, Finance Minister and Chairman FBR for collecting additional Rs 72 billion under ADR (advance-to-tax ratio) due to which the government's target of tax revenue for December 2024 had almost been achieved.

Similarly, he said due to funding by the Bill Gates Foundation of \$6 million, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) would become completely digitized. The early results of this project were that the 39% time duration of container inspection had been reduced while the businessmen got relief of 89%.

Additionally, he said smuggling of sugar through Afghanistan had been reduced to zero which was a positive sign for the country's economy. He gave the credit of reducing the smuggling to Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanvir Hussain, the institutions and the Army Chief.

He said during first nine months of the government, no scandal surfaced which reflected the government's

commitment to ensure transparency in all sectors. As regards, terrorism in the country, the prime minister vowed that the law enforcing agencies were fully committed to halt the nefarious designs of the enemies.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the federal cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif termed Pakistan's two-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a significant achievement on the diplomatic front.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar earlier, briefed the cabinet about Pakistan's term at the UNSC which began today. The meeting was held at the Prime Minister's House, according to PM Office Media Wing. During the meeting, the prime minister directed that the details of public sector imports from Gwadar Port, over the past three months, should be presented in the next meeting of the cabinet.

US calls for restraint amid Pak-Afghan border tensions

US State Department responds to query from The Frontier Post

Jalil Afridi

WASHINGTON: The US State Department issued a statement in response to The Frontier Post's inquiry regarding recent cross-border tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. "We are aware of the Afghanistan Defense Ministry's statement on December 28 that Afghan

Taliban forces targeted several points in Pakistan," the department said.

The State Department emphasized the importance of preventing terrorism from originating within Afghanistan. "We urge the Taliban to ensure that Afghan soil is not used to support terrorist groups, movement of terrorists, or acts of terrorism," it stated.

The department called for restraint from both nations, highlighting the benefits of regional stability. "Pakistan and Afghanistan have much to gain from a peaceful and stable region on their shared borders, and both parties should de-escalate tensions," the statement added. The US government said it is closely monitoring the evolving situation.

KP govt okay demands of LG representatives: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif has clarified that the demands of local government representatives have been approved and necessary steps have already been taken for their redressal. Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur has directed for undertaking of pragmatic steps to resolve their genuine concerns.

He elaborated that all necessary amendments to the relevant rules have been approved by the Hon'ble Chief Minister, and implementation orders have already been issued. The Finance Department has released the arrears for honorariums, and clear instructions have been sent to assistant directors for utilizing funds from the previous term for developmental

projects in Village and Neighborhood Councils. Barrister Dr. Saif further noted that additional funds for rent and honorariums were recently provided by the Finance Department. Additionally, revenue generated from CRVS certificate fees is being deposited into the official accounts of the respective councils. The government is also working to establish Assistant Director offices in all tehsils in a phased manner to strengthen local governance.

The Advisor expressed disappointment over continued protests, terming them unnecessary given that the demands have already been met. He pointed out that the government had allocated a designated area for peaceful demonstrations, yet today protesters attempted to breach the Red Zone, a restricted area housing critical institutions such as the High Court, Civil Secretariat, and mili-



tary installations. Barrister Dr. Saif emphasized that protests within the Red Zone have never been permitted and described the attempt to storm the area as both regrettable and unacceptable. He stressed that no coercive actions disguised as protests will be tolerated. He called on protesters to adopt a peaceful approach to express their views, assuring them that the government's doors remain open for dialogue and resolution of legitimate concerns.

Police baton charge LG representatives

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Police here Wednesday baton charged Local Government representatives who were demanding for rights. The police made lathi charge and shelling against them near Bacha Khan square and dispersed them forcefully.

Engr Amir Muqam in a statement here strongly condemned use of police force against peaceful LG representatives who were demanding funds and others rights from KP Govt. He said it was against democratic values and termed the attitude of KP Government was highly deplorable.

The doubled standard of PTI that trying to hide its failure through use of force against peaceful protestors was stand exposed, he added. Engr Amir Muqam reiterated to raise voice for local government representatives, demanding resolution of their problems.

Hindu pilgrims from India to arrive on 5th

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Hindu pilgrims from India will arrive Pakistan via Wagah Border on January 5 to participate in the birth anniversary celebrations of Satguru Sant Swami Shadaram, the founder of historic Shadani Darbar Hayat Pitafi in Mirpur Mathelo, Sindh.

The pilgrims will be warmly welcomed by Additional Secretary Shrin, Saifullah Khokhar, Deputy Secretary Umer Javed Awan, and member of the Pakistan Hindu Mandir Management Committee, Amit Shadani.



LAHORE: A disable person on the way for selling the colorful balloons while shuttling on the road on wheel chair to earn for livelihood in the City. —APP Photo

Governor announces free IT courses for 500,000 youth

KARACHI (PPI) Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori extended warm New Year greetings to the nation and announced that in 2025, 500,000 youth will receive free advanced IT courses. Additionally, he pledged to double the scope of the Governor Initiative to benefit even more individuals.

According to a statement issued from the Sindh Governor House today, the New Year celebrations at Governor House featured a mesmerizing qawwali night that captivated attendees. Mr Tessori expressed his delight as a new world record was set for fireworks, marking a grand celebration for

the entire nation. Addressing the gathering via video link, he highlighted the historic display of fireworks at the Governor House, which lasted for over 40 minutes at midnight, leaving thousands of spectators in awe.

Tessori called on citizens to commit to working for the nation's development in the New Year, vowing to make 2025 a year of prosperity and joy. He assured that the focus would remain on employment generation, provision of clean drinking water, affordable electricity, and cleanliness across the province. Reflecting on the achievements of the past year, Tessori noted that the doors of the Governor House

remained open to the public. He highlighted the distribution of 900,000 ration bags to deserving individuals and ongoing free IT education for 50,000 youth. He further mentioned initiatives that provided laptops, motorcycles, dowry packages, Hajj, and Umrah opportunities to the needy.

Senior Vice Chairman of Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan Dr Farooq Sattar and Nasreen Jalil also addressed the event, praising the initiatives and vision of the Governor Sindh. The celebrations and commitments made by Tessori set a hopeful tone for the year ahead, promising progress and opportunities for the people of Sindh.

Naqvi launches biometric B-Forms for Children over 10

ISLAMABAD (APP): The ministry of Interior, on directives of Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, has announced the introduction of a new B-Form equipped with advanced security features for children aged 10 and above.

This initiative aims to enhance identity verification and curb crimes such as identity theft, human trafficking, and illegal passport acquisition. The new B-Form will now include mandatory fingerprint impressions and photographs of children in the specified age group. According to officials, the phased rollout of these enhanced B-Forms will commence on January 15, 2025.

Speaking on the development, Minister Mohsin Naqvi said, "These measures will prevent the mis-

use of children's identity information and strengthen our national identification system. I commend NADRA and the Passport Department for their swift action in implementing these reforms."

In the first phase, children between the ages of 10 and 18 will need to visit NADRA centers, accompanied by a parent or legal guardian, to provide their fingerprints and photographs.

Guardians must also present their Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) and the child's computerized birth certificate issued by the Union Council or Town Committee.

Once the process is completed, NADRA will issue a new B-Form featuring the child's photograph and biometric details. The

updated document will be a prerequisite for obtaining a new passport for children in this age group.

The Ministry of Interior spokesperson confirmed that the old B-Form, which lacks biometric details, will no longer be accepted for children over 10 years old. Additionally, further reforms, such as integrating iris scans and enhancing services through the Pak-ID Mobile App, are planned for future phases.

This initiative is part of a broader effort to integrate NADRA's systems with provincial civil registration databases and ensure the issuance of Digital IDs to all Pakistani citizens. "These steps will play a crucial role in securing the identity of our citizens and combating crimes effectively," said the spokesperson.

2024 successful year in Punjab's history: Azma

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari has declared 2024 as the most successful year in the province's history.

She highlighted that Maryam Nawaz launched over 77 public relief projects, with more than 50 already completed. Importantly, all of these initiatives were funded using Punjab's own resources, she added. Bokhari emphasised that Punjab was leading in development, prosperity, and public welfare compared to other provinces of Pakistan.

Relief has been extended to every segment of society, including students, farmers, women, and youth, without any discrimination, she said and added that for the first time, relief packages had also been introduced for minorities in Punjab.

The Information minister criticised previous leaders, stating that for four years, Punjab's resources were plundered by figures like 'Pinky', 'Googi', and the Captain. She praised Maryam Nawaz for addressing these injustices and improving the lives of people. Today, the standard of living in Punjab was now far superior to that of other provinces, contributing to Maryam Nawaz's growing popularity. She confidently expressed that Punjab's development journey would continue on this trajectory over the next five years.

LDA seals another 111 properties

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Development Authority (LDA) on Wednesday sealed another 111 properties, in a crackdown on illegal commercial buildings and defaulters of commercial fees. On the direction of LDA Director General Tahir Farooq, the LDA teams had been conducting daily operations with full force. In the latest operation, the teams sealed and demolished 111 properties in various areas of the city.

The targeted locations included Gulberg, Faisal Town, Garden Town, Sabzazar, Shah Jamal, Gulshan Ravi, and Samanabad. Specifically, 32 properties in Gulberg, Faisal Town, and Garden Town were sealed, while 45 properties in Shah Jamal, Gulshan Ravi, and Samanabad, and 34 properties in Sabzazar were also sealed.

Fatimid Foundation greets PPC new cabinet

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Fatimid Foundation's Administrator Badar Hussain has extended warm felicitations to the newly elected President of Peshawar Press Club, M. Riaz, and his cabinet members on their recent electoral victory. Badar Hussain expressed his confidence that the newly elected president and his cabinet will utilize their abilities

to improve the well-being of the journalist community, particularly, and the society at large. They will also strengthen the role of media in shaping a healthy society. He also expressed his gratitude to the journalist community of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for their cooperation, which has facilitated Fatimid Foundation's Peshawar Center in fulfilling its professional responsibilities.

Fatimid Foundation's Administrator, while extending his best wishes to the newly elected president and his cabinet, stated that M. Riaz's repeated election as president is a testament to the journalist community's unwavering trust in him. It is hoped that the newly elected president and cabinet members will once again live up to the expectations of journalists and various segments of society

Minister inaugurates revamped dispensary

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare, Khawaja Imran Nazir, inaugurated a newly revamped urban dispensary on Bhogiwal Road on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, he announced that the new year would be marked with a renewed commitment to serving humanity.

The minister lauded the completion of the dispensary's revamping within a mere three months and reiterated that, under the vision of Chief Minister, all urban dispensaries in Punjab would be revamped by the end of year. Khawaja Imran Nazir highlighted key developments in Punjab's healthcare infrastructure, including the near-completion of a state-of-the-art cancer hospital in Lahore, costing Rs 82 billion. He also mentioned the establishment of a second Punjab Institute of Cardiology (PIC-2) at Jinnah Hospital, Lahore, and a new cardiac center in Sargodha.

Additionally, new dialysis machines are being provided to healthcare facilities across the province. The minister provided an update on the recruitment of healthcare professionals, stating that 3,500 doctors were hired during the previous tenure, while 1,500 have been recruited so far in the current term. He revealed that by December 31, nearly 600 health facilities had been revamped, and 150 Basic Health Units were being upgraded into Maryam Nawaz Health Clinics. He assured that no doctor, nurse, or staff member would face unemployment, as they would be relocated to nearby facilities.

FIA arrests four more human traffickers

LAHORE (APP): Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Gujranwala Zone claimed on Wednesday to have arrested four criminals including a notorious human trafficker for their alleged involvement in Libya boat tragedy.

According to FIA Imran Hussain aka Mani,

a key figure in the Libya boat tragedy, had been listed among the most wanted human traffickers in the FIA's Red Book.

He was a member of an international human trafficking syndicate, with six cases registered against him at the Composite Circle Gujrat.

New year will prove to be a year of development: Mayor

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab has said that the new year will prove to be a year of development and progress for Karachi, and the long-standing issues of the citizens will be resolved this year, setting the city on the path of growth.

He expressed these views while addressing a cultural program as the chief guest at Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim, Clifton. Parliamentary Leader of the City Council Karamullah Waqasi, Deputy

Parliamentary Leader Dil Muhammad, and local leaders of the Pakistan People's Party were also present with him. At the start of the new year, a spectacular fireworks display was held, delighting the thousands of citizens present at the event. He said that several development projects in Karachi are in the final stages of completion, while tenders for various projects have already been issued, and work on them will commence by the end of this month.

The Mayor Karachi said

that the people want to see Karachi thriving, a city of lights, love, tolerance, music, and joy, where people can enjoy the happiness of life. He emphasized that along with prayers, we must make efforts for the development and construction of our city. He pointed out that today's program included people from various ethnic backgrounds, showcasing Karachi as a bouquet of flowers of every color and race, which is the true identity of this city.

CM Murad conducts progress review of Karachi Safe City Project

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah chaired a high-level meeting today to review the progress of the Karachi Safe City project, a key initiative aimed at improving urban security through advanced surveillance systems. The meeting, held at the Chief Minister's House, was attended by Home Minister Zia-ul-Hasan Lanjar, Chief Secretary Asif Haider Shah, IG Police Ghulam Nabi Memon, DG Sindh Safe Cities Authority Asif Ijaz Sheikh, and other senior officials.

During the briefing, the DG Safe Cities Authority outlined the five-phase Karachi Safe City project, with an estimated cost of Rs34.95 billion. The initiative includes 12,000 high-res-

olution CCTV cameras being installed across the city, covering 1,700 kilometers and 2,525 police sites.

The chief minister said that in Phase One, 1,300 cameras would be installed, with an additional 1,044 new units and upgrades for 256 existing cameras. The Sindh Chief Minister said that 110 emergency response vehicles should be arranged, emphasizing their importance in boosting mobile surveillance. "These vehicles will strengthen CCTV coverage and improve patrolling efficiency," he said.

The meeting was informed that the first Point of Presence (PoP) site has been completed at Boat Basin Police Station, while

work continues on 17 additional sites at key police stations, including Preedy, Saddar, and Shahrah-e-Faisal. The Safe City project is being integrated with NADRA and the Excise Department to enhance data sharing. Meanwhile, preparations for the project headquarters near the KPO on Shahrah-e-Faisal are underway.

The Chief Minister directed the police to launch a crackdown on vehicles with fake or fancy number plates starting in February, adding that the initiative would improve traffic management and law enforcement. In a significant development, the Chief Minister instructed officials to replicate the Safe City project in

Hyderabad and Sukkur, extending the initiative's benefits beyond Karachi.



PAF BASE, KOHAT TENDER NOTICE-SPORTS GROUND

PAF Base, Kohat requires tender for maintenance / uplifting of Sports Field / Indoor Complexes and Courts. Last date for submission of tender applications is **17 January, 2025** at 1000 Hrs. Tenders will be opened on the same day at 1200 Hrs. Any Tender application may be rejected on technical grounds.

Note: - Quotations may be sent in favor of Sports Officer, PAF Base, Kohat.

Detail specification may be obtained on Tel No. 0922-9260092-5215, Mobile: 0323-9452311

PAC for steps to recover Water Board's dues

KARACHI (APP): The Public Accounts Committee of the Sindh Assembly, Wednesday, directed to initiate measures for recovery of Rs20 billion water charges due on different state owned entities and seek assistance of federal government in the regard.

The Sindh Assembly PAC, in a meeting presided over by the Chairman Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, reviewed audit paras pertaining to Karachi Water and Sewerage Board, Ministry of Local Government, said a statement issued here.

The Sindh PAC directed the Additional Chief Secretary Local Government and CEO

Water Board to communicate to the relevant federal government institutions for the payment of dues to federal institutions situated in the province.

The PAC also summoned the relevant officials of various federal government institutions to the PAC on January 21 in the regard.

The PAC Chairman Nisar Khuhro said that the Water Board owed Rs20 Billion outstanding arrears of water charges to Pakistan Steel Mills, Sui Southern Gas, PSO, KPT, Pakistan Railways, PIA, National Shipping Corporation, Port Qasim Authority, Marine Fisheries, Cantonment

Boards, Karachi Shipyard, Pakistan Machine Tool Factory, Cotton Export Corporation, and other institutions.

The some of the outstanding amount dates back to 2016 while only the Pakistan Steel Mills has to pay Rs10 billion arrears of water charges, he added.

Nisar Khuhro has said that Sindh has provided water facilities to federal institutions, but these federal institutions are not paying dues.

He requested the federal government to take notice of the issue and initiate necessary measures for payment of dues to KWSB.

5,000 promotions given across province on merit: IGP

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar ensured exemplary initiatives for the police force during the year 2024.

In 2024, more than 5,000 departmental promotions were given across the province based on merit and seniority. Punjab Police Spokesperson shared details that, during 2024, 08 MOUs were signed with educational institutions and hospitals.

An amount of Rs 281.9 million was spent on medical financial assistance for police employees and their families. An amount exceeding Rs. 781 million was disbursed for educational scholarships for the children of police employees.

In 2024, 599 police stations across the province were converted into Special Initiative Police Station Protocols, and the process of constructing 39 Smart Police Stations began in different districts of the province.

Punjab Police Spokesperson further said that the approval for establishing 19 new police posts in the Kacha areas of Rahim Yar Khan and Rajanpur was obtained. Similarly, the construction of 30 border posts in Dera Ghazi Khan, Layyah, Mianwali, and Bhakkar was initiated.

The approval for Hard Area Allowance for personnel performing duties in the Kacha areas was also granted. In the Special Branch Punjab, an Artificial Intelligence Center was established, and a paperless computerized system was implemented.

Additionally, the establishment of a district office for the Special Branch in Murree was completed.

The construction of a hostel for female personnel in the Qurban Lines was initiated. The approval for 30 plots from the Punjab Government for shifting rental police stations into personal buildings was also obtained. Over 2.6 million citizens were provided services at police service centers across the province. Over 19 million driving licenses were issued to citizens at Driving License Centers. More than 85,000 minority citizens were provided services at Meesaq Centers.

Over Rs. 2320 million was spent on the welfare of police officers and employees, and more than Rs. 2460 million was approved as financial assistance grants for offi-

cers and personnel who died during service.

Additionally, 170 plots and Rs. 36.0 million were provided to the families of martyrs for the construction of houses. Over Rs. 80 million was spent on the medical treatment of 241 injured personnel during duty.

ufone 4G

Public Notice

Dear Customers,

Following will be the prices of below offers effective 10th January 2025.

Offer	Price
UPower 280	Rs. 300
UPower 300	Rs. 330
Weekly Calling Offer	Rs. 280

For more information, please visit www.ufone.com or call our helpline number 333. Terms & Conditions apply.

GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT

NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING

Single Stage Two Envelop E-Bidding System

C&W Department Highway Division Abbottabad, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites Electronic Bids from eligible firms/contractors in accordance with KPPRA procurement rules 2014 on single stage two envelop procedure for the following works.

S.No.	Name of Work	Relevant category of C&W & PEC	E/Cost (M)	Bid Security i/c S/Duty	Period of Completion	Last date of submission of Bids & time	Date & time of opening of financial bids	
DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE IN MANSEHRA AND ABBOTTA BAD ADP NO.935/240315 (2024-25) PK-43 DISTRICT ABBOTTABAD								
PACKAGE NO. 1								
1.	IMP. & B/TOPPING OF LORA SWARGALI (HARRO TO NAGRI) ROAD	C-5	40.00	840000	As per work order	31/01/2025 1200 hrs	Financial bids will be opened after approval of technical bid from competent authority	
PACKAGE NO. 2								
1.	REHABILITATION OF BEERANGALI ROAD	C-6	13.30	306000	As per work order	31/01/2025 1200 hrs		
2.	IMP. & B/TOPPING OF ROAD FROM LORA BAZAR TO BOYS DEGREE COLLEGE							
PACKAGE NO. 3								
1.	DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR HAZARA DIVISION ADP NO. 918/210557 (2024-25) SH: CONSTN/ B/TOPPING OF ROADS I.e SAREELA, CHAFAR, BAGAN, MERA REHMAT KHAN, BATOTAY, SAMANDER KATHA, JASTER & CHONEY IN DISTRICT ABBOTTABAD SH: IMPROVEMENT & BLACKTOPPING OF BAGAN ROAD	C-6	10.00	240000	As per work order	31/01/2025 1200 hrs		

- Bid documents and instruction to bidders can be downloaded upto on day prior to the opening date from C&W website (www.cwd.gkp.pk).
- All the bidders are required to be registered with C&W Department and are on the Active Tax Payer's list of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority.
- Instructions issued by KPPRA vide Notification No. S.R.O(14)/Vol:1-24/2021-22 dated: 10/05/2022 will be applicable.
- All the bidders are required to submit the bid security, additional security and tender fee in shape of Call Deposit.
- Separate CDRs for each package should be provided alongwith an application showing Package No. and CDR No. for the package.

INF(P) 3570/24

Executive Engineer | C&W Highway Division Abbottabad

Peshawar Zalmi Talent Hunt Program

Fakhar inaugurates trials to select talented cricketers

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan, on Wednesday, inaugurated the trials for the search of talented cricket players under the Peshawar Zalmi Talent Hunt Program at Arbab Niaz Stadium in Peshawar.

Secretary of Sports and Youth Affairs, Matiullah, Director of Sports, Abdul Nasir Khan along with former cricketer and Director of Cricket Peshawar Zalmi, Mohammad Akram, former cricketers Umar Gul, Mohammad Yousuf, Kamran Akmal and Ihsan Ali were also present on the occasion.

More than seven thousand young people have registered for these trials being held at Arbab Niaz Stadium.

These trials are organized by Peshawar Zalmi to search new talent in the province.

During the inauguration, the Provincial Minister for Sports spoke to media representatives and said that this initiative under Peshawar Zalmi is a significant effort to bring forward

talented players. He acknowledged that Zalmi has made excellent arrangements for this purpose.

In response to a question regarding Arbab Niaz Stadium, he stated that the PSL will soon be held at this venue.

He mentioned that the stadium is a key ground for international sports in the province, and efforts are being made to complete it at the earliest so it can host international matches.

He further added that the stadium will be equipped with international standards and facilities.

Regarding the promotion of sports in the province, he said that the provincial government is focusing on all types of sports and making every effort to organize sports events here, providing all possible support to the players.

More than 10 thousand young cricketers reached Peshawar for the Zalmi's talent hunt and trials. Young cricketers from remote areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Waziristan, Mansehra, Charsada, Bajaur Bannu, Bajaur and other areas arrived in

Peshawar to give trials. More than 10,000 young cricketers arrived at Arbab Niaz Stadium for Peshawar Zalmi's talent hunt. Muhammad Akram, director of Peshawar Zalmi, said that seeing the enthusiasm of the youth, his heart has filled with joy.

Mohammad Akram said that Peshawar Zalmi has been trying since the first day to organize PSL matches in Peshawar and still he is requesting and demanding from the provincial government and PCB to organize Pakistan Super League season 10 matches, so that the young cricketers here can see their team Peshawar Zalmi in action. Former star cricketer and mentor of Peshawar Zalmi Kamran Akmal said that he is happy to see restoration of the cricket in Arbab Niaz Stadium once again. The best talent was seen in talent hunts and Hopefully PSL and international cricket will return here soon. The series of Peshawar Zalmi talent hunt and trials will continue till January 5. After shortlisting the best talent, practice matches will be held and 50 best players will be selected.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan talking to media during the inauguration of trials to select talented crickets at Arbab Niaz Stadium.

Minister inaugurates 7th Digital Agricultural Census

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Provincial Minister for Agriculture, Major (R) Sajjad Barakwal inaugurated the 7th Digital Agricultural Census for KP province in a simple but impressive ceremony at Peshawar. The event was organized by Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

Addressing the ceremony, Barakwal assured full cooperation to PBS on behalf of his KP govt in making this first of its kind digital agricultural census a success story and emphasized the importance of the agricultural census in preparing the province's five-year agricultural policy. He highlighted that 80% of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's population is rural, relying heavily on agriculture for their livelihood. On this occasion the participants and high ups from KP agriculture department were given detailed briefing saying that Agriculture's Contribution to KP GDP is 22%, Employment Generation is 44% of the workforce, Wheat Production land is 48% irrigated, 52% non-irrigated, with yields of 14 and 26 maunds per acre, respectively.

The KP minister on this occasion stressed the need for evolving comprehensive policies to address challenges in the agricultural sector, including supporting and enlightening farmers, improving infrastructure, and allocating resources to boost agricultural productivity.

During the ceremony, tablets were distributed among crop reporting staff for completing the 7th Agricultural Census, while the minister also gave away shields to the participants.

IPS welcomes 2025 with joy and unity at new year event



Sajjad Muhammad Khan

PESHAWAR: The Institute of Professional Studies (IPS) celebrated the New Year with a splendid festivity. The event was overseen by Director Dr. Bilal Afridi, featuring a cake-cutting ceremony, humorous and educational skits, enchanting musical performances, and energetic bhangra dances.

The highlight of the event was the cake-cutting ceremony, attended by students, faculty, and staff. Dr. Bilal Afridi extended his New Year wishes to everyone and praised their hard work and dedication.

Afterward, the audience enjoyed humorous and educational skits presented by the students. These skits were not only entertaining but also conveyed important messages about social issues and values.

Musical performances were also a key aspect of the evening. Renowned singers took to the stage to perform various songs, prompting the audience to applaud and celebrate.

The youth displayed their dance skills, energetically performing to the beat of the drums.

Dr. Bilal Afridi thanked all participants, faculty, and students who contributed to the successful organization of the program.

He commended their efforts and creativity and stated that such occasions promote a sense of community and teamwork.

He promised that similar gatherings would be organized in the future to provide students with more opportunities to showcase their talents and strengthen relationships with their colleagues.

Director IPS has made a promising commitment to provide students with all possible modern facilities in

the new year. This initiative aims to create an ideal learning environment, equipped with the latest technology and infrastructure, to support students' academic growth and success.

Furthermore, the director has emphasized the importance of expanding scholarship programs, ensuring that every student has access to quality education, regardless of their financial background. This move is expected to promote inclusivity, diversity, and equal opportunities for all students to excel academically and achieve their goals.



RTI a key for good governance and transparency

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Right to Information (RTI) plays a significant role in the protection of child rights including the prevention of child marriages.

As it empowers communities by giving them access to information regarding the legal framework against child marriages, and available support services. By using RTI citizens can file requests to public entities about their programs and initiatives, number of cases reported, action taken, and the outcomes of those actions.

This was stated by Syed Saadat Jahan, Deputy Director Communication, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) while presenting his views in the Provincial Stakeholders' Seminar on KP Child Marriages Restraint Bill, Kalash Marriage Bill, and 2% Admission in Higher Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, arranged by a non-governmental organization Blue Veins in collaboration with National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) at Peshawar on Tuesday.

Chairman, Council of Islamic Ideology, Director Local Government, KP, Chief Khateeb KP, and representatives of Police Department, Child Protection Commission, KPRTPS Commission, Academia, members of civil society, and journalists participated in the said seminar.

The participants, specially Rizwan Ullah Shah, Coordinator, National Commission for Human Rights also lauded the efforts of KPIC in implementation of 2% Minorities Quota in all the public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Peshawar declared smoke-free in landmark ceremony

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A landmark ceremony held in Peshawar marked the official declaration of the city as a Smoke-Free District. Organized by the District Administration of Peshawar, in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tobacco Control Cell of the Health Department and civil society organization Blue Veins, this initiative is a significant milestone in the journey toward improved public health and tobacco control in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including government departments, academia, police, the Directorate General of Health, the Health Sector Reform Unit, the Right to Information Services Commission, the Commission, the Transport Department, the Education Department, trade, hotel, and transport associations, bar associations, youth groups, and civil society organizations. Their collective commitment reflected the critical importance of multi-sectoral collaboration in achieving a smoke-free environment in Peshawar.

The District Administration, under the leadership of Rao Hashim, Additional Deputy Commissioner General and accompanied by the other Assistant Commissioners, emphasized the transformative potential of this initiative. In his remarks, Rao Hashim said, "Tobacco smoke-free environments are crucial for protecting the health of non-smokers, reducing tobacco consumption, and creating a culture of compliance with public health laws."

Uran Pakistan to open gates of industrialization, economic growth

PESHAWAR (APP): Uran Pakistan, a landmark five-year national economic reform plan, has received widespread praise in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as experts and policymakers herald its potential to catalyze foreign investment and accelerate economic development across the country.

The comprehensive program, which focuses on revitalizing key sectors including exports, e-commerce (E Pakistan), environmental sustainability and climate change, energy, and infrastructure, is poised to drive substantial economic growth and promote industrialization in Pakistan.

Experts are optimistic that it will significantly enhance the country's global competitiveness and create vast opportunities for employment of youth.

The Uran Pakistan aims to generate thousands of job opportunities, particularly for the youth, by revamping various sectors critical to the national economy. These initiatives are expected to stimulate domestic and foreign investments, create sustainable employment, and empower youth with the skills and resources needed to thrive in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

One of the key components of the Uran Pakistan initiative is boosting exports, a critical area for the country's economic stability and

growth. By focusing on enhancing global trade relations and scaling up export-driven industries, the plan seeks to improve Pakistan's balance of trade and reduce the dependency on imports.

In addition, Uran Pakistan places a heavy emphasis on E Pakistan, fostering the digital transformation of the economy. With a focus on expanding e-commerce platforms, improving digital infrastructure, and providing digital education, the program aims to position Pakistan as a major player in the global digital economy.

As climate change continues to pose a significant challenge to Pakistan, Uran Pakistan prioritizes environmental sustainability and climate action. The plan outlines comprehensive strategies to address environmental degradation, enhance renewable energy production, and promote green technologies—efforts that are crucial not only for the country's ecological future but also for attracting international funding in sustainable development projects.

Prioritized energy and infrastructure development, the plan recognizes the critical role that reliable power supply and modern infrastructure play in fostering industrial growth. Efforts will focus on enhancing energy efficiency, expanding the energy grid, and investing in infrastructure that supports industrial and commercial expansion.

Equity and empowerment lie at the heart of the Uran Pakistan initiative, which aims to ensure that economic benefits are distributed equitably across all segments of society. Through policies designed to support marginalized communities, women's empowerment, and inclusive economic growth, the plan seeks to create a more balanced and just society where all citizens can contribute to and benefit from the nation's economic success.

Zilakat Malik, former Chairman Economics Department at University of Pakistan has welcomed the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's Uran Pakistan and termed a leap step forward to achieve the height of economic growth.

Uran Pakistan is a transformative initiative designed to spotlight and advance crucial projects and reforms set forth in the 5Es National Economic Transformation Plan. The strategy aims to rejuvenate Pakistan's economy, promote sustainable development, and drive inclusive growth.

He claimed that rural areas of KP were suffered from poor infrastructure, limiting both quality of life and economic opportunity and hopefully it's people would be largely benefited of it.

Dr Malik said Pakistan achieved great successes

especially on economic front during PMLN Govt tenure and Uran Pakistan has laid a the foundation of economically strong Pakistan.

Despite generation of about 55% of the country's GDP and contribution of 95% of federal tax revenues, with Karachi alone generating 12-15% of GDP and 55% of federal taxes, our cities youth were confronted to problem of unemployment and illiteracy which negative impacted the country's economic growth rate.

He said the poor infrastructure and an inadequate socioeconomic services in rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have widened urban-rural development gaps, thus putting extraordinary pressure on its cities owing to increased people's migration for employment and better services.

He said the rising urban-rural divide remains one of the most pressing challenges to the socio-economic stability and prosperity of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This divide perpetuates inequality, undermines merit, and stifles national progress, particularly in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where majority of the population struggles for basic necessities of life.

Dr Malik said the socioeconomic imbalances between urban and rural areas in KP, compounded by rampage of corruption and

nepotism, created a cycle of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment.

As a result, most people in rural areas of the province face difficulties accessing quality education, healthcare, housing, clean drinking water and sustainable livelihoods. This inequality not only hampers economic growth but also places extraordinary pressure on urban infrastructure, leading to overcrowded of schools, hospitals, basic health units and roads besides poor drinking water in KP.

He said there was a need to invest in rural infrastructure especially roads, schools, healthcare and clean water to improve living standards of people and stimulate economic growth in remote areas including merged tribal districts.

Since majority of our population reside in rural areas, the governments should focus on modernizing agriculture by introducing latest techniques, access to credit and improve market linkages, Prof. Malik said.

Such initiatives help Uran Pakistan may like create jobs, reduce dependence on subsistence farming and improve productivity.

Manzoorul Haq former ambassador also welcomed Uran Pakistan and termed a leap step forward to achieve economic growth and bolster the country's exports.

He said Uran Pakistan would not only enhance

export sector to drive economic growth, increase foreign exchange earnings, and boost the country's trade position but help accelerate digital transformation.

He said that implementation of sustainable practices will help address climate change challenges, protect natural resources, and ensure water and food security for long-term ecological balance. Manzoor said development affordable, efficient, and green energy solutions to support industrial growth, reduce energy costs, and ensure energy security besides promoting social justice and equitable distribution of resources.

He said the gap between rural and urban communities has fostered a fragmented society, where rural populations feel alienated from the centers of political and economic power, resulting widening of rural-urban divide.

He highlighted that just 1% of Pakistan's population controls a disproportionate share of the national wealth, including prime assets like farmland and real estate while many struggle for basic needs such as affordable housing and clean drinking water.

This concentration of wealth in urban centers has exacerbated poverty and unemployment in rural areas, with the nation's population surging to an all-time high of 241 million earlier

this year with over two percent annual growth rate.

He said the rapid population growth with over 2 percent growth rate has placed immense pressure on housing, infrastructure, and public services in major cities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where an estimated 2.5 million housing units are required to accommodate the homeless.

The migration from rural to urban areas has further strained urban systems, while rural communities continued to be overlooked in terms of investment and policy attention.

The experts said that urbanization does not automatically lead to economic growth; rather unplanned urbanization, without proper development strategies, has led to slums, environmental degradation, and deepened inequality that create challenge of urban-rural divide for the communities.

They argued that the KP government must invest in rural infrastructure especially in roads, schools, healthcare, and clean water to raise living standards of its people and stimulate economic growth in remote areas especially in merged tribal districts for achieving desired goals. Misal Khan, a retired Information officer also welcomed Uran Pakistan initiative of the Federal Government that would benefit people of all provinces of Pakistan.

He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was relative situated in a disadvantage location due to sea port and hopefully its mineral and mines besides hydropower potential would be unlocked under Uran Pakistan.

He said that Pakistan was badly affected by climate change as evident of 2022 floods that washed away expansive hotels in Swat besides colossal livestock and agriculture losses in all provinces.

He said that Uran Pakistan was a key program with a great potential to reinvigorate the national economy besides open gates of employment, increasing of exports and promote industrialization in all provinces of Pakistan.

With its ambitious scope and comprehensive approach, Uran Pakistan is seen as a potential game-changer for the country's economic landscape. By aligning its focus on crucial sectors and embracing innovation, the plan not only aims to stimulate foreign investment but also create a conducive environment for sustainable economic development.

The experts said that all eyes are now on the execution phase, with the hope that Uran Pakistan will open new avenues for economic prosperity and place Pakistan firmly on the path to long-term growth and stability.



In brief

Sewing machines distributed F.P. Report

BUNER: Health and Care Welfare Foundation Pakistan (HC-WFP) registered Islamabad distributed sewing machines among deserving white-collar women under employment project here in Buner on Wednesday. In this connection a function was held at Civil Defense Office Buner. The objective was to empower white collar deserving women so that they can get livelihood with dignity at home and live prosperously in the society. ADC Relief & Human Rights Syed Akram Shah was the chief guest in this program. On this occasion, Civil Defense Chief Warden Taj Muhammad Khan, Deputy Chief Warden Muambar Khan Muhammad Siraj Khan Dr. Gohar Rehman and other civil defense officers also participated. Health and Care Welfare Foundation Administration Chief Organizer Alhaj Muhammad Ashraf Minhas Sahib Khawaja Muhammad Aftab Sahib Advocate President UK Secretary Finance Syed Shahzad Ali Advocate Tahir Naem Sindhu Advocate Rana Muhammad Amin (Head Office Incharge) Chaudhry Muhammad Yunus Secretary Information and with the special support of other members this program has been completed.

DC kicks off agri census F.P. Report

MARDAN: Deputy Commissioner Mardan officially inaugurated the 7th Agriculture Census in a ceremony held at the Deputy Commissioner's office here on Wednesday. District Census Coordinator Ibn Amin was also present on this occasion. During the inauguration ceremony, the enumerators were given digital tablets in which software related to agriculture enumeration is installed. On this occasion, the importance of agriculture census was highlighted which will provide basic information for the development of agriculture sector. Through this process, data on agricultural production, resources, and challenges will be collected, which will support policy making and decisions. Deputy Commissioner Mardan Dr. Azmatullah Wazir termed this initiative as an important step for the development of agriculture. Deputy Commissioner on this occasion directed all concerned departments and staff to provide full cooperation to make the process of agriculture census transparent and effective. These results will be very useful not only for the local farmers but also for the overall development of the agriculture sector, he concluded.

P&D holds meeting F.P. Report

BANNU: Secretary Planning and Development Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa held a meeting to discuss the reconstruction of the historic Government High School No. 2 (Islamia) in Bannu District. This school, nearing 100 years of heritage, holds a unique place in the history and educational development of the region. Efforts to preserve this institution's legacy were championed by the Chairman of e-Hujra Bannu Gul, Mr. Asif Qureshi. Despite facing resistance in the past, Mr. Qureshi and his dedicated team persisted, advocating for the school's reconstruction while retaining its historic value. Their tireless efforts have now borne fruit, with plans for reconstruction moving forward.

RPO seeks media cooperation for controlling crime

F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Regional Police Officer (RPO) Syed Ashfaq Anwar on Wednesday urged upon the media to play their role for eradication of all crimes including terrorism from the area. While talking to local journalists here at his office, he said the range police would perform diligently with the cooperation of media for eradication of crimes from the area. He emphasized that all available resources and capabilities would be utilized to defeat terrorists and give a strong response to anti-state forces, thereby improving law and order in the area. He said the Dera police as well as the people of this area rendered matchless sacrifices in war against terror. As many as

121 terrorist incidents took place in the area during last year of 2024, he mentioned.

The RPO said the welfare of the police was also among his priorities. The media, he said, has an important role in building public confidence as well as for establishment of peace and order in the area. He said the positive and constructive criticism of media would be welcomed as it would help in ensuring better policing. However, he was of the view that fake news should be avoided which causes chaos among the people.

Replying to a question about increasing traffic issues in Dera Ismail Khan, he said a comprehensive traffic plan would be formed with the consultation of trade unions and media persons. He men-

tioned that the lack of parking in the city was one of the major reasons behind routine traffic mess. The RPO informed that he also held a meeting with traffic police, adding, as many as 20 more personnel and five motorbikes had been given to traffic police on their demand to ensure smooth flow of traffic. Moreover, he said the traffic police also demanded two more vehicles lifters which would be provided to them soon.

Replying to another question about smuggling in the area, he clearly said "no syndicate racket would be allowed in the police." However, he added that the police would extend all possible cooperation with other departments including customs to control crimes including smugglings.

Suitable areas finalizes for spring tree plantation drive

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah has said that under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", effective planning has been finalized for the upcoming Spring Tree Plantation Drive adding that suitable areas for which have already been selected in various districts of the Kohat Division.

This he said while reviewing preparations for

the upcoming Spring Tree Plantation Drive at Kohat on Wednesday. He was told that the process of collecting thousands of kilograms of seeds from local wild plants is in the final stages. It is hoped that this process will grow millions of saplings at a very low cost in the entire Kohat Division alone.

Commissioner Kohat maintained, in this regard, directions have been issued to the Deputy Commissioners of all the districts of the Division and authorities concerned of the

respective departments and institutions. He added that the Dermalak area of Tehsil Lachi has also been selected for the plantation campaign in which broadcasting of thousands of kilograms of seeds through Helicopter is also underway.

Appreciating the efforts of the Forestry Department, Motasim Billah Shah said that maximum plantation is need of the hour, however, he directed to pay attention on fruit plants also side by side the plantation of common plants.

Larkana police releases annual performance report

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Deputy Inspector General Larkana has released the police performance report for the year 2024 in all five districts of Range Police Larkana, Jacobabad, Shikarpur, Qambar Shahdadkot and Kashmore at Kandakot, according to which 1054 police encounters took place in the range in which 65 robbers were killed, including 04 prize-winning robbers, while 223 robbers were arrested in an injured condition.

The report released

states that 195 gang busters, 941 criminals, 8538 suspects and 9602 absconders were arrested, while the arrested suspects were armed with one LMG 01, 01 hand grenade, 46 pistols/revolvers, 957, 146 shotguns, 35 rifles, 18930 ammunition were recovered, while the range police conducted successful operations in different districts and recovered a huge amount of drugs, including 1354 kilograms of hashish, 1 kg 35 grams of opium, 7 kg 500 grams of ice, 3 kg and 35 grams of heroin,

25000 kilograms of gutka and 440 kilograms of cannabis, while 2100 liters of alcohol were also recovered.

From the beginning of last year to the end, 225 hostages were rescued from the possession of robbers, while 725 people were saved from kidnapping with the help of modern technology. According to the police report, 147000 liters of illegal Iranian oil were also recovered, while 17 police officers and youths murdered during performed their duties by sacrificing themselves.

Rescue 1122 issues annual performance report

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: District Emergency Officer has stated that in 2024, Rescue 1122 responded to 3,278 emergencies and performed their duties efficiently.

Engineer Malik Sher Dil Khan expressed these views

while talking to journalists at the Rescue 1122 headquarters in Alpuri on Wednesday. He clarified that Rescue 1122 personnel are always alert and respond promptly to emergencies throughout Shangla.

Regarding fake calls, he appealed to the public to

avoid making such calls, stating that they are highly irresponsible. In 2024, Rescue 1122 personnel responded to 3,278 emergency calls in Shangla, taking prompt action and providing timely assistance, which has been appreciated by the public.

KP's snow sports: A unique opportunity for cross-cultural exchanges

SWAT (APP): As the new year celebrations unfolds, an influx of tourists from Pakistan's plains has made its way to the northern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), drawn by the region's snow sports, trout fish and winter adventure opportunities. The breathtaking snowfall and the exhilarating activities of skiing and snowboarding in Upper Swat have become a significant draw, with thousands of visitors flocking to the picturesque valley.

The annual snow sports extravaganza become a great source of attraction for domestic and foreign tourists being held regularly at Abbottabad, Mansehra, Swat, Dir and Chitral in January-February every year, making positive impact on economy of rural areas and enhance the country's image of being tourists friendly destination in world.

These winter sports create an environment of camaraderie, bringing together people from various cultures, religions, and regions of Pakistan to enjoy the thrill of the mountains slopes at Malam Jabba, Bahrain, Osho valley and Kalam in Upper Swat. "The new year tourism surge is not just an economic boon but also a platform for intercultural interaction and bolstering of rural economy," said Professor Dr. Naveed Farooq of the Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan while talking to APP.

Arrived with his family for

new year celebrations, he said the striking snowfall feature, skiing and trout fish made Swat an ideal winter tourists destination of snow sports in Pakistan. As families, adventure enthusiasts, and groups of friends come together in the spirit of fun and recreation, the winter season in KP becomes a celebration of unity in diversity and strengthening of cultural bonds.

The visitors, whether from the bustling cities or more remote areas of Punjab, Sindh, KP, Balochistan, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, share stories, experiences, and smiles, breaking down barriers and building lasting connections. The tourism boost is also a shot in the arm for the rural economy, as local businesses, from ski instructors to hoteliers, experience increased demand for their services.

Vendors, shopkeepers, and hospitality workers in the region are seeing a rise in revenue, making this seasonal influx of tourists vital for the livelihoods of many. "The revenue of hotels increased due to new year celebrations in Swat," said Kamran Ali Yousafzai, a manager of Swat Paradise hotel at Kalam. "The response of snowfall lovers arrived from across Pakistan are overwhelming these days and our rent charges are minimum compare to four stars hotels here at Kalam," he told APP.

"With snow-capped mountains, crisp air, and a festive

atmosphere, KP's snow sports scene is more than just a recreational activity; it's a symbol of the diverse cultures and shared experiences that make Pakistan a rich and vibrant tapestry," he said. He hoped of an increase of tourists for the annual snow sports event at Parwak village in Upper Chitral where thrilling 'ice hockey' matches are played among different teams amid great fun and laughter.

The players of Fox and Snow Leopard teams besides girls players last year had received warm applause from the spectators, skiers, skaters, snowboarders and adventure enthusiasts. Kaghlasht snow festival is also planned that attracted a large number of tourists at Upper Dir last year where thousands of skiers, skaters, snowboarders, hikers, adventurers, mountaineers, athletes, musicians and foodies entertained visitors amid great funfair and cultural events.

Free mountain bike, bicycle race, archery and rock climbing add colours to the Upper Chitral festival. KP's snow-clad mountainous valleys including Kalam, Madain, Gabor Jabba, Malam Jabba and Mahudhand in Swat, Nathiagali, Ayubia, Khanuspor in Abbottabad, Naran and Kaghan in Mansehra, Kumrat in Upper Dir and Chitral Lower have drawn an influx of tourists, hikers and skiing lovers in the wake of new year enjoying different snow games including skiing, skating, throwball, snow



ABBOTTABAD: Director Higher Education, Hazara Division, Azhar Latif Awan visiting various projects at Government Postgraduate College.

Iranian CG calls on Balochistan Speaker F.P. Report

QUETTA: Iranian Consul General Mr. Hassan Darvishvand paid a farewell call on Speaker of Balochistan Assembly Capt. (R) Abdul Khaliq Khan Achakzai in his chamber on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the Speaker paid tribute to his services as Consul General in Quetta and thanked him for the assistance provided during his tenure. The Speaker said on the occasion that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a close neighbor and long-standing friend of Pakistan, with which relations are exemplary and brotherly. He reiterated that the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Iran would always remain strong and durable.

He said that Balochistan would make every effort to promote economic and trade relations with Iran. He also stressed the need for measures to further strengthen people-to-people contacts and cultural ties between the two countries. Hassan Darvishvand expressed satisfaction over the traditional friendly relations between Pakistan and Iran and hoped that these relations would deepen further in the future.

He thanked the Speaker while expressing his best wishes for the people of Balochistan and also appreciated the hospitality extended by the people and government during his stay in Balochistan. He said that the people and government of Balochistan have always shown cooperation with Iran, which has further strengthened the friendly relations between the two countries. In the meeting, both leaders stressed the importance of promoting mutual cooperation between Iran and Pakistan. In particular, detailed discussions were held on enhancing cross-border trade, cultural exchange, and cooperation in the energy sector between Balochistan and the Iranian province of Sistan and the province.

Pakistan commits for national prosperity

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Pakistan is in dire need of solidarity, unity and brotherhood at the beginning of the New Year 2025. These views were expressed by the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Human Rights, Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri in her congratulatory statement on the occasion of the beginning of the New Year 2025. She said that enemies are trying to sabotage peace situation in Pakistan unsuccessfully but the enemy will never be allowed to succeed in his evil intentions. She said that Pakistan is our homeland and Balochistan is our province, we all should forget our differences and work for the development and prosperity of Pakistan, especially Balochistan.

At this time, the country is in dire need of peace and order as well as economic and political stability, for this all institutions and

political parties has to forget their differences and sit together for the sake of the country.

Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri said that Pakistan forces and security agencies are working day and night for national security and our vision is equal development and prosperity throughout the country including Balochistan. We are working hard for prosperity and development of our people and this mission will continue to solve public problems. She further said that at the beginning of the New Year, the whole nation should take a pledge to forget their differences in the New Year and make a place for each other in their hearts and work for the security and prosperity of the country with an open heart.

Paying tribute to the Pakistan Army and other security forces, she said that the men of our security agencies have laid down

their lives and established peace and order throughout the country, including Balochistan, which enemies want to be sabotaged with the help of terrorist vested interests but our brave security forces have always crushed the evil intentions of the enemies and will not allow their nefarious purposes to be fulfilled in the future.

The New Year brings happiness, development and prosperity for Pakistan especially of Balochistan. 2025 will prove to be an important milestone and the law and order situation will improve throughout the country, including Balochistan. She said that, there are attractive opportunities for Pakistan which investors can take full advantage of it. She prayed that Allah may make 2025 a year of peace and prosperity for Pakistan and save us all from the tricks of enemies and sudden calamities.

DTO continues crackdown against tainted glasses

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: District Traffic Police Officer (DTO) Toba Tek Singh said that the traffic police issued 1,29,364 Challans and 8,94,69,900 Fines for violating traffic rules across the district.

He further said that we have taken action against over speed, over loading, pressure horn, one wayling, dangerous driving, traveling without driving license, smoke emitting vehicles, underage drivers, Black Glass, motorcycle riders without helmets and using

mobiles phone fines imposed driving.

Apart from this, an 222 FIR has been registered against those violating traffic rules. In the end, Ch. Kashif Munir Gill said that people should follow traffic police rules to avoid challans and fines.

Meanwhile, the district administration is constantly active to provide the best medical facilities to the citizens. On the instructions of Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh Muhammad Naem Sindhu, Additional Deputy Commissioner General

Zeeshan Labbha Masih visited primary health centers Chak No. 295 GB and 305 GB and checked the attendance of the staff.

He reviewed the record of medicines in the hospital and the cleanliness of the facility. He instructed the hospital administration that any kind of lapse in the facilities provided to the citizens will not be tolerated. He said that the Punjab government is taking all possible steps to provide facilities in the primary health centers. He expressed satisfaction over the facilities provided in the hospital.

One killed in in police encounter

F.P. Report

LODHRAN: An accused, booked in several cases, was reportedly killed by firing of his own accomplice during encounter near 'basti Line Wahin'. Police said here on

Wednesday that three accused opened fire on police van.

The team retaliated and during the cross fire, accused Shehbaz shot dead by the firing of his own accomplice. The team recovered rifle and number of bullets from the

crime spot. Police said that the deceased accused was booked in nine cases relating to multiple crimes as well as he had escaped the district hospital on December 11, 2024 after snatching rifle from constable on duty.

walking tracks to promote snow sports in Swat.

To maintain natural beauty and avoid pollution at tourist spots in Swat, camping pods would be established at new tourists' destinations besides Kalash culture events in Chitral. To link new tourist destination with Swat Motorway, huge amount were being spent on development and construction of new roads.

Four integrated tourism zones (ITZs) would be established at Mankiyal Swat on 754 kanal land, Thandiani Abbottabad on 640 kanal, Ganol Manshera on 480 kanal and Madaklasht Lower Chitral on 540 kanal with assistance of World Bank under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Integrated Tourism Development Project (KITE) that on completion would make Pakistan especially KP an international centre for domestic and international tourists.

Sports theme park would be constructed on 400 kanal land at Hund in Swabi district for which MoU has already been signed. In Nathiagali Abbottabad, a three-day snow festival would be arranged by Galiyat Development Authority (GDA) where thousands of snow sportsmen and tourists would participate during this winter.

The mesmerising natural beauty of Ayubia, Donga Gali, Khanaspur, Mushkपुरi snow clad top where adventure sports lovers would take a free chairlift

ride at Ayubia in Abbottabad. Mountaineering, hiking, sculpture paintings, tug of war, paintball competitions, archery, snow-tubing, music, bike race, snowball, skiing, skating, and snow football matches besides food stalls and cultural events would add colour to Nathiagali and Ayubia snow sports festivals.

He said that KP government has planned construction of three new ski resorts in Kaghan, Chitral and Swat while Battakundi-Lalazar chairlift project was under consideration. The waterfalls of Sajkot, Noori, Chajjian Hariapur, Jarogo Swat, Lanchar Dir, Umbrella Abbottabad would be developed.

New camping pods at Larum Top and Shahin Bin Shahi Lower Dir, Kumrat Dir Upper, Broghal and Sorlasapur at Chitral Upper, Shangla, Samana Hariapur, Sulatharn Swat and Kalam would be setup to promote winter sports in Pakistan. As the season progresses, the northern KP promises even more opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges, fun-filled adventure, and economic growth. In a world where cultural divides often take center stage, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's winter attractions serve as a reminder that sometimes, all it takes to unite people is a shared love for adventure, the great outdoors, and the spirit of togetherness.



Germany, France and Poland condemn violence in Georgia

BERLIN (AP): The foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland expressed concern about "the political crisis" in Georgia, two days after former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili was formally inaugurated as president of the South Caucasus nation, cementing the ruling party's grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's European Union aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

"We strongly condemn last week's violence against peaceful protesters, media and opposition leaders and recall Georgian authorities' responsibility to respect human rights and protect fundamental freedoms, including the freedom to assembly and media freedom," the three ministers wrote in a joint statement.

In reaction to the Russia-friendly course of the ruling Georgian Dream party, the three countries said they would "implement the EU decision on ending visa-free travel for Georgian diplomatic and service passport holders and consider additional measures on EU and national level."

They also stressed that "the political course of repression and democratic

backsliding by the Georgian Dream has in reaction led to a downgrading of our relationship at European and national level and a reduction of our assistance to and cooperation with Georgia's authorities."

The Georgian Dream party retained control of Parliament in the South Caucasus nation in the Oct. 26 election that the opposition alleges was rigged with Moscow's help. The party has vowed to continue pushing toward accession to the European Union but also wants to "reset" ties with Russia. Georgia's outgoing president and main pro-Western parties have boycotted the post-election parliamentary sessions and demanded a rerun of the ballot.

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

rights. Georgian Dream's decision last month to suspend talks on their country's bid to join the EU added to the opposition's outrage and galvanized protests.

"We reiterate our determination to support the democratic and European aspirations of the Georgian people," Germany, France and Poland stressed in their joint statement. Thousands of demonstrators have converged on the parliament building for weeks every night after the government announced the suspension of EU accession talks on Nov. 28. Riot police used water cannons and tear gas almost daily to disperse and beat scores of protesters, some of whom threw fire-works at police officers and built barricades on the capital's central boulevard. Hundreds were detained and over 100 were treated for injuries.

Several journalists, who were beaten by police, accused authorities of using thugs to deter people from attending anti-government rallies, a charge the Georgian Dream party denies. The crackdown has drawn strong condemnation from the United States and EU officials.

Xi says no one can stop China's 'reunification' with Taiwan

BEIJING (Reuters): No one can stop China's "reunification" with Taiwan, Chinese President Xi Jinping said in his New Year's speech, laying down a clear warning to what Beijing regards as pro-independence forces within and outside of the island of 23 million people.

In the past year, Beijing has stepped up military pressure near Taiwan, sending warships and planes almost daily into the waters and air space around the island in what Taiwanese officials view as a creeping effort to "normalise" China's military presence. China regards democratically-governed Taiwan as its own territory. But Taiwan's government rejects Beijing's claims and says only its people can decide their future and Beijing ought to respect the choice of the Taiwanese people.

"The people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family. No one can sever our family bonds, and no one can stop the historical trend of national reunification," Xi said in a speech televised on China's state broadcaster CCTV. In his New Year's speech last year, Xi said China's "reunification" with Taiwan is inevitable, and that people on both sides "should be bound by a common sense of purpose and share in the glory of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." Tensions have remained high throughout the year in the sensitive Taiwan Strait, especially after Lai Ching-te, deemed a "separatist" by Beijing, became the island's latest president in May.

Earlier this month, China staged a large massing of naval forces around Taiwan and in the East and South China Seas after Lai stopped over in Hawaii and the US territory of Guam on a Pacific trip criticised by Beijing. China, which never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control, conducted two rounds of war games around the island this year, saying they were warnings against "separatist acts" and vowed to take further actions if needed. US arms sales to Taiwan, allowed by the Taiwan Relations Act, have also continued to strain Beijing's ties with Washington. China has regularly warned the US against any military ties with Taiwan, and slapped sanctions on military suppliers and their executives.

Thousands turn New Year celebration into anti-govt protest in Serbia

BELGRADE (AP): Instead of the traditional boisterous street partying on New Year's Eve, tens of thousands of protesters led by university students gathered overnight in Belgrade and other Serbian cities to demand political reforms and justice in the Balkan country.

The protesters have been actively demonstrating following the tragic collapse of a concrete canopy in the northern city of Novi Sad's central train station on Nov. 1, which resulted in 15 fatalities. The tragedy has been attributed to corruption and sub-standard construction practices by the populist Serbian leadership, leading to a widespread public outcry and demands for accountability.

Students from various Belgrade universities have organized the protest under the slogan "There is No New Year - You Still Owe Us for the Old One." The loud crowd, chanting "We Want Justice," went silent at 11:52 p.m. with 15 minutes to honor the victims of the Novi Sad tragedy. Many were holding banners with a red handprint, which has become a symbol of the antigovernment protests, telling the authorities that they have blood on their hands.

Earlier, they marched past a state-sponsored concert where the crowd danced to folk music tunes. Police guarded the area where the concert was taking place and set up metal fences while directing the protesting crowd to other streets nearby to avoid contact between the two groups. The antigovernment protesters emphasized that, despite the festive season, their commitment to seeking justice remains unwavering. The student-led movement has garnered support from



various societal groups, including professors, farmers and actors, reflecting broader discontent with autocratic President Aleksandar Vucic's leadership.

Thousands of people also gathered in Novi Sad and the southern city of Nis for parallel gatherings also led by university students in those cities. In Belgrade, state-sponsored concerts and other New Year celebrations were organized in the city center and in a newly built high-rise Belgrade Waterfront neighborhood, which Vucic has claimed is his own project together with the United Arab Emirates investors. Belgrade has become a favorite partying destination for tourist on the New Year's Eve celebrations with street partying and huge fireworks.

The crowds in Belgrade braved very cold weather and fog to join the students. The New Year's Eve protest comes just over a week after tens of

thousands rallied together with the students in what was one of the biggest gatherings in recent years in the Serbian capital. Serbia's public prosecutor indicted 13 people, including a former minister, over the collapse of the concrete canopy.

The protesters say that is not enough as the indictment does not include charges of possible corrupt deals during a renovation of the the Novi Sad train station that was part of a wider deal with Chinese companies. Vucic earlier told pro-government Prva TV that all student demands have been fulfilled. "I have always been ready to talk, I am asking them now but they won't talk to me, they have no arguments, the prosecutors fulfilled the last of their demands, all documents they wanted have been published and nothing happened," Vucic said, adding he won't be toppled by street protests.

Putin tells Russians 'everything will be fine'

MOSCOW (Reuters): President Vladimir Putin told Russians in a New Year address that the country would move forward with confidence in 2025, though he offered no specific promises on the economy or the war in Ukraine.

At a time when many ordinary people are worried about rising prices and the central bank's 21% interest rate is squeezing businesses and homebuyers, Putin reassured Russians that their wellbeing was his top priority. He framed Russia's challenges as part of a wider historic mission, evoking past victories including its role in the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War Two.

Russia, he said, had overcome trials, achieved major goals and strengthened its unity in the first quarter of the 21st century - a period coinciding exactly with his time as its paramount leader. "And now, on the threshold of the new year, we are thinking about the future. We are confident that everything will be fine, we will only move forward. We know for sure that the absolute value for us was, is and will be the fate of Russia, the well-being of its citizens," he said. His three-and-a-half-minute seasonal message from the Kremlin was being broadcast at mid-

night in each of Russia's 11 time zones, starting with Kamchatka and Chukotka in the far east.

He was speaking exactly 25 years since he first addressed the nation as its acting president after Boris Yeltsin resigned unexpectedly on the last day of 1999. Putin, 72, paid tribute to Russian soldiers fighting in the war in Ukraine, describing them as heroes. "We are proud of your courage and bravery. We believe in you," he said. He made no specific reference to the situation on the battlefield or the prospects for an end to the conflict after Donald Trump returns as US president on Jan. 20. Trump has said he will swiftly stop the war, without providing details. Russian forces in 2024 advanced in Ukraine at the fastest rate since 2022, the war's first year, and control about a fifth of the country. But the gains have come at the cost of heavy, though undisclosed, losses in men and equipment.

In 2024, Russia was invaded for the first time since World War Two as Ukraine grabbed a slice of its western Kursk region in a surprise counter-attack on Aug. 6. Russia has yet to eject Ukrainian forces from Kursk despite bringing in more than 10,000 troops from its ally North Korea,

according to Ukrainian, South Korean and US assessments. Russia has neither confirmed nor denied their presence. "To sustain even the very slow advance in Ukraine, Russia has been forced to ignore the months-long occupation of part of its own territory by Ukrainian forces," British security expert Ruth Deyermond said. "Taking a 'nothing to see here' attitude to the loss of its own land is not what great powers do, particularly one so preoccupied with the idea of state sovereignty."

Deyermond, in a long thread posted on X, suggested Putin's efforts to portray Russia as a leading world power were also undermined by the toppling of its chief Middle East ally, former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and its increasing dependence on China. Putin, the longest-serving ruler of Russia since Josef Stalin, said on Dec. 19 that under his leadership the country had moved back from "the edge of the abyss" and rebuffed threats to its sovereignty. With hindsight, he said, he should not have waited until February 2022 before launching his "special military operation" in Ukraine, the term he still uses for the full-scale invasion of Russia's neighbour.

Ecuador AG confirms bodies are missing boys

GUAYAQUIL, Ecuador (Reuters): Four bodies discovered last week are a group of boys reported missing at the start of the month. Ecuador's attorney general's office said, as a judge ordered detention for 16 military personnel while their alleged role in the disappearance is investigated.

The boys, aged between 11 and 15, went missing on Dec. 8 from the Las Malvinas neighborhood in the coastal city of Guayaquil. Their families have said they went out to play soccer. The case has sparked outrage throughout Ecuador, with protesters in capital Quito and elsewhere demanding answers about what happened to the children.

President Daniel Noboa's government has deployed members of the military to patrol streets and assist law enforcement efforts amid a crackdown on crime, which has battered the country over the last several years. Commanders of Ecuador's armed forces said last week the children were detained while allegedly committing a robbery and subsequently taken to a military base before being released. Genetic testing confirmed the identity of the four bodies, found on Dec. 24 in the town of Taura, the attorney general's office said on social media.

The confirmation came just after a judge in Guayaquil ordered 16 members of the air force be detained while prosecutors investigate their alleged participation. The lawyer for the military personnel said he will appeal the ruling.

Palestinians released from Israeli jails bear mental, physical scars

CAIRO/JERUSALEM/RAMALLAH (Reuters): Once muscular and strong, Palestinian bodybuilder Moazaz Obaiyat's nine-month spell in Israeli custody left him unable to walk unaided upon his release in July. Then, in an October pre-dawn raid on his home, soldiers detained him again.

Before being re-arrested, the 37-year-old father of five was diagnosed with severe PTSD by Bethlehem Psychiatric Hospital, related to his time at Israel's remote Kitz'iot prison, according to medical notes seen by Reuters from the hospital, a public clinic in the occupied West Bank. The notes said Obaiyat was subjected to "physical and psychological violence and torture" in prison and described symptoms including severe anxiety, withdrawal from his family and avoidance of discussion of traumatic events and current affairs.

Alleged abuses and psychological harm to Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons and camps are in renewed focus amid stepped-up efforts in December by international mediators to secure a ceasefire that could see the release of thousands of inmates detained during the Gaza war and before, in return for Israeli hostages held by the Palestinian group Hamas in Gaza. In the event of the release of

detainees in any future deal, many "will require long-term medical care to recover from the physical and psychological abuse they have endured," said Qadoura Fares, head of the Palestinian Commission for Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, a government body in the West Bank. Fares said he was aware of Obaiyat's case.

For this story, Reuters spoke to four Palestinian men detained by Israel since the war's outbreak after the Hamas attacks of Oct. 7, 2023. All were held for months, accused of affiliating with an illegal organisation, and released without being formally charged or convicted of any crime. All described lasting psychological scars they attributed to abuses including beatings, sleep and food deprivation and prolonged restraint in stress positions during their time inside. Reuters could not independently verify the conditions in which they were held. Their accounts are consistent with multiple investigations by human rights groups that reported grave abuses of Palestinians in Israeli detention.

An investigation published by the United Nations human rights office in August described substantiated reports of widespread "torture, sexual assault and rape, amid atrocious inhu-

mane conditions" in prisons since the war began. The UN office has also said Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The White House has called the reports of torture, rape and abuse in Israel's prisons "deeply concerning." In response to Reuters questions, the Israeli military said it was investigating several cases of alleged abuse of Gaza detainees by military personnel but "categorically" rejected allegations of systematic abuse within its detention facilities.

The military declined to comment on individual cases. The Israel Prison Service (IPS), which falls under hard-right national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, and the country's internal security service said they were not in a position to comment on individual cases. "Terrorists in Israeli prisons are granted supervised living conditions and accommodations appropriate for criminals," Ben Gvir's office said in response to Reuters questions, adding that the facilities operate in accordance with the law. "The 'summer camp' is over," Ben Gvir's office said. Tal Steiner, executive director of the Israeli rights group Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), said the symptoms the men recount-

ed were common and can echo through victims' lifetimes, often shattering their families.

"Torture in Israeli prisons has exploded since October 7. It will have and already has had a devastating effect on Palestinian society," said Steiner. Speaking from his hospital bed in July, a severely emaciated Obaiyat called the treatment of himself and fellow prisoners "disgusting," showing scars on his wasted legs and describing isolation, hunger, handcuffs and abuse with metal rods, without giving details. Photos of Obaiyat taken before his incarceration show a powerfully-built man.

On Dec. 19, Israel's High Court ordered the state to answer a petition brought by rights groups about the lack of adequate food for Palestinian prisoners. Israel has also reported mistreatment of some of the 251 of its citizens taken captive to Gaza after the Hamas attacks. A report by the Israeli Health Ministry, published said hostages were subjected to torture, including sexual and psychological abuse. Hamas has repeatedly denied abuse of the hostages. Obaiyat is currently being held in a small detention centre in Etzion, south of Bethlehem, according to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, an advocacy group.

Driver runs down two NZ police officers, killing one

WELLINGTON (AP): A driver ran down two New Zealand police officers down as they patrolled on foot in the early hours of New Year's Day, killing one and seriously injuring the other, the country's police chief said.

The attack jolted a country where the killing of police officers on duty is rare. The vehicle drove into the officers "at speed" as they performed a routine patrol of a parking lot, before the driver turned and rammed a police car, Police Commissioner Richard Chambers told reporters in the South Island city of Nelson. A 32-year-old man was arrested and charged over the incident shortly after it happened at about 2 a.m. local time. One of the

officers, a woman, died in a local hospital hours later. The other was in serious condition but was expected to make a full recovery, Chambers said. A third officer who was in the rammed police car received a concussion and two members of the public were hurt, one of them after coming to help the injured officers.

Chambers condemned the "senseless act of an individual who appears to have been determined to cause harm," although he did not suggest a motive. "There was, at this stage, no indication that was what about to occur, occurred," Chambers said. New Zealand's Police Minister Mark Mitchell said the officers were "targeted in what I consider a very cowardly

attack." The attack happened in a downtown area of Nelson - population 55,000 - close to the street where the city's New Year's Eve celebrations had concluded two hours before.

The last killing of a police officer on duty in New Zealand was in 2020, when an officer was shot by a fleeing driver. 33 other officers have died through criminal acts while on duty since 1890, according to police records. The woman killed, Senior Sergeant Lyn Fleming, had been an officer for 38 years and was "well-known and hugely respected member of the Nelson community", Chambers said. She is survived by a spouse and children. The man charged is due to appear in court.

a misdemeanor charge of failing to perform her duty as an election officer and was sentenced to probation.

Crosby has pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy and interference with an election officer. His trial is scheduled for Jan. 30. Dennis Wilenchik, one of Crosby's lawyers, said his client will ask the state Supreme Court to review the matter.

Arizona didn't have immunity: Court

PHOENIX (AP): An appeals court has rejected an Arizona official's argument that felony charges against him for delaying certification of his rural county's 2022 election results should be dismissed because he has legislative immunity.

In an order, the Arizona Court of Appeals concluded Cochise County Supervisor Tom Crosby's duty to certi-

fy the election results wasn't discretionary. The court also said certifying election results is an administrative responsibility and that legislative immunity doesn't apply to Crosby's situation. Crosby and Cochise County Supervisor Peggy Judd, both Republicans, were criminally charged after they balked at certifying the results. Two months ago, Judd pleaded guilty to

a misdemeanor charge of failing to perform her duty as an election officer and was sentenced to probation.

Crosby has pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy and interference with an election officer. His trial is scheduled for Jan. 30. Dennis Wilenchik, one of Crosby's lawyers, said his client will ask the state Supreme Court to review the matter.

Outgoing North Carolina governor commutes 15 death row sentences

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP): In one of his final acts in office, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper commuted the death sentences of 15 men convicted of first-degree murder to life in prison without the possibility of parole, reducing the state's death row population by more than 10%.

Cooper, who was barred from seeking a third consecutive four-year term, will give way to fellow Democrat Josh Stein when Stein takes the oath of office. Cooper, who was previously the attorney general for 16 years, said his commutation decisions occurred following a thorough review of petitions offered by defendants and input from prosecutors and victims' families.

North Carolina had 136 offenders on death row. Cooper's office said it had received clemency petitions from 89 of them. Cooper's office said it considered a variety of factors, such as a defendant's conduct in prison, the adequacy of legal representation and sentences received by co-defendants.

"These reviews are among the most difficult decisions a Governor can

make and the death penalty is the most severe sentence that the state can impose," Cooper said in a news release. "After thorough review, reflection, and prayer, I concluded that the death sentence imposed on these 15 people should be commuted, while ensuring they will spend the rest of their lives in prison." North Carolina is one of 27 states that have the death penalty as a criminal punishment, according to the Death Penalty Information Center, although governors in five of those states currently have placed executions on hold. While North Carolina is not one of those five, an execution hasn't been carried out in the state since 2006.

The number of defendants sentenced to death in North Carolina has also dwindled in recent years, as prosecutors have more leeway in state law to decide whether to try a capital case. Even after action, North Carolina has the fifth-largest death row by population in the country, according to the North Carolina Coalition for Alternatives to the Death Penalty. Although some groups opposed to the death

penalty have sought from Cooper a complete commutation for all on death row, they still praised him for what they called a historic act of clemency. State Department of Adult Correction records list 13 of the 15 receiving clemency as Black. The convictions dates for the 15 range from 1993 to 2011.

Cooper "joins the ranks of a group of courageous leaders who used their executive authority to address the failed death penalty," Chantal Stevens, executive director of American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina, said in a separate release. "We have long known that the death penalty in North Carolina is racially biased, unjust, and immoral, and the Governor's actions today pave the way for our state to move towards a new era of justice." Cooper received national attention this year as he surfaced as a potential running mate for Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris.

Stein succeeded Cooper as attorney general in 2017. The Attorney General's Office participates in death penalty appeals. Among the

15 receiving commutations include Hasson Bacote, who was convicted of first-degree murder in 2009 in Johnston County. Bacote had been challenging his death sentence under the 2009 Racial Justice Act, which allowed prisoners to receive life without parole if they can show that racial bias was the reason for their death sentence. While the law was repealed in 2013, the state Supreme Court ruled later that most prisoners currently on death row could still use the law retroactively.

Bacote's recent hearing before a judge based on that law was considered a test case. Groups backing Bacote's litigation said they still anticipate a ruling in his case because of the widespread public interest in the matter. Another whose sentence was commuted is Guy LeGrande, who was once set to be executed in late 2006 before a judge halted it and later cited LeGrande's "severe mental illness." He was convicted in Stanly County of the 1993 killing of a woman whose estranged husband offered to pay him a portion of life insurance proceeds.

The Frontier Post

Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's

Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Why we can be more optimistic about 2025

ZAHA Hadid – the Iraqi-British architect whose designs left an indelible mark on a number of cities, including Abu Dhabi – knew a thing or two about looking to the future. Born in 1950, a time when the republics of the Arab world were teeming with new ideas, she told an interviewer in 2012 that when growing up in Iraq, “there was an unbroken belief in progress and a great sense of optimism”.

Today, as the Middle East and the wider world enter the 26th year of the new millennium, it would be understandable if many people did not share Hadid’s confidence. Our changing global climate, rising wealth inequality and collection of deadly armed conflicts are just some of the urgent challenges that paint a picture of a world in deep crisis.

However, there are several realistic reasons to be more optimistic about 2025, and thousands of people around the world have found them. A recent 33-country study carried out by pollster Ipsos found that despite a pervasive cost of living crisis, political polarisation and continuing wars, 71 per cent of respondents said they were optimistic that 2025 will be better than the year just gone. Although two thirds of respondents said 2024 was a bad year for their country, this was the lowest figure since 2019.

In the Middle East, such optimism is coupled with a brighter economic outlook. A report published on Monday by the Middle East Council on Global Affairs said that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were both projecting an increase in growth in most regional economies this year. In addition, the World Bank says growth in Gulf countries is expected to strengthen to 4.2 per cent this year, up from 1.9 per cent in 2024. And yesterday, The National reported that robust growth, economic diversification plans and strong investor demand for initial public offerings in the Gulf is set to continue driving new listings in 2025 and beyond. In societal terms, such economic optimism translates into investment and jobs, offering people more opportunities and security.

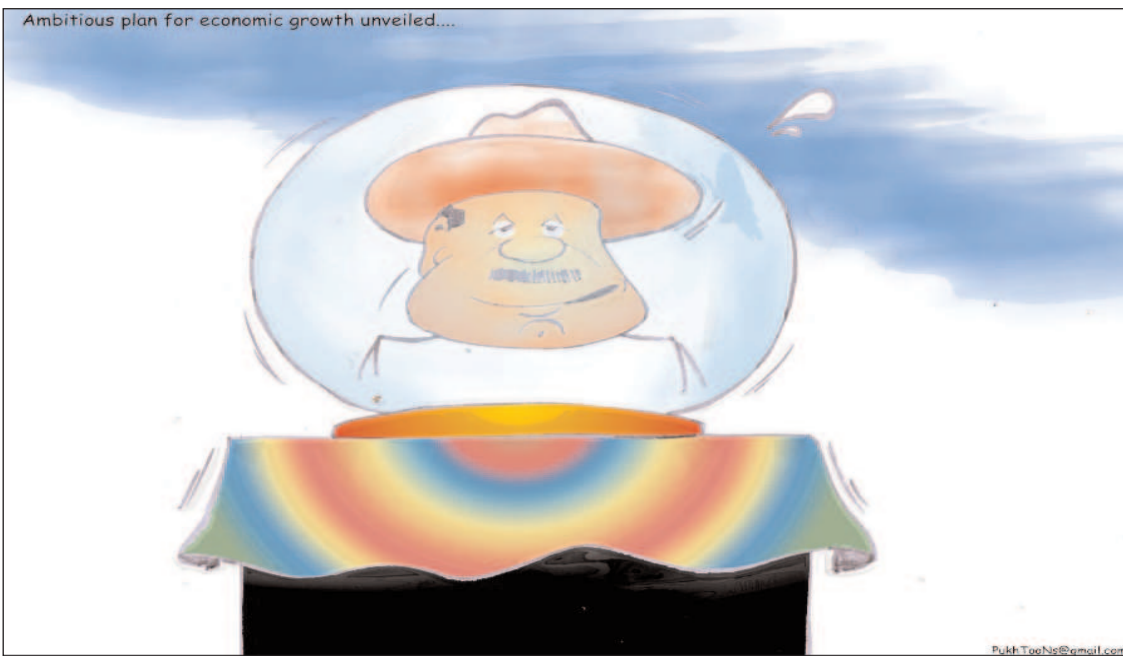
Other parts of the world are also looking to 2025 with some anticipation, with many parts of the Global South growing in confidence. The Ipsos survey found that more than 80 per cent of respondents in Indonesia and China – two important countries in an increasingly multi-polar world – were optimistic about this year. Several emerging economies are also more confident than western nations about the chance of ending ongoing wars. While there was a drop of 10 percentage points in the number of Australians who thought the war in Ukraine can be resolved this year, Malaysians revealed growing optimism that it could be. In addition, more than half – 55 per cent – of respondents in India were hopeful of a more peaceful Middle East.

Indeed, despite the collective failure to end the suffering seen in many wars, and the ongoing occupation and suffering of Palestine, many people retain a strong moral conscience about the need for such conflicts to end. Culturally, many artists remain undaunted by the challenge and work tirelessly to highlight injustice. A collection of 11 stories about Gaza created by female Palestinian filmmakers for the Connecther film competition in the US is just one example.

The “unbroken belief in progress” of which Hadid spoke will be sorely tested by the many challenges that lie ahead in the coming months. However, neither naivety nor fatalism are options. When it comes to building a better world in 2025, humanity has to be confident that it is still the master of its own fate.

Important Notice

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



The trusted mediator: Sardar Ayaz Sadiq's legacy in bridging political gaps

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

IN the complex political landscape of Pakistan, the role of the Speaker of the National Assembly is crucial in maintaining parliamentary decorum and ensuring a balance between opposing factions. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, a seasoned parliamentarian, has emerged as a pivotal figure in bridging the gaps between the opposition and ruling parties. His statesmanship, impartiality, and commitment to democratic values have earned him widespread respect across the political spectrum, making him a symbol of unity in turbulent times.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq's journey in politics is closely intertwined with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), where he has consistently upheld the party's principles while demonstrating a unique ability to engage constructively with political opponents. His tenure as Speaker during his first term was marked by several challenges, most notably when the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) submitted en masse resignations from the National Assembly. At that time, Pakistan was navigating a highly charged political environment.

Ayaz Sadiq handled the crisis with remarkable composure, employing a blend of constitutional wisdom and political tact. Instead of escalating the tensions, he facilitated dialogue and worked diligently to ensure that the sanctity of the Parliament was upheld. His approach high-

lighted his dedication to democratic processes and showcased his potential as a mediator.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq's ability to build trust across party lines has been a defining feature of his political career. Leaders from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), PTI, and other opposition parties have often expressed their confidence in his impartiality. His leadership style, characterized by inclusivity and respect for diverse viewpoints, has enabled him to foster a culture of collaboration even in the face of intense political rivalry.

This respect is not only a testament to his personal integrity but also an acknowledgment of his efforts to prioritize national interests over partisan agendas.

In his current tenure as Speaker, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq faces the formidable task of navigating a deeply polarized political landscape.

The growing rift between the government and the PTI threatens the stability of Pakistan's democratic institutions and poses significant challenges to the country's economic and social development. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, Ayaz Sadiq has taken on the role of a mediator, striving to bring both sides to the negotiating table. His reputation as a fair and credible interlocutor places him in a unique position to achieve a breakthrough in the impasse.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq's efforts to bridge the divide are not just about preserving parliamentary decorum; they are also about safeguarding the broader interests of Pakistan.

The country stands at a critical juncture, facing economic challenges, social unrest, and external pressures. In such times, political stability and collective action are imperative for progress. Sadiq's calls for dialogue and reconciliation aim to create an environment where all stakeholders can work together to address these pressing issues.

The respect Sardar Ayaz Sadiq commands across party lines is a rare and invaluable asset in Pakistani politics. His ability to engage with leaders from different ideological backgrounds, combined with his unwavering commitment to democratic principles, makes him a key figure in efforts to restore political harmony.

His efforts to bring the government and PTI together are not just about resolving a political deadlock; they are about fostering a culture of collaboration that can pave the way for sustainable development.

The potential for Sardar Ayaz Sadiq to succeed in this endeavor lies in his deep understanding of the political dynamics and his proven track record as a mediator. His leadership during the PTI resignations crisis demonstrated his capacity to handle complex situations with grace and efficacy.

Today, as Pakistan grap-

ples with economic challenges and the need for political unity, his role is more critical than ever. By bringing the government and PTI to the table, Ayaz Sadiq could help establish a framework for cooperation that prioritizes the nation's interests over individual ambitions.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq's efforts to promote dialogue reflect his belief in the power of consensus to drive progress. His vision for a united political front is not just about overcoming immediate challenges; it is about laying the groundwork for a democratic culture where differences are resolved through discussion rather than discord.

His emphasis on mutual respect and shared goals resonates with the aspirations of the Pakistani people, who yearn for stability, prosperity, and a brighter future.

In conclusion, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq stands as a beacon of hope in Pakistan's turbulent political arena. His ability to command respect from all sides, coupled with his dedication to democratic values, positions him as a key player in efforts to foster political reconciliation.

His leadership is a reminder that dialogue and cooperation, rather than confrontation, are the paths to a stronger and more prosperous Pakistan.

At a time when the nation faces daunting challenges, Ayaz Sadiq's efforts to build bridges offer a roadmap for unity, progress, and the realization of Pakistan's true potential.

China, US should expand list and make bigger pie of cooperation

Zhong Sheng

CHINA and the United States recently signed a 45-year-old Agreement Between the United States and China on Cooperation in Science and Technology for additional five years.

The international community widely welcomes the renewal of the agreement. They believe that sci-tech cooperation between China and the US not only serves the interests of both peoples but also facilitates their joint efforts in addressing global challenges.

This once again demonstrates that China-US cooperation can lead to fruitful results that are beneficial to both countries and the rest of the world.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations 45 years ago, China-US relations have gone through the tests of winds and rains but have largely sustained a positive momentum.

From the “Ping-Pong Diplomacy” that broke the ice of bilateral relations to the group “Kuliang Friends” that continued the legacy of friendship, each small step of “harmony” and “cooperation” between China and the US has injected impetus into the historical development of their relationship.

Over the past four years, China-US relations have gone through ups and downs, but the two sides have also been engaged in dialogue and cooperation. The relationship has remained stable on the whole.

Facts have proved that when the two countries treat each other as partners and seek common ground while shelving differences, their relationship will make considerable progress. But if they regard each other as rivals and pursue vicious

competition, they will roll the relationship or even set it back.

To steer China-US relations to the right course and foster a stable, sustainable and productive China-US relationship, it is necessary to draw inspiration from the past experiences and grasp the general direction of bilateral cooperation.

The interests of China and the US have been closely intertwined. Win-win cooperation is a defining feature of bilateral relations, and dialogue and cooperation remain the only right choice for the two countries.

The total trade between China and the US has exceeded \$660 billion. Over 70,000 American companies are doing business in China, earning a profit of \$50 billion annually. In terms of employment, exports to China alone support 930,000 jobs in the US. Chinese products have not only offered American customers more choices, but also lowered costs for them, and Chinese investment has not only created more jobs in the US, but also bolstered local economies. Around two-thirds of Qualcomm's global revenue and a quarter of Intel's global revenue come from the Chinese market.

Out of Apple's 200 major suppliers worldwide, over 80 percent have set up factories in China. Tesla alone accounted for 28.6 percent of China's new energy vehicle exports last year. These examples illustrate the vast potential for China-US cooperation. The two countries stand to gain mutual benefits and win-win outcomes from cooperation.

The two sides should expand the list of cooperation and make a bigger pie of cooperation based on their

complementary advantages. The success of one side should be an opportunity rather than a challenge for the other, and one's achievement should help rather than hinder the development of the other.

The world economy is facing many difficulties and challenges, and each country faces its own set of challenges. The right choice is to build an open world economy through cooperation. Neither decoupling nor supply-chain disruption is the solution. “Small yard, high fences” is not what a major country should do.

History and facts have proved that tariff war, trade war, and tech war are against the trend of history and laws of economics. Imposing restrictions or engaging in unilateralism and protectionism will inevitably disrupt normal trade cooperation and the stability of industrial and supply chains.

It is a clear-cut choice that China and the US should choose cooperation over confrontation, and win-win cooperation over zero-sum games. Former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers recently said that centuries of economic studies and past practical experiences have shown that for major economies, initiating a global trade war is a highly detrimental choice.

China's foreign policy is open and transparent. It is focused on managing its own affairs well to bring better lives to its people. While realizing its own development, it is also ready to work with other countries for common development and to jointly build a community with a shared future for mankind.

China's policy toward the US is highly stable and con-

sistent. Its goal of a stable, healthy and sustainable China-US relationship remains unchanged; its commitment to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation as principles for handling China-US relations remains unchanged; its position of resolutely safeguarding China's sovereignty, security and development interests remains unchanged; and its desire to carry forward the traditional friendship between the Chinese and American peoples remains unchanged.

The one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiques are the political foundation of China-US relations. They must be observed. The Taiwan question, democracy and human rights, China's path and system, and China's development right are four red lines for China. They must not be challenged. These are the most important guardrails and safety nets for China-US relations. Misjudging China-US relations and misinterpreting China's development will mislead the people of both countries and the international community, resulting in more harm than good. The US should view China and its development in a positive and rational light, so as to maintain a right strategic perception, which is fundamental to the China-US relationship, just like the first button of a shirt that must be put right. Both China and the US are great nations, and cooperation between them is a noble endeavor. The US should work with China in the same direction to find a right way for the two countries with different civilizations, systems, and paths to coexist in peace and achieve common development on this planet.

A Trump trade war with China would be very bad for South-East Asia

Sholto Byrnes

2025 should be a pivotal year for South-East Asia – at least according to Anwar Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia, which has just taken over as chair of the Association of South-East Asian Nations.

The group of 10 countries is likely to admit a new member for the first time since 1999, if Timor-Leste gets the go-ahead, thus “expanding the community to encompass the entirety of geographical South-East Asia”, as Mr Anwar put it in a recent essay. He also wrote that the region of more than 660 million people is on the brink of “a second renaissance that benefits all”, based on a strategic long-term plan, the Asean Community Vision 2045.

To do so, Asean must build “a rules-based regional order ... that not only safeguards prosperity but also enhances South-East Asia's stability while navigating tensions between great powers”.

Mr Anwar listed as key pillars the necessity to preserve both strategic autonomy and Asean unity; ending the civil war in Myanmar; distancing Asean from the “excesses of unchecked capitalism” and “the distorting influence of state-subsidised trade from outside powers”; engaging more deeply with Asean-plus partners in the Asia Pacific, as well as the Brics group (several Asean members are already officially Brics partners), and more widely, specifically mentioning the Asean-GCC-China summit due to take place this year; and influencing, rather than just participating in, the global economy, governance and cultural narratives.

Mr Anwar's aims are ambitious, but not unexpected.

Malaysia has a history of being a highly active chair of Asean, as I saw first-hand as a senior fellow at the national think tank the last time the coun-

try was the group's chair, in 2015. That year the Asean Economic Community was declared, which envisioned the region as a single market and production base, with a free flow of goods, services, investments, capital and labour.

One senior official even suggested the group change its name to “the Asean Community” to mark the importance of the change, just as the European Economic Community had become the European Community in 1993 with the launch of its single market.

All of this, however, will (or won't) take place against an uncertain backdrop. Just what will the incoming US administration's policies be concerning China? President-elect Donald Trump has threatened to put tariffs of up to 60 per cent on all imports to America from China. But the region knows well, as independent Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew, used to say: “When elephants fight, the grass suffers.”

Countries including Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand benefitted from the first Trump administration's trade war with China, as factories relocated to create new supply chains. But Mr Trump's second White House will be filled with hawks who are well aware of these “workarounds”. Asean countries fear both being cracked down on themselves and the wider implications of new and escalating rounds of tit for tat – for Beijing is ready with its own retaliation if Mr Trump goes through with his threat.

“Protectionism and trade wars lead only to recession, conflict and poverty,” Vietnamese

President Luong Cuong warned at an Apec summit in November. “Now more than ever it's critical to transcend the zero-sum game mindset and guard against nationalism skewing policy decisions.”

Good luck with persuading Maga partisans of that. There may, however, be reasons for cautious optimism. Chinese officials and organs are going out of their way to be conciliatory to Mr Trump and underline the gains to be made from “win-win cooperation” rather than pursuing “vicious competition”, as an editorial in the China Daily put it yesterday.

“Dialogue and cooperation remain the only right choice for the two countries,” it argued, pointing out that: “The total trade between China and the US has exceeded \$660 billion. Over 70,000 American companies are doing business in China, earning a profit of \$50 billion annually. In terms of employment, exports to China alone support 930,000 jobs in the US. Chinese products have not only offered American customers more choices, but also lowered costs for them, and Chinese investment has not only created more jobs in the US, but also bolstered local economies.”

In a recent interview Victor Gao, vice president of the Centre for China and Globalisation in Beijing, and a very eloquent and persuasive proponent for his country, praised Mr Trump's victory and his bearing after the attempted assassination on him. He said that, “in my view there is no competition between the US and China”, explaining that would only be the case if one was trying to impose its system of governance on the other.

Mr Gao argued that tariffs would only hurt the American people, and said if there were worries about Taiwan, should it reunify with the mainland, there was no reason why the island should not be turned

into a giant free trade zone, with China guaranteeing continued exports to the US of “semi-conductor chips of all kinds”.

We can't know if these placatory expressions will persuade Mr Trump. But I do think his unprecedented invitation for Chinese President Xi Jinping to attend his inauguration was a very welcome gesture, even if Mr Xi is unlikely to go. South-East Asian leaders realise the importance America's incoming president places on one-to-one relations. Several were effusive with their praise after his election win.

Malaysia's Mr Anwar told him it was a “remarkable political comeback and victory”. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said: “I know that his robust leadership will result in a better future for all of us.”

into a giant free trade zone, with China guaranteeing continued exports to the US of “semi-conductor chips of all kinds”.

We can't know if these placatory expressions will persuade Mr Trump. But I do think his unprecedented invitation for Chinese President Xi Jinping to attend his inauguration was a very welcome gesture, even if Mr Xi is unlikely to go.

South-East Asian leaders realise the importance America's incoming president places on one-to-one relations. Several were effusive with their praise after his election win.

Malaysia's Mr Anwar told him it was a “remarkable political comeback and victory”. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr said: “I know that his robust leadership will result in a better future for all of us.” Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet told Mr Trump: “Under your wise leadership, I am confident that the indispensable US role in promoting stability, security and prosperity will be further strengthened.”

Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto went one better and filmed himself phoning Mr Trump to offer his congratulations. All will need to continue to appeal not just to the transactional side of Mr Trump, but also to the sunny, more joyful aspect of his nature which is there, even if his critics refuse to accept it exists. For a trade war between the two elephants wouldn't just flatten South-East Asia's “grass”, it could derail ambitions and lead to devastating fractures, rather than unity, in the region.

So avoiding one is crucial. The “second renaissance” Mr Anwar hopes for depends on it.

How to bring the region closer to peace in 2025

EVEN the turbulent standards of the Middle East, 2024 was earth-shattering in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and the West Bank. In Gaza, tens of thousands were killed and millions made homeless. Impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity emboldened perpetrators to commit ever more gruesome atrocities. In Syria, Bashar Assad was forced to flee after a disastrous 24-year rule capped by a bloody 13-year civil war. In Lebanon, Israel decimated Hezbollah's leadership and weakened its grip on power. Consistent with Israel's indiscriminate battle doctrine, there was a huge civilian toll.

The most catastrophic event in 2024 was the killing fields of Gaza and this looks set to continue into 2025. More than 45,000 Palestinians have been killed there since October 2023, mostly women and children. About 100,000 more have been injured, some maimed. Many others are missing or buried under the rubble of their destroyed homes.

In October, the World Health Organization estimated that more than 6 percent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million had been either killed or injured.

The UN estimates that nearly 70 percent of Gaza's water and sanitation plants have been destroyed or damaged. That includes all five of the territory's wastewater treatment facilities, plus desalination plants, sewage pumping stations, wells and reservoirs. Nearly all of Gaza's inhabitants have been forcibly displaced, some multiple times.

Having taken control of all entry points into the Gaza Strip, Israel has severely impeded the flow of aid. For example, out of the 91 attempts the UN made to deliver aid to the besieged north of Gaza between Oct. 6 and Nov. 25, 82 were denied and nine impeded. The conditions for survival are diminishing for the 65,000 to 75,000 people estimated to remain in the north. Starvation has already taken a toll in many parts of Gaza and famine is looming.

In addition to deliberately starving the Palestinians of Gaza and forcibly displacing them en masse, which are war crimes under the Geneva Conventions, Israel has engaged in other grave breaches of international humanitarian law, including indiscriminate bombing and the targeting of unarmed civilians, hospitals, schools, refugee camps and shelters. It is for these and other war crimes and crimes against humanity that the International Criminal Court in November issued warrants to arrest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

The Israeli government, led by Netanyahu and populated by some of the basest ministers Israel and the region have ever had, engaged in this genocidal campaign because it was assured by the full support of the US. Although the Biden administration frequently voiced disagreement with some of Netanyahu's extreme tactics, it continued to support him materially and shield him from UN censure.

President Joe Biden, the consummate politician who has spent more than 50 years in politics, failed to use his tremendous leverage to temper Israel's uninged behavior in Gaza, let alone bring a halt to the war. His administration also failed to persuade Israel to allow aid to flow to starving Palestinians.

It was argued that it would be difficult for Biden to discipline Israel during the US election campaign. But once the elections were over, the administration continued its lackadaisical approach of letting Israel off the hook every time the UN tried to improve the situation inside Gaza.

Many have argued that Biden still has enough time and power to do the right thing before he leaves office on Jan. 20. Jonah Blank, now with the RAND Corporation, served for 10 years as a Biden adviser. He wrote that there are three steps Biden could take during his final weeks in office that would "mitigate Palestinian suffering and preserve the possibility of a two-state solution — which would also be the best way to solidify Israel's security in the long

run."

First, he should recognize Palestinian statehood. Second, he should sponsor a resolution on a two-state solution at the UN Security Council. Third, he should enforce existing US legislation on arms transfers. These three actions are within Biden's executive authority and could change the course of the crisis in the Middle East, "which is hurtling toward catastrophe," as Blank made clear.

Such actions could salvage Biden's legacy, which is now marred not only by the failure of his Middle East policy but also his contribution to the Democratic Party losing the presidential and congressional elections. This was one of the most pivotal moments of 2024.

According to US election experts, Biden's initial insistence on running for reelection, against the better judgment of Democratic Party elders, led to that loss. After his disastrous performance in the presidential debate with Donald Trump, Biden was urged to relinquish his bid for a second term. He reluctantly agreed, but it was too late to salvage the Democratic Party's election campaign.

The Democrats blamed him for their resounding defeat as the Republicans, led by Trump, trounced them everywhere to get what might be called — in the language of racing — a trifecta or even a superfec-ta. Republicans convincingly flipped the White House and the Senate and retained their majority in the House of Representatives. They already had a solid majority in the Supreme Court, thus rounding out the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. From Jan. 20, they will be in a position to change the face of the federal government for a long time.

For at least the next four years, America's allies, partners and adversaries need to deal with this changed landscape in Washington. But for the next few weeks, Biden is in control and he can make history if he chooses to do so. A permanent ceasefire is needed in Gaza to start the process of rebuilding and reunifying the Strip with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority,

instead of break-away factions.

In addition to the Gaza war, there are other crises that the White House needs to address during the weeks leading up to Trump's inauguration to make sure that there are no gaps in US regional policy on the changing of the guard at the White House and Congress. They include the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Fortunately, in each of these four crises, there is consensus on what needs to be done and UNSC resolutions to go by.

First and most urgent is the crisis in the West Bank, where the Israeli government and settlers have increased their attacks on Palestinians with the clear aim of driving them off their land. Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed and their homes and farms destroyed or burned down.

Clearly, the only way to defuse the West Bank crisis is through ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state. Already, about 150 countries have recognized Palestine as a state and there is a clear consensus on the parameters of this solution in UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In September, Saudi Arabia, together with Norway, the Arab League and the EU, launched the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution. The first meeting of the alliance was held in Riyadh on Oct. 30 and attended by 90 states and organizations, while the second meeting was held in Brussels on Nov. 28 and the third is planned for January in Oslo. The US took part in these meetings and expressed support for the alliance. It needs to do more to persuade Israel to join.

Second, in Lebanon, the agreement of a 60-day temporary ceasefire was a good start, but it needs to be solidified by the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701 of 2006, which called for the withdrawal of all forces, save for the UN Interim Force in Lebanon and the Lebanese security forces, from Lebanese territory south of the Litani River.

Third, the surprise attack in late November by Turkiye-backed Syrian

groups on Aleppo and the surrounding areas ended in Assad's ouster and the installation of a new Islamist government in Damascus. In large part, the attack was motivated by the impasse in the UN and Arab League-mediated political process.

In December 2015, the UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 2254, which set forth a roadmap to resolve the crisis in Syria. Talks over its implementation stalled because the Assad regime stopped cooperating with UN Special Envoy Gere Pederson. Instead, the civil war raged, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands and leaving half of Syria's population homeless.

In May 2023, the Arab League reached an agreement in Amman with the Assad regime to resume the political process, but it later ignored the Arab League's pleas to live up to that agreement.

The weakening of Assad's close allies, Iran and Hezbollah, and preoccupation of Russia, Assad's third ally, contributed to the decision by the militants to launch their successful blitz. In October, Assad's forces again bombed the rebel-held Idlib province, probably hastening their decision to mount their counterattack.

Things in Syria are now in flux, but the new rulers appear to be eager to reassure Syrians and the outside world that they intend to have an inclusive government focused on rebuilding Syria's devastated economy.

Fourth, in Yemen, the UN-led peace process has also stalled, as the Houthis have chosen to improve their political standing by disrupting international maritime trade and attacking ships. Here too, there is a clear UNSC resolution (No. 2216 of 2015, which was adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter) that sets out the main parameters for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

To its credit, the Biden administration has been working on all these issues. But time is of the essence. It needs to take advantage of its remaining days in office to finish at least some of them, so as to hand over to the new administration a coherent response.

— Arab News

HTS must unite partners to curb infighting

Michael Jansen

SYRIA is not Idlib. Syria's new rulers, dominated by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), have yet to learn that Syria is far more commanding, complex and complicated than Idlib, one of the smaller provinces. Idlib had a population of 2.9 million, of whom 1.9 million were internally displaced persons (IDPs), out of a total Syrian population of 24.7 million. As Idlib's residents are largely Sunni and conservative, HTS did not have to moderate its fundamentalist culture and impositions to win a measure of public acceptance. HTS dealt harshly with detractors and dissidents and marginalised communities which did not accept its diktat.

HTS could count on allied Turkish military muscle and political and economic resources to prop up the National Salvation Government which administered Idlib as an authoritarian, technocratic, Islamic state. It provided education, police, and services and collected taxes. Idlib had 24-hour electricity because Turkey connected Idlib to its power grid and replaced the weak Syrian currency with the Turkish lira. Without Turkey HTS would never have been able to topple the Assad government.

Although the leading faction, HTS has to assert command and control over all others. To achieve this end, HTS must unite its militia partners to prevent infighting and the fracturing of the country into fiefdoms ruled by squabbling warlords. Last week, HTS's commander Ahmed al-Sharaa (formerly Abu Mohammed al-Jolani) announced that faction heads had agreed they would disband and merge under the new Defence Ministry. While he did not name them, he said there was "no faction that did not agree." However, he left out Turkey's Syrian National Army (SNA) and the US-protected Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The SNA and the Turkish army hold the northwest Afrin district plus the border towns of al-Bab, Azaz, Manbij, Jarabulus, Rajo, Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn. These areas have been designated as a "safe Zone" by Ankara.

The SDF controls and administers territory in the northeast which amounts to 25 per cent of Syria. The

dominant Kurds call it "Rojava." This strategic region is a rich agricultural area containing three dams and Syria's oil wells. The SNA and SDF create a dilemma for the HTS. The SNA is allied to Turkey while the SDF is backed by the US which the HTS sees as its key to securing international recognition. The SNA and SDF are sworn enemies and have frequently clashed in the border zone.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan seeks to defeat and disband the SDF, which he regards as an offshoot of the insurgent Turkish Kurdish Workers Party and put an end to Syrian Kurdish autonomy. So far, he has been thwarted in this ambition by the US which has deployed at least 2,000 troops in the Kurdish area. However, during his first term as president Donald Trump threatened to withdraw US troops and could act on this threat after he re-enters the White House on January 20th. He admires the Turkish leader.

Erdogan stated on December 25th, "The separatist murderers [Kurds] will either bid farewell to their weapons, or they will be buried in Syrian lands along with their weapons. We will eradicate the terrorist organisation that is trying to weave a wall of blood between us and our Kurdish siblings."

He vehemently opposes and is willing to use force to prevent the emergence of a recognised Kurdish autonomous region in Syria like that in northern Iraq as this is precisely what the Turkish Kurds have been fighting for over four decades.

While in the north and the northeast enmity between Turkey and Syria's Kurds constitutes the greatest risk of renewed warfare in Syria, the lack of civil order is undermining HTS assurances to minority groups and secularists. HTS has only around 25,000 fighters deployed in Syria's main cities where the civilian authorities are also undermined. Syrians dwelling in towns, villages, and the countryside remain vulnerable to lawless gangs and criminals.

Following incidents of intimidation against Christians, the December 23rd torching of a Christmas tree by masked men in the Christian-majority town of Suqaylabiyah, near the city of Hama, sparked public

protests in Damascus and across the country. Defiant Christians responded by planting a cross on the place where the tree stood.

The arsonists were reported to be foreigners which HTS leader Sharaa said would be punished. So far, they have not been apprehended.

On the 25th, 14 members of Syria's HTS-Interior Ministry forces were killed when trying to arrest an ex-regime army officer. They were attacked by supporters of former President Bashar al-Assad in the coastal province of Tartus where there is a substantial Alawite community. Alawites — the small sect to which the Assads belong — have been beaten, kidnapped, and killed since HTS took power, an Alawite shrine has been desecrated, and the mausoleum of late President Hafez al-Assad in his natal Latakia village has been set on fire.

These incidents have been magnified by being widely posted on social media which is well developed in Syria due to Bashar al-Assad. He headed the Syrian Computer Society before he became president.

Meanwhile in the south, although Sharaa has tried to avoid confrontation with Israel, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu ordered troops to seize the UN-monitored Golan buffer zone and the summit of Jebel Shaikh (Mount Hermon) that commands the approach to Damascus. Israel has also carried out heavy airstrikes on Syrian army bases and arsenal, leaving Syria unable to defend itself against its aggressive neighbours, Erdogan and Netanyahu. They have conflicting politico-military objectives in Syria and will do their utmost to realise their goals — at Syria's expense.

Erdogan and Netanyahu seek to shore up their flagging rule in challenging times. Erdogan wants the 2.9 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey to go home as they are unpopular with Turks, and he is blamed for welcoming them. Netanyahu is opening a new front with Syria to distract Israelis from the never-ending war on Gaza. Due to his refusal to agree to a ceasefire and end the Gaza war, 100 Israeli captives share the fate of Palestinians who are bombed day and night and deprived of water, food, and medicine and driven from one unsafe place to another.

The relationships that led to Assad's downfall

I have previously questioned the depth of Tehran's relationship with Bashar Assad, as he considered it his pillar of support. It saved him in 2014 but failed 10 years later.

Abdulrahman Al-Rashed

In the final weeks of his life in March 2000, Hafez Assad decided to negotiate with Israel. He was in a hurry, wanting to resolve the outstanding issues before handing power to Bashar. Despite his illness, he flew to Geneva and negotiated with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak through a mediator, US President Bill Clinton. The draft agreement was about regaining the occupied Golan Heights without addressing the issue of a Palestinian state. The Israelis, aware of Bashar's grooming for the leadership, were not confident he would take power, given the hidden conflicts. Hafez died 10 weeks after the Geneva meeting.

Bashar did not return to negotiations until protests erupted against him in 2011. But Benjamin Netanyahu remained skeptical of Bashar's ability to sever ties with Tehran and Hezbollah, so he refused.

One of the key reasons for the longevity of Hafez's regime was his ability to manage relations with his foreign adversaries. He refrained from confronting Israel after the 1973 defeat, whereas Bashar integrated Syria into the Iranian "Revolutionary Guard Empire," inevitably making it a target for destruction later.

Why did Hafez not sign a peace agreement with Israel, despite having secretly coordinated with it? His closest ally, the late Abdul Halim Khaddam, mentioned that Hafez feared it would be said that the Alawite minority made peace with the enemy.

And what about his confrontations with Israel through Lebanon? In reality, Syria did not launch attacks

on Israel during its 30 years in Lebanon. Instead, it acted as a military force to curb the activities of Palestinian factions, and later Hezbollah to a lesser extent, until Bashar expanded the risks. Hafez's strategy was to take control of Lebanon as long as Israel occupied the Golan Heights. He used it as a bargaining chip with Arab states and played the role of mediator in the abduction of Western hostages.

Using the same policy of getting close to the fire without being burned, he gave Turkish Kurds refuge, but when Ankara threatened him, he stopped and indirectly handed over their leader.

Hafez's relationship with Iran must be understood as complex. He used it for geopolitical balance against his enemy, Saddam Hussein, to prevent the Damascus regime's fall. He leveraged Tehran to enhance his significance in Riyadh and repeatedly played roles in easing tensions with Tehran.

After the 1996 Alkhobar bombing, he handed over some Saudi fugitives when it was revealed the cell had hidden in Damascus. On the other hand, he facilitated the escape of its leader to Tehran.

In trying to understand the relationship, Khaddam spoke about Hafez's policy toward Iran. When Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani visited in 1985, seeking Assad's support in Iran's war against Iraq, like a skilled Iranian merchant, he tried to convince him that the reward for their alliance upon defeating Saddam would be a stronger Syrian position against Turkiye, Israel and Iraq. Khaddam said Hafez was cautious about overextending the alliance amid the region's shifting sands.

There is no doubt that one of the reasons for the fall of Bashar's regime was

his failure to manage foreign policy, especially his alliance with Iran. While Hafez built a strong relationship with Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, understanding its importance, he refused to participate in its war. Yet, like Israel and Libya, he secretly sold Scud missiles to Iran.

As for Bashar, at the start of his presidency, he gave the impression to everyone that he had shifted his orientation westward, away from Moscow and Tehran. It was not long before everyone who had initially supported him — Saudi Arabia, Spain, France and the US — realized the truth.

Early in his alliance with Iran, Bashar planned to seize control of Lebanon's decision-making process by assassinating Rafik Hariri and numerous other leaders, before turning Hezbollah into the sole ruler in Lebanon after the expulsion of his forces.

Bashar then dared to open his southern borders to armed groups to attack the new regime in Baghdad, which was under Washington's protection. This justified neighboring countries like Jordan and Turkiye opening their borders to Syrian rebels in 2012, ultimately leading to his regime's downfall.

Alliances can be understood in the context of regional conflict, considering Hafez's strong relationship with Tehran as a significant player, and similarly Bashar's. However, the latter became deeply involved in its wars in Lebanon and Iraq. Khaddam said Bashar made a fateful decision to fully merge with Tehran in 2011. My opinion, as I mentioned earlier, is that his involvement in Tehran's wars started years earlier. Was Bashar's rise to power, supported extraordinarily by Tehran, what pushed him to always act as an agent like Hezbollah? Very few know what happened between 2000 and 2024.

Carter was a man of peace and integrity

THE Palestinian people have this week lost one of the most outspoken champions of their cause. Jimmy Carter, the 39th president of the US, died on Sunday at the age of 100. Carter will be remembered as a man of integrity and courage. His readiness to move away from the more orthodox foreign policy line adopted by both Democrats and Republicans back in the 1970s over the Arab-Israeli conflict triggered fundamental shifts in how the world later approached that conflict, with the plight of the Palestinians as its core.

Carter's life embodied the American dream, while transcending it through his dedication to global service. His one term as president (1977-1981), even though he was often criticized during his tenure, yielded lasting diplomatic triumphs, most notably the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt — an achievement that earned him respect as a peacemaker long after he left office.

Carter, who had no foreign policy experience prior to his 1976 presidential victory, oversaw one of the most important and complex US diplomatic interventions ever to resolve a significant aspect of the conflict: ending the state of war between Egypt and Israel. Those agreements paved the way for future US-sponsored peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, culminating in the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, which would be followed by a peace deal between

Jordan and Israel.

Carter's commitment to peace and justice knew no bounds. Though controversial, his advocacy for Palestinian rights and criticism of Israeli policies reflected his unwavering commitment to human rights and justice, regardless of political cost.

His 2002 Nobel Peace Prize recognized his diplomatic achievements and his lifelong dedication to advancing human dignity and peace. Throughout his life, Carter maintained a reputation for integrity that stood as a beacon in American public life. His plainspoken manner and modest lifestyle reflected his belief that true greatness lies in serving others. Even as he faced criticism for his political positions, few questioned his sincerity or commitment to his principles.

Carter's commitment to the Palestinian issue extended beyond his presidency and covered most of his post-presidential career. During his time in office and over the following decades, Carter brought unprecedented diplomatic attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, leaving an indelible mark on Middle East peace efforts.

His crowning achievement was the 1978 Camp David Accords, as he skillfully mediated negotiations between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. While the accords primarily focused on normalizing Egyptian-Israeli relations and returning the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, they also established a framework for addressing Palestinian rights and

Osama Al-Sharif

autonomy. However, the provisions regarding Palestinian self-determination remained notably vague and fell short of Palestinian aspirations for statehood. Carter was committed to acknowledging Palestinian rights throughout his administration, stressing the importance of including Palestinian self-determination in any enduring peace solution. His administration kept open communication channels with the Palestine Liberation Organization, representing a significant change in America's diplomatic approach. Carter also supported UN Security Council Resolution 242, which called for a fair settlement of the Palestinian issue, although the implementation of such resolutions continued to be contentious.

After leaving the White House, Carter's advocacy for Palestinian rights intensified. He became an increasingly vocal critic of Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories and a steadfast proponent of a two-state solution. Through books, speeches and direct involvement in peace initiatives, Carter consistently highlighted the challenges faced by Palestinians and advocated for their rights and recognition. During the 1990s and 2000s, he participated in numerous peace initiatives and observer missions in the region, working to foster dialogue and understanding between Israelis and Palestinians.

Carter's 2006 book "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid" marked perhaps his most controver-

sial contribution to the discourse. In it, he provided a critical examination of the Israeli occupation and its impact on Palestinian lives. While the book drew sharp criticism and allegations of antisemitism from some quarters, especially in Israel, Carter remained resolute in his stance, continuing to address issues such as settlement expansion and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Throughout his post-presidency, Carter openly criticized US policies that he believed undermine Palestinian interests. This included certain aspects of military aid to Israel and what he perceived as inadequate pressure on Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza. His approach reflected a rare willingness among American political figures to challenge established views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Carter's legacy regarding the Palestinian issue reflects the achievements and limitations of American engagement with this conflict. His presidential accomplishments, particularly the Camp David Accords, established important frameworks for negotiation, even if they failed to fully address Palestinian aspirations. His post-presidential advocacy helped maintain focus on Palestinian rights and the necessity of a just resolution to the conflict. Through both periods, Carter's efforts underscored the intricate challenges of achieving lasting peace in the region and the importance of considering the rights and aspirations of all parties involved in the peace



PSX turns bullish, gains 1,881 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 1,881.18, a positive change of 1.63 percent, closing at 117,008.08 points as compared to 115,126.90 points on the last trading day.

A total of 956,274,456 shares were traded during the day as compared to 1,236,873,705 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs46,440 billion against Rs44,218 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 462 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 258 of them recorded gains and 161 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 43 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Energyco PK with 71,999,946 shares at Rs7.66 per share, Pak Int. Bulk with 62,831,962 shares at Rs9.30 per share and Bank of Punjab with 45,412,470 shares at Rs10.96 per share.

Hallmark Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs91.47

per share price, closing at Rs1,006.17, whereas the runner-up was Lucky Cement Limited with Rs87.17 rise in its per share price to Rs1,187.66.

Haleon Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs79.76 per share closing at Rs2,720.24 followed by Pakistan Tobacco Company Limited with Rs54.76 decline to close at Rs1,277.03.

Gold rates increase by Rs1,000 to Rs273,600 per tola: The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,000 and was traded at Rs273,600 on Wednesday

against its sale at Rs272,600 on the last trading day. All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold increased by Rs857 to Rs234,568 from Rs233,711 whereas that of 10 grams of 22 karat went up to Rs215,021 from Rs233,711.

Per tola and ten gram silver were sold at existing prices of Rs3,350 and Rs2,872.08 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$10 to \$2,624 from \$2,614, the Association reported.

SECP notifies adoption of IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has notified the adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) Sustainability Disclosure Standards in a phase-wise manner in Pakistan.

The IFRS-S1, 'General Requirements for Disclosure of Sustainability-related Financial Information' and IFRS-S2, 'Climate-related Disclosures', are issued by the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) and recommended for adoption in Pakistan by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan (ICAP), said a press release.

IFRS-S1 requires disclosure of information about sustainability-related risks and opportunities that could reasonably be expected to affect the entity's cash flows, its access to finance or the cost of capital. IFRS-S2 sets out the requirements for identifying, measuring and disclosing information about climate-related risks and opportunities.

The standards are designed to meet the needs of existing and potential investors, lenders and other creditors through the provision of consistent and complete information that can be used to assess a company's exposure to and management of sustainability-related risks and opportunities.

The standards have been notified after an extensive consultation process involving market readiness analysis, information and awareness sessions together with ICAP and a survey together with consultation sessions to get stakeholders' perspectives.

The standards will be implemented only on the listed companies in a phased manner on the basis of criteria comprising of total assets, turnover and number of employees. The first phase starts from the annual reporting periods beginning on or after July 1, 2025.

The second and third phase start from July 2026 and 2027 respectively. Further, the standards will also be applicable on unlisted-licensed-public interest companies in the third phase, i.e. starting from the year 2027.

Requirement of obtaining assurance on sustainability reporting from the auditor of the company will start from the second year of the reporting.

Adoption of these standards is an important milestone in the ESG regulatory roadmap of SECP and represents SECP's commitment to align capital markets with global best practices, enhance transparency through standardized sustainability reporting, improve risk management and risk mitigation practices, allow more informed decision-making by stakeholders and promote a culture of integrating sustainable business practices into business strategies.

IIA tested parking of narrow-body aircraft

IIA tested parking of narrow-body aircraft

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad International Airport management has successfully tested the parking of narrow-body aircraft on wide-body stands.

Flight PA231 (A321-200) and PF769 (A320-200) were parked on stands 06 and 07, respectively, with operational success including the engagement of Passenger Boarding Bridges (PBB) and Ground Power Units (GPU).

This milestone, configuring 8 out of 9 wide-body stands for narrow-body operations, marks a significant improvement in operational flexibility, reduced turnaround time, enhanced passenger convenience, and increased revenue for PAA.

Need stressed to bring women in trade sector

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Vice Chancellor Government Sadique College Women University Bahawalpur Prof Dr Shazia Anjum emphasized the need to make joint efforts to bring women in business sector.

Vice Chancellor Sadique College Women University Bahawalpur Prof Dr Shazia Anjum said this while holding a meeting with the office-bearers of Women Chamber of Commerce Bahawalpur.

The meeting was also attended by President, Women Chamber of Commerce Bahawalpur, Ms Rabia Osman, Senior Vice President, Ms Ayesha Ali, former senior vice president, Ms Irum Tahir and member executive committee, Ms Fatima Waheed.

Vice Chancellor Sadique College Women University Bahawalpur Prof Dr Shazia Anjum appreciated the Women Chamber of Commerce Bahawalpur over organizing an exhibition to encourage women to display their business items at the stalls.

"It is need of the hour to encourage women by organizing exhibitions in order to bring them into business field," Dr Shazia Anjum opined.

Core inflation decelerates to 4.1%

ISLAMABAD (APP): The core inflation measured by Consumer Price Index (CPI) decelerated further to 4.1 percent during December 2024 as compared to 4.9 percent recorded during November 2024, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

According to PBS data, the CPI based inflation during the same month of last year (December 2023) was recorded at 29.7%.

On month-on-month basis, it increased by 0.1% in December 2024 as compared to 0.5% in the previous month and an increase of 0.8% in December 2023.

According to PBS data, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation urban, decreased to 4.4% on year-on-year (YoY) basis in December 2024 as compared to 5.2% in the previous month and 30.9% in December 2023. On month-on-month (MoM) basis, it decreased by 0.1% in December 2024 as compared to 0.5% in the previous month and an increase of 0.7% in December 2023.

CPI inflation rural, decreased to 3.6% on year-on-year basis in December 2024 as compared to 4.3% in the previous month and 27.9% in December 2023. On month-on-month basis, it increased by 0.3% in December 2024 as compared to 0.5% in the previous month and an increase of 1.0% in December 2023.

The Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) inflation on YoY decreased to 4.2% in December 2024 as compared to 7.3% a month earlier and 35.3% in December 2023. On MoM basis, it increased by 0.8% in December 2024 as compared to 1.0% a month earlier and an increase of 27.3% in December 2023.

On MoM basis, it decreased by 0.4% in December 2024 as compared to a decrease of 0.1% in the previous month and no change was observed in corresponding month of last year i.e. December 2023.

The Core inflation measured by non-food non-energy for urban decreased to 8.1% on (YoY) basis in December 2024 as compared to 8.9% in the previous month and 18.2% in December 2023.

On (MoM) basis, it increased by 0.2% in December 2024 as compared to 1.2% in previous month and an increase of 0.8% in corresponding month of last year i.e. December, 2023.

The core inflation measured by non-food non-energy for rural decreased to 10.7% on (YoY) basis in December 2024 as compared to 10.9% in the previous month and 25.1% in December 2023. On (MoM) basis, it increased by 0.6% in December 2024 as compared to an increase of 0.7% in previous month and an increase of 0.9% in corresponding month of last year i.e. December 2023.

PFC showcases excellence at 17 global expos in 2024

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) participated in 17 major international expos across the globe in 2024, showcasing high-quality Pakistani furniture and craftsmanship to boost exports.

Chairing first board of directors meeting of the year here on Wednesday, CEO PFC Mian Kashif Ashfaq said these expos provided an excellent platform to project the diversity, durability, and unique designs of Pakistani furniture, attracting buyers and investors from various countries.

He said: "Through participation we successfully promoted Pakistan's traditional and contemporary furniture, including hand-made woodwork and modern designs, which resonated with global markets".

The council's efforts aimed at fostering trade links, exploring new markets, and enhancing the visibility of Pakistan's furniture industry internationally.

He said exhibitions not only strengthened Pakistan's trade relationships with other countries but also helped generate valuable export orders, contributing significantly to the national economy.

The PFC remained committed to promoting local artisans and expanding the country's footprint in the global furniture market, he concluded.

Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Five ships, Maersk Chicago, Kotka, ST. Nikolai, Ginga Ocelot and Aramon carrying Container, Palm oil, Chemicals and Mogas, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal, Engro Vopak Terminal and FOTCO oil Terminal respectively on Tuesday.

Eleven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them three ships, Kotka, Seamec Gallant and Al-Khuwair left the on Wednesday morning while three more ships, Maersk Chicago, F. Line and White Shark are expected to sail on Thursday afternoon.

Cargo volume of 143,704 tonnes, comprising 95,233 tonnes imports cargo and 48,471 tonnes export cargo carried in 4,566 Containers (2,348 TEUs Imports & 2,218 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

My father's correct name is Muhammad Ayaz, whereas it has been incorrectly written as Muhammad Ayaz Khan Khalil in my educational documents. Therefore correction be made.

Saba Gul Daughter of Muhammad Ayaz resident of Tehkal Bala, Peshawar

Correction of Father's Name

Public at large that Gul mohammad son of Peer Mohammad R/o kokikhel sikandarkhel gundi jamrod distt khyber,am the owner plot 1746 Measuring 05 marlas. Registration no.4493(category general public)situated P.H.A Hangu Town ship Hangu. Now I want to appoint Mr.Mohammad imran S/o Mehboob khan r/o Shahu waam Hangu as the general attorney for the said plot. If anyone has any objection to the transfer. He/She should inform the Manager RFC Kohat PHA Hangu Town ship No 0922514515 undersigned within 15 days of the publication of this notice

Public Notice

In the court of sana shah civil judge IV.Illaga Qazi district Swat. Case# 20/6 year 2024. Next Hearing date. 03/01/2025. Bakht Nasrat vs Ghulam Nabi etc. Notice to 8/2) Fazal subhan.8/2) Fazal Rehman sons.8/3) Zeenat daughter jehan Ranra r/o Karachi.9) shamsa kanwal daughter bakht Mand presently Abroad. 11/3) Hassan ali.11/4) khurshid.11/5) Sher zaman.11/6) farman sons presently Abroad.13/6) sula-man.13/2) Gul bacha.13/3) Ihsan.13/4) Akbar Zada. 13/5) tooti.13/6) Akhtar bacha sons khapeeral presently Abroad.13/8) Mst. Subhania.13/9) Mst. Ruqia.13/10) Mst. Bakht taja daughter khapeeral late r/o farhat abad tehsil khwaza-khela swat.18) provincial government secretary Mall civil secretariat peshawar. Whereas the above named cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court on 03/01/2025. at 8.30 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

PMEX advances concept of innovation, market productivity

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Executive Officer of Pakistan Mercantile Exchange (PMEX), Khurram Zafar on Wednesday said that PMEX wants to advance the concept of innovation and market productivity in the commodity market by increasing efficiency in agriculture and metal.

"We are envisioning future markets under which market regulation will be maintained and competitiveness and productivity in the commodity market will be enhanced," Chief Executive Officer of Pakistan Mercantile Exchange (PMEX), Khurram Zafar told APP in an exclusive interview.

He said that the exchange registered a trading volume of around Rs

3,800 billion in the current Fiscal Year.

CEO, PMEX said that Commodity futures are derivative contracts in which the purchaser agrees to buy or sell a specific quantity of a physical commodity at a specified price on a particular date in the future. Derivatives are investments that derive their value from the price of another asset, typically called the underlying asset, he said.

He said that Pakistan Mercantile Exchange (PMEX) has a huge role in future market design and market economy on which the future market depends.

Talking to APP, the CEO, PMEX said that the Market Eco-system and Storage are very important

on which Pakistan Mercantile Exchange is working.

He said that there is a need to digitize the commodity market across the country, on which our institution is working on research and analytics.

Zafar said that digitization and automation are very important in the global capital market at this time and "we are working on creating the ecosystem of the commodity market and its role is important in the restoration and development of the country's economy." The productivity factor in the Pakistani economy is low and more work needs to be done on it which is being followed by PMEX, he said.

The CEO, PMEX said

that storage is very important in the commodity market and our organization is ready to provide facilities to the farmers, which will have a positive impact on our agricultural economy.

He said that currently countries' economies are dependent on research and data, and the future economy is also dependent on this.

Zafar said that the government needs to collaborate with PMEX to modernize the market economy in Pakistan so that the country's economy can move forward.

He said that the role of stakeholders is very important to bring competitiveness in the economy and to bring it into harmony with the global market.

Exports increase by 10.52% to \$16.561 billion in first half of FY

ISLAMABAD (APP): The exports from the country increased by 10.52 percent during the first half of the current fiscal year as compared to the corresponding months of last year, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported Wednesday.

Exports during July-December (2024-25) were recorded at \$16,561 billion against \$14,985 billion during July-December (2023-24), according to PBS data. On the other hand, imports into the country went up by 6.11 percent by growing from \$26,137 million last year to \$27,733

million during the first six months of the current year.

Based on the figures, the trade deficit during the months under review was recorded at \$11,172 billion against the deficit of \$11,152 billion last year, showing a slight increase of 0.18 percent.

Meanwhile, on year-on-year basis, the exports in December 2024 increased by 0.67 percent to \$2,841 billion from \$2,822 billion in December 2023.

On the other hand, the imports went up by 14.02 percent by going up from \$4,635 to \$5,285 percent,

according to PBS data.

On a month-on-month basis, the exports from the country went up by 0.28 percent when compared to the exports of \$2,833 billion during November 2024.

The imports also witnessed increase of 17.44 percent when compared to the imports of \$4,500 billion in November 2024, PBS reported.

Meanwhile, the services exports during the first five month of the current fiscal year increased by 7.58 percent when compared to the corresponding period of last year.

The service exports during July-November (2024-25) were recorded at \$3,274 billion against the exports of \$3,044 billion in July-November (2023-24), according to PBS data.

On the other hand, the service imports went up by 2.88 percent to \$4,425 billion this year against \$4,301 billion last year.

Based on the figures, the services trade deficit witnessed negative growth of 8.48 percent and was recorded at \$1,150 billion during the current fiscal year against the deficit of \$1,257 billion last year.

Entrepreneurial wave reshaping Saudi economy and global standing

RIYADH (Arab News): Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia is no longer just a passing trend — it's a driving force reshaping the Kingdom's economy, aligned with the Vision 2030 agenda.

The Kingdom's Center for International Communications reports that 42 percent of adults plan to launch their businesses within the next three years, marking the highest rate of entrepreneurial intent since 2016. This surge in entrepreneurial activity reflects the country's growing commitment to economic diversification, with 25 percent of businesses in their early stages, operating for less than 42 months — a 33 percent increase from 2022.

The entrepreneurial boom is no accident. Saudi

Arabia is actively diversifying its economy away from oil and aims to increase the private sector's contribution to gross domestic product from 40 percent to 65 percent by 2030. A key part of this transformation involves fostering an economy driven by entrepreneurship and innovation, with the contribution of small and medium enterprises set to rise from 20 percent to 35 percent by the decade's end.

"A significant portion of this change has been driven by regulatory reforms, which have created an environment conducive to starting companies. Additionally, various investment initiatives have made the Kingdom a more attractive market for setting up operations," said Khaled Talhouni, managing partner

at Nuwa Capital.

Saudi Arabia's growing reputation as a friendly environment for early-stage businesses has been recognized by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, which recently ranked the Kingdom at the top for ease of starting a business and available opportunities.

Tushar Singhvi, deputy CEO and head of investments at Crescent Enterprises, said the government's reform efforts, which have simplified business operations, attracted foreign investment, and nurtured a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

"The Ministry of Investments of Saudi Arabia has introduced policies permitting 100 percent foreign ownership in most sectors, significantly reduc-

ing barriers for international entrepreneurs. This policy, alongside incentives such as tax exemptions, subsidies, and expedited licensing procedures, has made Saudi Arabia a prime destination for global investment," Singhvi said.

"The Kingdom's strategic location, connecting markets across the GCC and beyond, offers access to over 60 million consumers. Infrastructure advancements, including NEOM and cutting-edge logistics networks, provide businesses with the tools to thrive in an increasingly competitive market," he added.

Singhvi further said that by aligning policies with global best practices and embracing technology-driven solutions, Saudi

Arabia has positioned itself as a global leader in terms of ease of doing business.

Riyadh Al-Najjar, chairman of PwC Middle East and KSA country senior partner, said entrepreneurs and investors now benefit from a streamlined process in establishing and scaling businesses in Saudi Arabia.

"Strategically located at the crossroads of major international markets, Saudi Arabia has solidified its position as a global hub for commerce and innovation. This advantage is further amplified by a suite of government-backed incentives and specialized support programs to attract high-caliber talent and innovative ideas, supported by a thriving venture capital landscape," Al-Najjar told Arab News.

He also said: "For the second year in a row, Saudi Arabia has maintained its leadership in the MENA region, attracting SR1.5 billion (\$399.3 million) in venture capital funding across 63 deals in just the first half of 2024. This achievement highlights the Kingdom's success in cultivating a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem that continues to draw global investment and attention."

Al-Najjar also praised the role of institutions like Monsha'at (General Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises), noting their proactive efforts in providing resources like funding, mentorship, and capacity-building programs that have enriched the entrepreneurial ecosystem.



In brief

Djokovic and Kyrgios beaten in doubles

B R I S B A N E (Agencies): Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios were knocked out of the men's doubles in the second round at the Brisbane International after a narrow defeat by top-seeded pairing Nikola Mektic and Michael Venus. Kyrgios, 29, lost a gruelling three-set match to Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard on Sunday on his return to singles competition after 18 months out through injury. The Australian said the defeat left him in "throbbing" pain and suggested he was a doubt for this month's Australian Open. But he fulfilled his promise to play alongside Djokovic in the doubles and appeared comfortable, only occasionally grabbing his right arm between serves. The pair lost the first set 6-2 but responded well to win the second 6-3 to take the match to a deciding first-to-10-points tie-break. With Djokovic and Kyrgios two points from victory, a double fault from the Serbian proved costly at 8-6. It shifted the momentum of the tie-break back towards Mektic and Venus, who won the next three points to seal the win 6-2 3-6 10-8. "Incredible," Mektic said afterwards. "I was very happy when I saw them [Djokovic and Kyrgios], I could play them on the first of January. "It's an amazing feeling to start the year like this and we knew there would be points like that against players like this," Djokovic, pursuing his 100th career ATP title, is through to the quarter-finals of the singles, where he will play France's Gael Monfils.

Chebet smashes own world record

B A R C E L O N A (Agencies): Double Olympic champion Beatrice Chebet crowned a golden year as she smashed the women's 5,000m world record at the Cursa dels Nassos road race in Barcelona. The 24-year-old Kenyan finished the race in 13 minutes and 54 seconds to become the first woman to break the 14-minute barrier in the event. Chebet, who won 5,000m and 10,000m gold at the Paris Olympics earlier this year, beat her previous mark - set a year ago to the day in the same race - by 19 seconds. "I'm super happy as everything went according to plan," she said. "I felt capable of running under 14 minutes and I managed to do so. Two races in Barcelona and two world records, can I ask for more? "My focus for next year is to win gold medals over 5,000m and 10,000m at the World Championships in Tokyo." Chebet was all on her own as she sprinted through the race and embraced friends at the finish line after adding yet another accolade to her name. Alongside her Olympic success in 2024, she also broke the 10,000m world record in Eugene in May, before claiming her second Diamond League title in the 5,000m in September.

Seko Fofana joins Rennes after Saudi Arabia stint

RENNES (AFP): Ivorian international Seko Fofana has signed a four-and-a-half year deal with Rennes, the Ligue 1 club announced Wednesday, after 18 months playing in Saudi Arabia. The 29-year-old midfielder, who has 22 caps for the Ivory Coast, arrives on a deal estimated to be worth 20 million euros (\$20.8 million). The former Lens captain joined Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr in the summer of 2023, after helping the French club return to the Champions League for the first time in 21 years.

Harmas Ali Raja receives heroic welcome after winning gold at US Jr Squash C'ship



ISLAMABAD (APP): Harmas Ali Raja, a young squash player from Rawalpindi received a

hero's welcome at Islamabad International Airport after winning the Boys Under-11 title at the

US Junior Open Squash Championship. According to press release, the tournament

held in Philadelphia from December 14-17, is the world's largest individual squash event, boasting over 1,000 players from 51 countries.

Harmas Ali Raja's gold medal was one of only a few titles not claimed by Egypt or the United States, making his victory even more significant for Pakistan.

A large crowd of Pakistan Squash Federation (PSF) officials, fellow players, coaches and fans gathered at the airport to celebrate Raja's achievement.

A celebratory rally escorted him from the airport to the PSF headquarters and then on to his home in Rawalpindi.

The PSF President and Senior Vice President praised Raja's exceptional performance, congratulating him on his victory at this prestigious international event.

They expressed hope that he will continue to hone his skills and bring further accolades to Pakistan in the future.

Salman Agha confident of beating Proteas in Newlands test match

CAPE TOWN (APP): All-rounder Salman Ali Agha has said that the Pakistan cricket team was confident of beating South Africa in the second and last test of the two-match series in Newlands, Cape Town starting from January 3 (Friday).

Talking to the journalists prior to a practice session in Newlands, Cape Town on Wednesday, he said the team lost the first test match in Johannesburg by a whisker, adding that the first test match was 'anyone's game' which the Proteas won due to tenacity of Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen.

"Team's morale is very high as we lost by a close margin in the first test while we beat the Proteas in the three-match ODI series convincingly," Salman said, expressing the hope that the second test match will be a 'cracker' of a contest.

He further said that the team has the belief that it can beat South Africa at their home soil, adding that they beat the Proteas in the ODI series but were a bit short in the first test match in Johannesburg.

To a question he said that the team was in good stead and no conclusions could be made about the pitch in Newlands, adding it looked a different strip from what team played on in Johannesburg with less amount of grass on the pitch.

About inclusion of a specialist spinner

in the squad at Newlands, Salman Ali Agha, who is himself a spinner, said the team management will decide on it after having a look at the pitch tomorrow, adding that the statistics favour inclusion of a spinner at the Newlands.

"I just looked at the pitch and I thought I will bowl in this test match because I have not bowled during the past three test matches I have played," he responded to a question, adding his role will be important in the test match as an all-rounder.

About Muhammad Abbas, the all-rounder said "Muhammad Abbas is very accurate and I have not seen anyone like him as he knows his job." He was a bit rusty in the first innings of the Johannesburg test but he was outstanding in the second innings, adding it was Muhammad Abbas who brought us back in the game by claiming six scalps after Aiden Markram and Bavuma looked to finish easily. He further said it was amazing to see a quick bowl the whole first session on the fourth day of first test match in Johannesburg. About the South African team in the WTC final, the all-rounder said that the Proteas are a formidable side with strong batting and bowling line-up, adding that their qualification for the WTC final speaks volumes about the quality of their cricketing skills.

Saud shines as Babar and Rizwan slip in Test rankings

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The latest ICC Test batting and bowling rankings, released on Wednesday, reflected a significant reshuffling of positions for Pakistani cricketers following their two-wicket defeat to South Africa in the first Test of the ongoing series.

Saud Shakeel emerged as a standout performer for Pakistan, showcasing grit against South Africa's fearsome pace attack.

Although he fell cheaply in the first innings, managing just 14 runs off six balls, Shakeel bounced back with a determined 84 in the second innings. This performance earned him a three-place jump in the

ICC Test batting rankings, placing him at the sixth position with 764 points—a career-best achievement.

Former captain Babar Azam, despite breaking his half-century drought with a vital 50 off 85 balls in the second innings, dropped two places to the 17th spot with 669 rating points. His first-innings dismissal for just four runs compounded his decline in the rankings, reflecting the ongoing challenges he faces in maintaining consistency.

Wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan's form in Test cricket remained below expectations. Scoring only 30 runs across both innings of the

match, he slipped two places to the 21st spot in the ICC Test Batting Rankings, emphasizing the need for improved contributions in the second Test.

In the ICC Test bowling rankings, spinner Noman Ali and pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi—who missed the first Test—each dropped one place, now sitting at ninth and eighteenth, respectively.

However, Naseem Shah delivered an impactful performance, taking four wickets across two innings. His efforts earned him a six-place rise to 33rd position, showcasing his growing prominence in Pakistan's bowling attack.

Gambhir was not the first choice for India coach

NEW DELHI (Agencies): A latest report has made startling revelations about Indian head coach Gautam Gambhir amid India's struggle in the ongoing AUS v IND Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

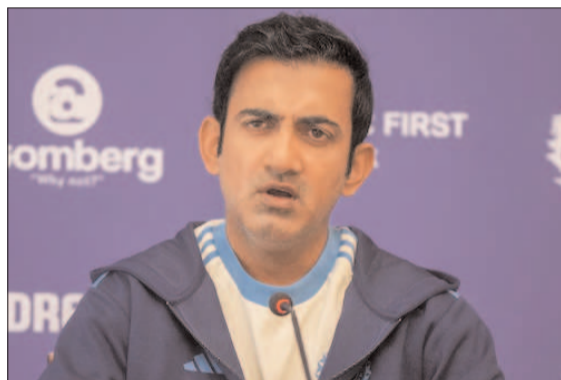
Criticism of Gambhir intensified after the side fell 1-2 behind in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia.

The former opening batter took charge as India's coach after Rahul Dravid stepped down from the post following India's triumph in the T20 World Cup 2024 in June last year.

His tenure began with a disastrous start as Sri Lanka defeated India in an ODI series followed by a whitewash at the hands of New Zealand India on their turf.

During the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia, the tourists have lost two games after winning the first AUS v IND Test at Perth.

India risk losing the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in case they return with any result other than a



win in the fifth and final Test in Sydney.

The dismal outing in the ongoing AUS v IND Test series has also made it difficult for them to qualify for the final of the World Test Championship (WTC).

Meanwhile, Indian media reported that Gautam Gambhir was not the first choice to coach India, instead VVS Laxman was under consideration for the job.

"He was never BCCI's first choice (it was VVS Laxman) and some of the well-known overseas names didn't want to coach all three formats, so he was a compromise.

Obviously, some other compulsions were also there," Indian media quoted a BCCI official as saying.

According to the report, Gautam Gambhir's future as the head coach might be in doubt if India fail to return to winning ways before the Champions Trophy 2025 in February-March.

"There is a Test match to be played and then there is Champions Trophy 2025. If the performance doesn't improve, even Gautam Gambhir's position wouldn't be safe," the BCCI official was quoted as saying.

PCB to announce domestic cricketers' contracts

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is set to announce contracts for domestic cricketers in the current month. According to PCB insiders, this move follows a previous announcement in August, 2024 that 150 domestic players would receive contracts as part of the board's commitment to strengthening the local cricket structure. Sources indicated that the selection of players for the contracts has already been finalized. The delay in the official announcement has been attributed to the board's ongoing commitments with the domestic cricket season, which commenced in August. Despite this, the PCB has remained consistent in its plans to support domestic talent and enhance their financial stability through these contracts. In August, the PCB had also introduced new player categories for domestic contracts. Under this scheme, players in Category-1 will earn a monthly salary of PKR 550,000, a significant step toward professionalizing domestic cricket in Pakistan.

Cavs top Lakers in LeBron's first game at 40, Celtics crush Raptors



LOS ANGELES (AFP): The league-leading Cleveland Cavaliers spoiled LeBron James' first game as a 40-year-old, beating the Los Angeles Lakers 122-110 on Tuesday, as the NBA champion Boston Celtics closed out 2024 with a 125-71 demolition of the Toronto Raptors.

Jarrett Allen scored 27 points and grabbed 14 rebounds, while Donovan Mitchell added 26 points and Evan Mobley chipped in 20 for the Cavaliers, who notched their eighth straight win to push their league-best record to 29-4. James, whose four NBA titles include a 2016 championship with his hometown team Cleveland, scored 23 points with four rebounds, seven assists and a blocked shot.

It was his first game since his 40th birthday on Monday, and made James

the first player in league history to play a game in his teens and in his 40s.

Austin Reaves led the Lakers with an impressive near-triple-double of 35 points, nine rebounds and 10 assists.

Anthony Davis scored 28 points and grabbed 13 rebounds, but after twice edging ahead in the second quarter the Lakers trailed by five at halftime and never led in the second half.

There was less drama in Boston, where the Celtics won by the second-largest margin of victory in franchise history -- trailing only their 56-point triumph at Chicago in December 2018.

Jayson Tatum scored 18 of his 23 points in the third quarter, when the Celtics out-scored the Raptors 45-18 to effectively put the game out of reach.

Payton Pritchard scored 19 points off the bench as

seven Celtics players scored in double figures.

The Celtics connected on 22 of their 43 three-point attempts as they handed the Raptors an 11th straight defeat.

Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said the big win -- after the Celtics dropped four of their last six games -- was just part of the process as the Celtics try to repeat as champions.

"There's still stuff that we've got to work on... we've just got to continue to be better," Mazzulla said.

Bucks rally The Milwaukee Bucks erased a 19-point deficit on the way to a 120-112 victory over the Indiana Pacers.

Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo, back after missing three games because of illness, found his rhythm after scoring just four points in the first half, finishing with 30 points and 12 rebounds.

Brook Lopez added 16 points and reserves Bobby Portis Jr. and Gary Trent Jr. scored 14 points each for Milwaukee, who trailed 83-64 midway through the third quarter.

"These are the type of games you need throughout a season to keep you going," Portis said. "It was a great game for us, especially going forward, that we can look back on like: OK, cool, we do it one time we can do it again and just keep building, keep building."

Another big night from Victor Wembanyama saw the San Antonio Spurs finish the year with a lopsided 122-86 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers.

Wembanyama closed out a December to remember with 27 points, nine rebounds, five assists, one steal and three blocked shots in less than 26 minutes on the court.

His 17 points in the first quarter matched the Clippers' total in the period.

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points and the Thunder notched their 12th straight regular-season victory, 113-105 over the Minnesota Timberwolves.

The Thunder trailed by as many as 12 in the second quarter and were down 52-46 at half time.

But they out-scored the Timberwolves 43-23 in the third quarter and never trailed in the fourth on the way to a seventh consecutive win since they fell to Milwaukee in the NBA Cup final, which doesn't count as part of the regular season.

Stoke appoint ex-Coventry boss Robins as manager

LONDON (Agencies): Stoke City have appointed former Coventry City boss Mark Robins as their new manager on a three-and-a-half-year deal.

Robins, 55, was sacked by the Sky Blues in October after seven years in charge. He succeeds Narcis Pelach, who the Potters parted company with on Friday just three months after he was appointed.

Robins' first game will be against managerless strugglers Plymouth Argyle on Saturday. Caretaker boss Ryan Shawcross, who oversaw Sunday's late win over Sunderland, will again take charge for the New Year's Day home game against Burnley.

Paul Nevin, who had been serving as interim England Under-20s head coach, and former Newport County manager James Rowberry, the Wales men's number two behind Craig Bellamy, will join Robins at the bet365 Stadium, as assistant managers.

After using the job title of head coach for the last three men in charge - Alex Neil, Steven Schumacher and Pelach - the vastly experienced Robins' job title will be manager.

After starting his managerial career with Rotherham United in March 2007, Robins has taken charge of a total of 780 games with

Barnsley, Coventry, Scunthorpe United and Huddersfield Town.

"He was always going to be in great demand"

"At Coventry, Mark built something successful with a real identity and longevity," said Stoke sporting director Jon Walters.

"He left the club in a significantly better place than he found it. That's exactly what we want to achieve at Stoke City, and he has all the pedigree and experience to help us do that." Robins had also been linked with the current vacancy at Stoke's Midlands Championship rivals West Bromwich Albion.

"With a record like that behind him, Mark was always going to be in great demand," said Walters. "So we're delighted that he sees an exciting opportunity to build something special in the Potteries."

"The immediate mission is to climb as high as we can up the Championship table during the second half of this season, whilst also laying foundations for a long-term successful future for our club."

Stoke are 18th in the table, ahead of the Burnley trip, four points clear of trouble.

The Football Association of Wales have confirmed that Rowberry will remain in his role as Bellamy's assistant with the national team. "Welcoming

two assistant managers of such calibre and with such innovative and progressive mindsets in Paul and James is another important part of how we will seek to progress and grow," added Walters.

Mark Robins' managerial record

In his second spell with the Sky Blues, Robins twice led them to promotion, from League Two and League One before reaching the Championship play-off final in 2023, when they lost to Luton Town on penalties.

They then took Manchester United, where Robins started his playing career, to a penalty shootout in last season's FA Cup semi-final before falling away in the league late on as they failed to match the previous season's top-six finish.

Stoke started the season under Schumacher, beating Robins' Coventry on the opening day, but surprisingly sacked him in mid-September to appoint former Huddersfield and Norwich coach Pelach.

However, they won just three times in the 36-year-old Catalan's 19 games in charge and he was sacked after a 2-0 home reverse by Leeds stretched their winless run to nine matches. Robins is now the club's seventh managerial appointment since their 10-year spell in the Premier League came to an end in May 2018.



SYDNEY: The Australian players pose with Glenn McGrath ahead of the SCG Test.



In brief

IRSA releases 28,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 28,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,400 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1472.53 feet and was 74.53 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 16,600 cusecs and 6,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1132.85 feet, which was 82.85 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,800 cusecs and 4,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 22,300, 17,200, 17,300 and 1,100 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 11,700 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 6,300 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Three suspects arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police while conducting an operation managed to arrest three more suspects for killing a citizen in a private housing society. According to a police spokesman, Gujar Khan police arrested three accused namely Faisal, Mukhtar and Kamran for killing a person in a private housing society. He informed that total six accused involved in the case have been sent behind the bars. The accused had shot dead a citizen namely Abdul Rehman in a private housing society function. Three accomplices Irfan alias Bhola, Nasir and Talha were rounded up earlier. City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani took notice of the incident and ordered the arrest of the accused. Gujar Khan Police arrested the accused through technical and human intelligence based operation. Superintendent of Police, Saddar Muhammad Nabil Khokhar said that the accused will be challenged with solid evidence. The criminals who play with the lives of citizens cannot escape the clutches of the law, he added.

Four dacoits nabbed

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police's Shahzad Town station team apprehended four wanted members of a notorious dacoit gang involved in numerous criminal activities, recovering cash, valuables, and weapons used in their crimes, on Wednesday. According to police spokesperson, the Shahzad Town team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending four wanted members of the snatcher gang. He said the gang was involved in numerous snatching activities in various areas of twin cities. Police team also recovered cash, six motorcycles, mobile phones and weapons with ammunition used in crime from their possession. The accused were identified as Usman Ali, Muhammad Tayyab, Bilal Abbasi and Sadam Hussain. Cases were registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway. DIG Syed Ali Raza also directed officers for an effective crackdown against the accused involved in criminal activities and to take all possible measures to protect the life and property of the citizens. DIG Raza further said that no criminal element will be allowed to disturb the peace of the people.



ISLAMABAD: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Senator Robina Khalid while cutting the cake of New Year 2025, made an important announcement to increase the amount of Benazir Kafalat monthly stipend to 13,500 rupees. —APP Photo

Senate committee discusses voting rights for overseas Pakistanis

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Senate Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs held a comprehensive discussion on granting overseas Pakistanis, including dual citizens, the right to vote in future elections. The meeting was presided over by Senator Dr. Mohammad Humayun Mohmand. Highlighting the significance of extending voting rights to overseas Pakistanis, the Chairman said that many countries successfully implement postal balloting and questioned why Pakistan could not adopt a similar mechanism.

He observed that the current legal framework neither grants voting rights to dual citizens nor provides a system to facilitate their participation. A representative from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) briefed the committee on past efforts, explain-

ing that a third-party audit had previously advised against internet voting due to significant security concerns, including the risk of hacking. The audit concluded that online voting was unsafe for general elections.

The Chairman stressed that all Pakistanis living abroad or holding dual citizenship should have the right to vote, suggesting that postal balloting could be a viable solution for Pakistan. While the ECP representatives acknowledged the practicality and cost-effectiveness of postal balloting, they cautioned that it could be prone to malpractice due to the lack of direct supervision.

Drawing from international experiences, the Chairman asked the committee members to explore advanced electoral systems, citing Brazil's progress in implementing modern technologies for elections.

Senator Shibli Faraz added that reluctance to adopt systems like postal balloting or electronic voting machines (EVMs) reflects a lack of commitment to ensuring free and fair elections. The Chairman posed the question of whether the committee would support amending the laws and Constitution to facilitate voting systems such as postal balloting and EVMs. However, Senator Kamran Murtaza expressed reservations, arguing that such measures might not align with constitutional provisions.

Faced with limited support for constitutional and legal amendments, the Chairman adjourned the meeting, stating, "If the committee members are unwilling to consider changes to enable a transparent and modern voting system, there is no point in continuing the discussion."

ANF recovers over 32 kg drugs in 10 operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 10 operations across the country managed to recover 32.914 kg drugs worth over Rs 5.8 million and arrested 11 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday.

He informed that 24 grams weed was recovered from a parcel sent from the UK at a courier office in Rawalpindi.

12 kg hashish hidden in a vehicle near M-1 Motorway Islamabad was recovered and two suspects

were rounded up during the operation.

In third operation, 1.2 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of a suspect held near M-1 Motorway in Islamabad.

10 kg hashish hidden in an uninhabited area of Jiwani in Gwadar was seized and 6 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of a suspect near Mehria Town, Attock.

In three operations near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza GT Road Attock, ANF recovered 120 intoxicated tablets, 290 grams opium

and 136 grams hashish from the possession of three suspects.

1.2 kg hashish was recovered from an accused near Satellite Town, Rawalpindi.

In 10th operation, 2 kg heroin was recovered from a trolley bag in Sohrah Goth Al-Asif Square Karachi and three accused were arrested.

Separate cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Water filtration plant inaugurated at IIUI

ISLAMABAD (APP): The President of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), Prof. Dr. Ahmed Shuja Syed, on Wednesday inaugurated a water filtration plant at the male hostels on the university campus.

He was accompanied by Dr. Inam Ul Haq, Director Administration, representing Vice President (Academics & Finance) Prof. Dr. Abdul Rahman, along with a team from Helping Hand for Relief and Development (HHRD) Pakistan. Speaking on the occasion, President IIUI, Prof. Dr. Ahmed Shuja Syed, emphasized the university's commitment to adopting a student-centric approach and facili-

tating the IIUI community.

He highlighted the plant's benefits for the students and staff and underscored the importance of establishing a follow-up and maintenance mechanism to ensure its sustainability. The filtration plant, valued at Rs 2 million, has a capacity of 1000 liters per hour and features Ultra Filtration (UT) technology with a SCADA monitoring and control system.

The project was initiated by Col (R) Athar Babar, former Provost Male and current Chief Security Officer, in collaboration with Ali Rafay, Assistant Director Hostels, and the HHRD team.

Earlier, Dr. Inam Ul Haq

briefed the President on the initiative and acknowledged the contributions of HHRD for their support in the installation of the plant.

Representatives from HHRD, including Arsheed Baloch, Manager Health Program; Muhammad Imran, Senior Program Officer; Amjad Mehmood Amjad, Director Programs; and Raheel Ahmed, Manager Youth Program, were also present at the event. On the occasion, Imran from HHRD explained the plant's operation, monitoring, and maintenance. He emphasized its role in preventing waterborne diseases and supporting students' academic and physical well-being.

ICT admin cracks down on illegal petrol agencies

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration has intensified its crackdown on violators of official price lists and illegal petrol agencies operating in residential areas in the Federal Capital.

According to the spokesman of ICT administration, a targeted operation was carried out by the Assistant Commissioner (Nilore) against the violators of official price lists and illegal petrol agencies

in Ghorri Town and Khanna areas late night.

During the operation, five individuals were arrested for breaching the official price lists. One person was arrested for running an illegal petrol agency in a residential area.

Additionally, two petrol dispensing machines from illegal agencies operating within the jurisdictions of Khanna and Karpal police stations were also seized, he added. This action is part

of the administration's broader efforts to regulate fuel distribution and enforce compliance with official pricing policies.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon urged the residents to report such agencies and avoid buying petrol from them. "Community cooperation is essential to eliminating such illegal activities and ensuring safety and compliance," the DC emphasized.

AIOU Offers 80 Educational Programs for Int'l students

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has offered over 80 educational programs for overseas Pakistanis and international students in its admissions for the Semester Spring 2025.

These programs include Matriculation, FA, I.Com, Associate Degrees in Arts, Commerce, and Education, BS programs, B.Ed programs of 1.5, 2.5, and 4 years, and Diploma Programs in 12 disciplines.

The university is offering these educational programs to international students through an online management system.

All academic activities, from admissions to examinations, will be conducted online. For monitoring online examinations, MS Teams or a monitoring application approved by the authorities will be used.

The last date for admissions is February 10. Students can apply online through the link <http://fmhp.aiou.edu.pk>.

It is noteworthy that to facilitate international students, Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood has activated and empowered the International Collaboration and Exchange Office at the university.

This office maintains continuous contact with international students, provides them with extensive guidance, and arranges orientation sessions for new international enrollees.

While discussing international admissions, the Vice-Chancellor stated, "It is a matter of pride for us that 1,007 students from 37 countries have already enrolled, and we aim to increase this number to 5,000 within the next five years."

Overseas Pakistanis and international students can contact the International Collaboration and Exchange Office for further details via email at overseas@aiou.edu.pk or phone at +92519572495.

2-member bike lifters gang busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Airport Police on Wednesday busted a two-member bike lifters gang and recovered six stolen motorcycles from them.

The arrested accused were identified as Saleem and Muhammad Ali, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said.

Gilani extends new year greetings to nation, calls for unity

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani extended heartfelt New Year greetings to the nation on Wednesday, urging collective efforts toward progress, unity, and prosperity in the year ahead.

In his special message marking the beginning of the New Year, he said, "The start of a new year brings fresh aspirations, ambitions, and objectives. It is an opportunity to learn from past mistakes, realign with our purpose, and ded-

icate our energies to the progress and prosperity of our nation."

He said, "The great people of Pakistan have always faced challenges head-on. As we step into another year, it calls for determination, courage, and unity from all of us. Each individual must fulfil their personal and collective responsibilities wholeheartedly to place our country on the path of peace, development, and prosperity."

Highlighting the importance of national unity, the

chairman said, "The New Year reminds us that our greatest strength lies in our unity as a nation. Let us set aside our differences and work toward building a society where every individual is entitled to equality, justice, and respect."

He said, "May the New Year bring growth, harmony, and peace to our country. May Allah bless our nation with greater achievements and elevate its stature. Let us continue our endeavours to serve and uplift our beloved homeland."

BISP beneficiaries to get increased Benazir Kafalat stipends

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid Wednesday announced an increase in the quarterly installment under the Benazir Kafalat Programme from Rs. 10,500 to Rs. 13,500 with advent of the year.

The amount has been raised for providing much-needed financial relief to deserving women across Pakistan. The announcement was made at a ceremony where Senator Rubina Khalid,

along with Secretary Amir Ali Ahmed, Additional Secretary Dr. Tahir Noor, and other staff members, celebrated the New Year by cutting a cake.

Senator Rubina Khalid declared 2025 as the "Year of the Benazir Hunarmand Programme", emphasizing the initiative's potential to empower underprivileged individuals by equipping them with skills to earn a livelihood and achieve self-sufficiency.

"This year, we are committed to continuing our work with honesty and

dedication to serve the marginalized segments of society," said Senator Rubina Khalid during her New Year message. The chairperson BISP extended her heartfelt New Year greetings to all citizens on behalf of the BISP team.

The Benazir Income Support Programme remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's social protection efforts, ensuring financial stability and skill development opportunities for the country's most vulnerable communities.



ISLAMABAD: People sitting around fire to keep them warm during cloudy weather in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Syedaal praises PIMS as a vital healthcare institution

ISLAMABAD (APP): During a meeting with Dr Rana Imran Sikandar, Executive Director of the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), he commended the govern-

ment, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, for prioritizing healthcare reforms.

He said that efforts are underway to address public healthcare challenges and to plan large-scale developmental projects for various departments of PIMS.

Dr. Sikandar provided a comprehensive briefing on the hospital's performance, challenges, and the state of medical facilities. The Deputy Chairman praised PIMS as a vital healthcare

institution serving patients from across Pakistan but acknowledged the immense pressure it faces as a primary healthcare provider.

"The provision of medical facilities is becoming increasingly challenging due to the rising number of patients," Syedaal Khan added. He expressed concerns over the frequent breakdown of hospital equipment, which often forces patients to seek diagnostic tests from external facilities.

To address these issues, he underscored the urgency of procuring new machinery through adequate funding. He also called for significant improvements in the hospital's infrastruc-

ture, particularly the wards, and urged both administrative staff and medical professionals to take collective responsibility for enhancing patient care.

Highlighting inefficiencies in the hospital system, Syedaal Khan pointed to the long queues patients endure for blood sample collection.

"This system needs to be reformed to save patients' valuable time," he stated, stressing the importance of streamlining operations for better service delivery.

The Deputy Chairman reiterated the government's commitment to resolving healthcare challenges and ensuring accessible, high-quality medical services for all citizens.

Sufi teachings vital for peace in troubled times: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Housing and Works, Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, underscored the critical role of Sufi teachings in fostering peace, harmony, and brotherhood during the launch of Kalyam Kooch-i-Ishq, a book celebrating the life and teachings of Hazrat Mian Fazluddin Kalyami.

The ceremony, held at the Pakistan Academy of Letters, marked the 133rd death anniversary of the revered mystic.

The book, co-authored by Syed Ahmad Iqbal Tirmazi and Iftikhar Ahmad Hafiz Qadri, explores the biography and discourses of Hazrat Mian Fazluddin Kalyami, a spiritual disciple of Hazrat Baba Fariduddin Ganjshakar.

The event drew a distinguished audience, including former president of the Islamic International University, Sahibzada Dr. Sajid ur Rehman, who presided over the session, and Professor Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir, Dean of Social Sciences at

Allama Iqbal Open University, as the guest of honor. Professor Dr. Najeeba Arif, President of the Pakistan Academy of Letters, also graced the occasion alongside other prominent academics and scholars.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Pirzada lauded the authors for their contribution to Sufi literature, emphasizing the timeless relevance of mystics in shaping Islamic teachings and spreading the values of humility, tolerance, and love.

"The teachings of Hazrat Mian Fazluddin Kalyami remain a beacon of hope and inspiration, especially in today's fractured world," the minister remarked.

He called for preserving and promoting Sufi literature to bridge divides and instill harmony among communities.

Dr. Sajid ur Rehman elaborated on Hazrat Mian Kalyami's spiritual guidance, highlighting his role in inspiring generations through his devotion and wisdom.

"His teachings continue to offer guidance to seekers of truth, even more than a century after his passing," he stated.

Professor Abdul Aziz Sahir praised the authors for shedding light on the life of the great mystic, calling the book a vital effort to preserve the spiritual heritage of the region.

Similarly, Professor Najeeba Arif highlighted Hazrat Mian Kalyami's miraculous abilities and profound understanding of Islamic mysticism.

Sahibzada Professor Rashad Masood Kalyami commended the authors for narrating the Sufi's emphasis on introspection, self-reflection, and inner purification, central to the Sabriya branch of the Chishti Order to which he belonged.

The ceremony concluded with a unanimous call to ensure Sufi teachings reach younger generations to promote values of compassion and humanity in an era of uncertainty and despair.

Reconstruction completed

BAMYAN (BNA): Local officials in Bamyan province have announced the completion of the reconstruction of 31 schools and religious seminaries at a cost of over 9 million Afghanis. During the inauguration ceremony, Bamyan Governor Mawlawi Abdullah Sarhadi stated that the reconstruction of these buildings, located in the provincial center and districts, was carried out with financial support from the Ministry of Education.

300 people arrested

KABUL (Khaama Press): Ministry of Interior of Taliban-run government announced that around 300 people, including several women, have been arrested and punished for human trafficking. Abdul Mateen Qani, spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior, stated that a four-year strategy has been developed to combat human trafficking. He emphasized that most human traffickers are based outside Afghanistan and their information has been shared with Iran governments.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

2024 saw significant challenges in health sector

KABUL (TOLONews): The year 2024 witnessed substantial changes in Afghanistan's health sector. Key issues included the closure of medical institutions to women, the launch of polio vaccination campaigns, limited access to standard healthcare services, especially in remote areas, and global concerns over maternal mortality and child malnutrition.

The closure of medical training institutions to women was neither officially confirmed nor denied by the Islamic Emirate. However, female students reported being given a ten-day period to complete their exams.

Haida, a midwifery student, spoke to TOLONews on December 4 about the closure of medical institutions to women, stating: "When we came to the institute the next day, the director told us not to come anymore, as the institutes were closed. Later, they gave us a ten-day period to take our exams."

This decision sparked both domestic and international reactions.

Organizations such as UNAMA, Amnesty International, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Médecins Sans Frontières, foreign ministers of France and Germany, former President Hamid Karzai, the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan, UNICEF, and others called for a reconsideration of this policy.

Despite a warning by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on August 22 that Afghanistan urgently needs 18,000 skilled midwives, the Deputy Minister for Policy and Development of the Ministry of Public Health denied a shortage of female health workers in the country.

"We have more than 30,000 midwives who are not currently part of the system and are waiting for employment opportunities to be created for them," said Mohammad Hassan Ghiasi, Deputy Minister of Planning and Health Development at the Ministry of Public Health, on December 25.

The launch of polio vaccination campaigns was another major health event of the year.

The Ministry of Public Health conducted at least ten campaigns in 2024, though the methodology for three of these campaigns deviated from previous years, as they were not conducted door-to-door.

The ministry did not confirm any positive cases of polio in 2024, but the World Health Organization (WHO) reported more than 20 positive cases in Afghanistan during the year.

"This year, we do not have any confirmed cases, but there are suspected cases," said Sharafat Zaman Amarkhel, spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Health, on December 24.

Achievements in the health sector included the establishment of Afghanistan's first polio laboratory in collaboration with aid organizations and the export of serum worth \$580,000 from Afghanistan to Iraq.

Challenges such as insufficient healthcare facilities, malnutrition, and most critically, maternal and infant mortality remain areas of concern for global organizations.

UNFPA described Afghanistan as one of the most challenging places in the world for women to give birth, reporting that every two hours, a mother dies due to preventable pregnancy and childbirth-related causes.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) also reported that 24 mothers and 167 newborns die daily from preventable causes in Afghanistan, though the Ministry of Public Health rejected these claims.

"About 67% of the population currently has access, which means that about 33% of the population does not have access to the health services," said Edwin Ceniza Salvador, the World Health Organization's (WHO) Representative in Afghanistan.

In a recent development, Noor Jalal Jalali, acting minister of public health, announced the approval of a budget for the construction of 318 district-level hospitals by the leader of the Islamic Emirate.

"A special budget has been approved by the Amir al-Mu'minin of Afghanistan for the construction of general hospitals in 318 districts. The preliminary legal procedures have been completed, and the construction work has practically begun," said the acting minister.

It remains to be seen whether Afghanistan's healthcare needs will be met in the coming year and if the sector will witness progress.

Official says 1b Afs spent annually on addiction treatment

KABUL (TOLONews): Abdul Haq Akhund, Deputy Interior Minister for Counter Narcotics, speaking at the graduation ceremony of a Quran recitation and Tajweed course for recovering addicts in one of Kabul's rehabilitation camps, stated that nearly one billion afghani are allocated annually from the Islamic Emirate's budget for the treatment of addicts.

He said that rehabilitation centers operate in all provinces of the country to improve the condition of addicts.

"Did you know that nearly one billion afghani are spent annually from the Islamic Emirate's budget for these brothers?" he said during the ceremony.

Abdul Rahman Qasemi, Technical Deputy Minister for Counter-Narcotics, pointed out the destructive effects of drugs on society and said, "The effects of drugs are not limited to the individual and their family but impact the entire society. For humanity, the impact of drugs is greater than that of chemical weapons."

Meanwhile, officials from the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs also emphasized the issue of beggar collection during the program, highlighting that foreign countries exploit children and beggars to tarnish Afghanistan's reputation internationally.

Zar Mohammad Haqqani, Technical Deputy of the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, said, "Foreign organizations, by employing women and children for begging, have tried to portray Afghanistan negatively."

Alizadeh, a religious scholar at the event, addressing the recovering addicts, said, "The money the government has spent on you should not go to waste."

Some of the recovering addicts who completed the educational course expressed their happiness at the opportunity and urged the youth to avoid drug use.

Wahidullah, one of the recovering addicts, said, "The fear that Westerners spread among us Muslims should be abandoned. Stay away from bad company."

Zia Rahman, another recovering addict, said, "My message to the youth is to stay away from drugs and pursue education. We were addicts too, but now we have become memorizers of the Quran."

According to officials, more than 30 people graduated from the Quran recitation and Tajweed course during the ceremony.

Activists urge global action to address crisis

KABUL (Amu TV): A network of women's rights activists has called on the international community and institutions to take decisive steps to address the worsening crisis in Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan Women's Political Participation Network, led by Tarannum Saeedi, released a statement marking the New Year, urging the world to reconsider its approach to the Taliban regime and its impact on Afghanistan's society.

The statement emphasizes the need for a shift in global engagement, particularly regarding the presence of "terrorist organizations" in Afghanistan, and calls for an end to international support or interaction with the Taliban.

The network also stressed the importance of unity among Afghan citizens to dismantle systemic discrimination.

"We will continue our fight to achieve freedom for Afghan women and push for the recognition of gender apartheid in Afghanistan," the statement read, reaffirming their commitment to advocating for women's rights.

Since the Taliban regained power in August 2021, they have drastically curtailed the rights and freedoms of Afghan citizens, particularly women and girls. Women are barred from attending secondary schools, universities, and workplaces. Even public acts of faith, such as reciting the Quran aloud or performing prayers, have been restricted for women.

Despite widespread condemnation from Islamic scholars, global human rights organizations, and Afghan citizens, the Taliban have refused to reverse their policies.

The activists have called on the international community to formally recognize the Taliban's policies as gender apartheid, a step they believe is crucial for mobilizing global action.

MoR and UNAMA discuss coordination for returnees, IDPs



KABUL (BNA): Representatives of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation held a meeting with representatives of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

According to a statement issued by the ministry, the meeting focused on sharing the ministry's operational plans and discussing coordination efforts with the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

The source added that Mawlawi Shukrullah Shakir, Director of Repatriation and Resettlement at the ministry, stated during the meeting: "The primary task of this ministry and related institutions is to work together and in coordination to address the challenges faced by returnees and internally displaced persons."

The statement further noted that UNAMA representatives assured the ministry officials of their cooperation and emphasized: "We are committed to assisting the people of Afghanistan, particularly returnees and internally displaced persons, to resolve their challenges through coordination and collaboration."

100 youths from Panjshir join army for training



PANJSHIR (BNA): The recruitment process for 106 volunteer youths from Panjshir into the ranks of the IEA Army has been completed, and they have been dispatched to training centers for military and professional education.

According to Bakhtar News Agency, these youths joined the IEA Army following a directive from the leadership of Panjshir province and in accordance with a special decree by Amir-ul-Mu'minin, may Allah protect him.

Hafiz Mohammad Agha Hakim, the Governor of Panjshir, stated that, under the decree of Amir-ul-Mu'minin, 600 youths have so far joined the Army, and 500 others have been recruited into the National Police. The recruitment process for the police has been finalized, and with the addition of these youths to the army, the recruitment efforts for the Islamic Army are now complete.

He further added that, in the past, adequate attention was not given to employment opportunities for Panjshir's youth, leaving many unemployed.

Meanwhile, residents of Panjshir have expressed gratitude to the leadership of the Islamic Emirate and local officials for their efforts to create job opportunities for the province's youth.

It is noteworthy that, over the past two years, the provincial administration of Panjshir has created employment opportunities for more than 20,000 youths in mines, Emirati and non-Emirati institutions, as well as in the ranks of the Islamic Emirate Army and Police.

Air pollution: Bus stops being moved outside Jalalabad city

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): A resident of Jalalabad, Sadiqullah, told Pajhwok Afghan News huge crowds in winter also caused air pollution and increased the incidence of diseases.

"To prevent air pollution, the Environmental Protection Agency should work seriously. The number of vehicles is huge and standard fuel is used in them, which causes smoke and increases air pollution."

Another resident, Sher Ahmad, said the Environmental Protection Agency should prevent low-quality fuel from being imported to the country.

He said low-quality materials were used in brick kilns in Sararud district and other factories and vehicles produced a lot of smoke in Jalalabad city.

"Air pollution in Jalalabad city is caused by factories, generators, brick kilns in Sararud district, old cars, rickshaws, and burning of rubber and tires by families in winter season and there are many other factors that the Environmental Protection Agency should take action to prevent."

However, the Nangarhar Environmental Protection Agency says it has beefed up efforts to deal with air pollution.

Qari Ehsanullah Mukhtar, head of the agency, told Pajhwok Afghan News that they had started working with a number of organizations to prevent air pollution in Jalalabad city.

He added seven or eight departments, including the Department of Environmental Protection, held a meeting and decided to move bus terminals outside the city.

He also said low quality fuel used by small and large vehicles had increased air pollution in the city.

He said people's cooperation of important in preventing air pollution and asked them to stop burning firewood and tyres unnecessarily.

2024 ends with still no recognition of interim govt

KABUL (TOLONews): The year 2024 proved to be politically tumultuous for the Islamic Emirate, with key issues such as the fate of the constitution and the interim cabinet remaining as unclear as in previous years.

International recognition of the Islamic Emirate also remained unresolved. Notable developments included new decrees issued by the Emirate's leadership and global conditions set for normalizing relations with Afghanistan under the Islamic Emirate's rule.

Officials of the Islamic Emirate have said that the interim government is directly engaging with other countries, which, in their view, amounts to recognition. Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs, previously said: "At the conference of Islamic states, the Islamic Emirate was invited and representatives of the Islamic Emirate were present there, so what does recognition mean?"

Recognition is a crucial matter that, if achieved, could bring widespread changes in political and economic relations for the Islamic Emirate. However, the international community has made recognition conditional on steps such as improving human rights (especially women's rights), forming an inclusive government, initiating national dialogue, and combating terrorism and drug trafficking.

On November 15, the US Deputy Spokesperson for the State Department said: "As long as the Taliban continues to essentially hold back 50 percent of its population from fully integrating in society, fully participating in society, it certainly is not going to be able to reach the international recognition that we know that they – that they're seeking."

The interim government has labeled these demands as interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs and has consistently urged the international community to refrain from meddling.

Despite this, Islamic Emirate officials repeatedly called on the international community to release Afghanistan's frozen assets and lift sanctions on more than 24 Islamic Emirate officials.

In July, Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said: "The issue of an inclusive government is an internal matter; Afghans will make decisions with consideration of their national interests in any case. Neighboring countries, as well as distant and nearby countries, should discuss issues related to their relations with Afghanistan."

Domestically, the fate of drafting a new constitution remains uncertain. Abdul Karim Haidar, Deputy Minister for Justice, at an event in Kabul said that no directive has been issued by the leader of the Islamic Emirate to draft a constitution.

The leader of the Islamic Emirate issued several decrees this year. According to the Ministry of Justice, seven laws have been approved since the Islamic Emirate came to power:

- Law on the Duties and Authorities of the Directorate for Monitoring and Implementation of Decrees and Orders
- Law on Preventing Land Grabbing and Recovering Seized Lands
- Law For Hearing Complaints
- Law on Collecting and Preventing Begging
- Law on Money Services and Currency Exchange
- Law on Industrial Zones
- Law on Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice

Afghanistan's cultural sector in 2024: Progress & challenges

KABUL (TOLONews): In 2024, Afghanistan's cultural sector witnessed significant initiatives, including the restoration of ancient monuments, the documentation and discovery of historical sites, and the exhibition of antiquities.

Historical artifacts symbolize a nation's identity, and Afghanistan, as a country rich in historical and cultural heritage, holds a unique position on the global stage.

According to statistics, the Ministry of Information and Culture prevented the smuggling of 538 historical artifacts in 2024.

These artifacts were identified and documented before being transferred to relevant museums in various provinces across the country.

The intercepted items included metal artifacts, objects from the Bronze Age, and Islamic-era items such as weapons, coins, and jewelry.

Khabib Ghofran, spokesperson for the Ministry of Information and Culture, stated: "The Ministry of Information and Culture has prevented the smuggling of 538 historical artifacts. These include metal objects, Bronze Age artifacts, and Islamic-era items like weapons, coins, and jewelry."

In addition to uncovering historical sites, several residents and cultural activists in provinces such as Bamyan, Uruzgan, Badakhshan, Nimroz, and others expressed concerns over the destruction of historical monuments during the year.

All countries around the world have historical and archaeological sites, but certain developments have led to these artifacts and sites remaining hidden from public view.

In 2024, approximately 150 historical and archaeological sites were discovered and documented in various provinces of Afghanistan.

Among the discoveries were 90 sites in Jawzjan province, 20 sites in Helmand province, and 13 sites in Farah province.

Faqir Maiwand, a former senior advisor to the Ministry of Information and Culture, said: "I hope Afghanistan's historical monuments will be treated responsibly, and experts with skills and knowledge will be involved in their discovery and display."

Restoration of historical monuments is one of the most valuable branches of architecture, ensuring the longevity of a historical monument for many years.

During the year, over eight historical monuments were restored in the provinces of Herat, Bamyan, Kandahar, Ghazni, and Kabul.

The strengthening of the Minaret of Jam in Ghor, the 80% progress in restoring the Kabul Bala Hissar, and the initiation of restoration work on the National Archives were among the notable restoration projects this year.

Mohammad Hasib Nasimi, the head of the Directorate of Preservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments, stated: "The Directorate of Preservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments has worked on restoring around 15 historical monuments since the beginning of 1403 (solar year). Fortunately, the restoration of over eight monuments has been completed, and work on five others is ongoing. Additionally, the restoration of three other historical monuments may be completed this week."

Abdul Rahman Ehsas, a cultural expert, said: "Immediate action must be taken to preserve these sites, as it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Information and Culture, particularly since some of these monuments are United Nations educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)-listed."

This year, the Ministry of Information and Culture established committees to restore historical sites, preserve cultural values, and protect the national languages of the country.

Meeting finalizes action plan for Huqooq-e-Pakistan project-II

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting regarding Huqooq-e-Pakistan Project-II, was held here at Chief Minister's Secretariat the other day, with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. The meeting discussed and finalized an action plan for the effective imple-



mentation of the project and achieving its desired objectives. Federal Secretary for Human Rights Allah Dino Khawaja, Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shah Faisal Utman Khel, as well as representatives from relevant federal and provincial departments and the UNDP, attended the meeting.

The meeting decided to have a coordinated mechanism between the relevant federal and provincial departments for the implementation of the project. A briefing was provided about the project's key features, objectives, proposed activities, areas of coordination challenges, and other related matters. It was informed that this 3.5 years long project is being launched with the cooperation of the

European Union and the UNDP, aimed at strengthening relevant institutions and improving the human rights situation in the province.

It was apprised that under the project, human rights institutions will be established to enhance the delivery of services in the province, and all data related to human rights

will be digitized, and added that the digitization/Integration of data will also help streamline the people-centered complaint management system. Furthermore, the project will introduce human rights-related programs in the higher education sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the provincial government will identify two universities for this purpose.

Additionally, various measures have been proposed under the program for implementing the Human Rights National Action Plan in the province.

The Chief Minister assured the provincial government's full cooperation for the proper implementation of the project and directed all relevant

departments to ensure their support in this regard. He stated that the government aims to centralize the database of marginalized and underprivileged segments of society, and has already instructed the concerned authorities in this regard. He expressed hope that this project would contribute to the ongoing efforts of the provincial government. The Chief Minister emphasized the importance of a comprehensive and integrated database of deserving and underprivileged groups, stating that the establishment of a centralized database and centers would enable the provision of uniform and quality facilities to all. He added that the provincial government is working to provide necessary equipment and facilities to individuals with disabilities across the province, and the establishment of the database will accelerate progress in this regard.

He directed the appointment of focal persons for effective coordination with relevant institutions for project implementation. He also instructed the formation of a steering committee at the provincial level to ensure the project runs on sustainable basis. He emphasized including officials from the Finance and P&D departments in the steering committee, as these departments have the capacity to sustain the project permanently.



GAZA STRIP: A field hospital flooded following heavy rains in Khan Younis.

KP PA proceedings adjourned due to lack of quorum

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly proceedings, chaired by Speaker Babar Salim Swati on Wednesday, adjourned until January 13, at 2 p.m. due to lack of quorum. The proceedings began with the recitation of the Quran. However, immediately after, an opposition member pointed out a lack of quorum. At that point, only 24 members were present in the House. In response, the Speaker ordered to rung the bells for two minutes.

Once the session resumed, the required number of members for continuing the proceedings was still not met. As a result, the Speaker adjourned the session until Monday at 2 p.m. January 13. It is worth mentioning here that the provincial assembly proceedings was initially scheduled to begin at 2 p.m. on Wednesday, but it was delayed by over four hours. This led to journalists in the press gallery boycotting the proceedings.

Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Babar Saleem Swati, approved and signed the rules of the "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Employees (Terms and Conditions of Service) Bill, 2024."

With this development, the rules regarding the terms and conditions of service for assembly employees have been granted legal status. On this occasion, the Speaker said that this legislation marks a significant step towards clarifying the rights and responsibilities of assembly employees and improving institutional performance. He further emphasized that the implementation of this bill would help address employees' concerns and ensure transparency in the administrative affairs of the institution.

10 dead after truck crashes into US crowd

LOUISIANA (AFP): At least 10 people were killed and 30 or more injured when a truck intentionally drove into a large crowd on Canal and Bourbon Street in New Orleans' French Quarter at a high speed early on Wednesday, city officials said.

The incident occurred at the intersection of Canal and Bourbon Streets during New Year's Eve celebrations, the city said in a statement. Bourbon Street is a historic tourist destination in the city's French Quarter, known for attracting large crowds with its music and bars.

Investigators have found a suspected improvised explosive device at the scene, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) said on Wednesday. "We are working on confirming if this is a viable device or not," Special Agent Alethea Duncan told a news conference after the attack. Police Chief Anne Kirkpatrick said at a televised news conference a driver intentionally drove into a crowd at around 3:15am.

"This man was trying to run over as many people as he could," Kirkpatrick said. "He was hell bent on creating the carnage and damage that he did," she added. Kirkpatrick said the driver fired at police and struck two police officers after his vehicle crashed.

She said there were more than 300 officers that were on duty at the time of the incident and that the FBI will be taking over the investigation. "A horrific act of violence took place on Bourbon Street earlier this morning," the governor of Louisiana, Jeff Landry, said on X, urging people to stay away from the area where the attack took place.

Fresh Israeli strikes kill 12 in Gaza

GAZA (AP): Israeli strikes killed at least 12 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, mostly women and children, officials said Wednesday, as the nearly 15-month war ground on into the new year with no end in sight.

One strike hit a home in the Jabaliya area of northern Gaza, the most isolated and heavily destroyed part of the territory, where Israel has been waging a major operation since early October. Gaza's Health Ministry said seven people were killed, including a woman and four children, and at least a dozen other people were wounded. Another strike overnight in the built-up Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza killed a woman and a child, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies.

The military said militants fired rockets at Israel from the Bureij area overnight and that its forces responded with a strike targeting a militant. The military also issued evacuation

orders for the area that were posted online. A third strike early Wednesday in the southern city of Khan Younis killed three people, according to the nearby Nasser Hospital and the European Hospital, which received the bodies.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people and abducting around 250. About 100 hostages are still held in Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Israel's air and ground offensive has killed over 45,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It says women and children make up more than half the fatalities but does not say how many of those killed were militants.

The Israeli military says it only targets militants and blames Hamas for civilian deaths because its fighters operate in dense residential areas. The army says it has killed 17,000 militants, without providing evi-

dence. The war has caused widespread destruction and displaced some 90 percent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, many of them multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are living in tents on the coast as winter brings frequent rainstorms and temperatures drop below 10 degrees Celsius (50 F) at night. At least six infants and another person have died of hypothermia, according to the Health Ministry.

American and Arab mediators have spent nearly a year trying to broker a ceasefire and hostage release, but those efforts have repeatedly stalled. Hamas has demanded a lasting truce, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to keep fighting until "total victory" over the militants. Israel sees net departure of citizens for a second year. More than 82,000 Israelis moved abroad in 2024 and only 33,000 people immigrated to the country, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics said.

Iran to hold nuclear talks with 3 European powers

TEHRN (AFP): Iran will hold nuclear talks with France, Britain, and Germany on Jan. 13 in Switzerland, local media reported on Wednesday, quoting a foreign ministry official.

"The new round of talks between Iran and three European countries will be held in Geneva on January 13," said Kazem Gharibabadi, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, according to ISNA news agency. He added the talks were only "consultations, not negotiations."

The three European countries had on Dec. 17 accused Iran of growing its stockpile of high-enriched uranium to "unprecedented levels" without "any credible civilian justification." They have also raised the possibility of restoring sanctions against Iran to keep it from developing its

nuclear program. Iran has in recent years increased its manufacturing of enriched uranium such that it is the only non-nuclear weapons state to possess uranium enriched to 60 percent, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) nuclear watchdog said. That level is well on the way to the 90 percent required for an atomic bomb. On November 29, Iran held a discreet meeting with the three European powers in Geneva which Gharibabadi at the time described as "candid." Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and has consistently denied any ambition of developing nuclear weapons capability.

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in all state matters, has long issued a religious decree, or

fatwa, prohibiting atomic weapons. Late Monday, Iran's security chief Ali Akbar Ahmadian maintained that Iran has "not changed" its nuclear doctrine against pursuing atomic weapons. The January 13 talks will take place one week before Donald Trump's return to the White House.

In 2015, Iran and world powers — including France, Britain and Germany — reached an agreement that saw the easing of international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. But the United States, during Trump's first term in office, unilaterally withdrew from the accord in 2018 and reimposed biting economic sanctions. Tehran adhered to the deal until Washington's withdrawal, and then began rolling back on its commitments.

Russian gas flow to Europe via Ukraine stopped

MOSCOW: The flow of Russian gas to several European countries was halted on New Year's Day after Ukraine refused to renegotiate a transit deal amid war with Moscow.

Ukraine's unwillingness to renew the five-year-old transit agreement aims to rob Russia of revenue that Moscow can use to fund its war, but the move will likely create an energy crisis in Eastern Europe, with Transnistria — a breakaway region — cutting heat and hot water supplies to households.

"It brings to a final end what was once Russia's dominance of the EU energy market," Al Jazeera's Jonah Hull, reporting from Ukraine's capital Kyiv, said. Before the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia supplied some 35 percent of Europe's pipeline natural gas exports. With the shutdown of Russia's oldest gas route to Europe, functional for more than 40 years, Russia's share has dwindled to less than 10 percent. Another gas pipeline passing through Türkiye still supplies gas to countries such as Hungary. So, how will turning off the taps during the height of the winter season affect countries, particularly in Eastern Europe and what could

happen next?

Russian energy giant Gazprom said on Wednesday that gas supplies to Europe had been halted at 8am local time (05:00 GMT) after Ukraine's state-owned oil and gas company Naftogaz refused to renew its latest five-year transit deal. On Wednesday, Ukraine's Energy Minister German Galushchenko said in a statement, "We stopped the transit of Russian gas. This is an historic event. Russia is losing its markets, it will suffer financial losses. Europe has already made the decision to abandon Russian gas." The latest contract was first signed in 2020 under which Ukraine was paid transport fees. But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had warned that Kyiv would not renew the transit agreement amid the continuing war.

Many European countries began to reduce their reliance on Russian gas after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. At its peak, Moscow's share of European gas imports stood at 35 percent, but has fallen to about 8 percent. The European Union received less than 14 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas from Russia through Ukraine as of December 1,

down from 65bcm per year when the contract began in 2020. The gas is sent through the Soviet-era U r e n g o y - P o m a r y - Uzhgorod pipeline from Siberia through Sudzha, a town in Russia's Kursk region which is now under the Ukrainian military's control. The gas moves via Ukraine into Slovakia. There, the pipeline splits into branches which take the supply to the Czech Republic and Austria.

The transit deal was bringing financial returns for both Russia and Ukraine. Ukrainian media quoted Serhii Makohon, former head of the Ukrainian GTS Operator, estimating that Russia made a significantly higher amount of money from the transit deal than Ukraine. Makohon estimated that Russia was earning \$5bn a year, a number also reported by the Reuters news agency. On the other hand, Ukraine was receiving an annual \$800m "but most of this money is spent on transit itself. [Ukraine's] treasury receives \$100-200m in taxes and dividends," Makohon was quoted by Ukrainska Pravda. Bloomberg estimated Russia's earnings from the deal to be even higher, at \$6.5bn annually. — Aljazeera

S Arabia executes six Iraqians

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has executed six Iraqians sentenced for drug trafficking, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Wednesday. The Iranian nationals were executed in the Eastern Province after being convicted of smuggling hashish into the Kingdom.

After being arrested by Saudi security authorities, the smugglers were referred to the competent court. A ruling was issued against them after their guilt was proven and they were sentenced to death. The ruling became final after it was appealed and then upheld by the Supreme Court, and a royal order was issued to enforce the punishment, the SPA said. The Ministry of Interior said that the government is protecting the security of citizens and residents from the scourge of drugs, and imposing the most severe penalties stipulated by the system on smugglers and dealers. — Arab News

Surge in fake calls to Rescue 1122

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: In 2024, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa saw a dramatic increase in both terrorism-related incidents and public negligence, as new figures reveal a staggering number of fake emergency calls to the province's Rescue 1122 service. According to data released, Rescue 1122 received a total of 7.3 million calls throughout the year, out of which a concerning 4.5 million were found to be false or prank calls.

The data highlights the widespread issue of public irresponsibility in the face of real emergencies, with major cities like Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, and Mardan leading the charge in fake call statistics. In Peshawar alone, over 6.6 million calls were received, many of which were unverified or malicious in nature.

The figures show that the overall emergency call volume across the province includes notable numbers from other districts such as Mardan (551,997 calls), Dera Ismail Khan (594,828 calls), and Swat (198,814 calls). Despite the serious nature of threats like terrorism, target killings, extortion, and street crimes, the public continues to misuse emergency services, undermining their ability to respond swiftly to actual crises.

Further scrutiny of the data also points to a worrying trend in other areas, with districts such as Nowshera, Kohat, and Hangu seeing hundreds of thousands of false calls. The scale of this issue stretches from Chitral to South Waziristan, where millions of calls flood the emergency response system-most of which are bogus.

This situation raises serious concerns about the lack of civic responsibility in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as people appear to prioritize trivial matters over critical emergency services, leaving the region vulnerable in the face of increasing criminal activity and terrorism. The authorities are urging the public to recognize the importance of these services and to avoid misusing them, as it hampers the ability of rescue operations to assist those in genuine need.

Accused granted bail against surety bond of Rs100

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In an interesting turn of events, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday granted bail to Shahid Hussain Khawaja, a co-accused in the Rs3.20 billion sales tax fraud case, against the surety bond of meagre Rs100. The court declared the tax department's criminal probe as an excess of authority.

IHC Justice Babar Sattar directed to send a copy of the court's order to Federal Bureau of Revenue's (FBR)

Chairman Mahmood Langrial. According to the verdict, the manager of a bank was arrested for helping in opening account at power company branch. It said that the state did not provide any material regarding the petitioner's involvement in the tax fraud crime.

The court also said that the tax department did not determine the tax due on the taxpayer as per the law. Moreover, the verdict said that the tax department arrested the petitioner in violation of the Lahore

High Court's verdict.

The tax department initiated criminal proceedings despite being aware of the LHC's verdict, said the IHC, adding that the FBR chairman should distribute the copies of the LHC and IHC's judgments to the tax officers. The court said in case of violation, the tax collection authority and the tax officers will face action for misuse of powers. The IHC further remarked that the legal and police powers delegated to public officials should be exercised in accordance with the law.

PHC grants bail to two PTI MNAs

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) divisional bench comprising of Justice Naem Anwar and Justice Fazal Subhan has sought a response from the federal government and other parties regarding the provision of details of cases filed against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Atif Khan.

The lawyer Bashir Wazir informed the court that the petitioner is MNA and that multiple cases have been registered against him following the November 24 protests. However, he stated that the details of these cases have not been provided to him.

Justice Naem Anwar remarked that the court will seek a report from the feder-

al government and other relevant parties. Atif Khan's lawyer also requested the court to grant protective bail to the petitioner and direct the authorities not to arrest him in the registered cases.

Justice Fazal Subhan observed that the court cannot issue a blanket order in this regard. The lawyer argued that the Peshawar High Court has granted protective bail in similar cases in the past. Justice Naem Anwar remarked that the Supreme Court has declared such routine orders as unlawful. Subsequently, the court granted protective bail to Atif Khan until January 16 and directed the relevant authorities to provide details of the cases registered against him by January 16.

Meanwhile, PHC has granted interim bail to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

(PTI) leader and Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Barrister Umar Ayaz Khan Niazi until January 16. The court has also directed him to appear before the relevant court.

PHC Justice Naem Anwar heard the arguments. The counsel for the petitioner, Adil Butt Advocate, informed the court that his client is an elected MNA from Mianwali and a case has been registered against him at the Pirpai police station in Mianwali. The court was informed that the petitioner has already been granted interim bail in 10 other cases. After completing the arguments, the court granted interim bail to Umar Ayaz Khan Niazi until January 16 and directed him to appear before the relevant court at the scheduled time.

S Korea to send Jeju Air crash black box to US

SEOUL (AFP): South Korean investigators probing a Jeju Air crash which killed 179 people in the worst aviation disaster on its soil said Wednesday they will send one of the retrieved black boxes to the United States for analysis.

The plane was carrying 181 people from Thailand on Sunday when it issued a mayday call and belly-landed before hitting a barrier and bursting into flames, killing everyone aboard except two flight attendants pulled from the burning wreckage. South Korean and US investigators, including from Boeing, have been combing the crash site in southwestern Muan since the disaster Sunday.

"The damaged flight data recorder has been deemed unrecoverable for data extraction domestically," said South Korea's deputy minister for civil aviation, Joo Jong-wan. "It was agreed today to transport it to the United States for analysis in collaboration with the US National Transportation Safety Board." Joo earlier said both of the plane's black boxes were retrieved, and for the cockpit voice recorder, "the initial extraction has already been completed." "Based on this preliminary data, we plan to start converting it into audio format," he said, meaning investigators would be able to hear the pilots' final communica-

tions.

The second black box, the flight data recorder, "was found with a missing connector", Joo said. "Experts are currently conducting a final review to determine how to extract data from it." Officials initially pointed to a bird strike as a possible cause of the disaster, but they have since said the probe was also examining a concrete barrier at the end of the runway, which dramatic video showed the Boeing 737-800 colliding with before bursting into flames.

They also said that a special inspection of all Boeing 737-800 models operated by local carriers was examining their landing gear after questions over a possible mechanical failure in the crash. The ongoing inspections are "focusing mainly on the landing gear, which failed to deploy properly in this case", said the director general for aviation safety policy, Yoo Kyeong-soo. Local media reported the landing gear had deployed properly on Jeju Air Flight 2216's first failed landing attempt at Muan airport before failing on the second.

The issue "will likely be examined by the Accident Investigation Board through a comprehensive review of various testimonies and evidence during the investigation process", the ministry of land, which oversees civil aviation, said at a briefing. At Muan airport, grieving

families of victims had become increasingly frustrated by delays in identifying and releasing the bodies. Officials have said the bodies were extensively damaged by the crash, making the work of identifying remains slow and immensely difficult, even as investigators had to preserve crash-site evidence.

But the country's acting president Choi Sang-mok, who has been in office less than a week, said Wednesday the process had finally been completed, and that more bodies had been handed over to relatives so that they could hold funerals. "Our investigators, along with the US National Transportation Safety Board and the manufacturer, are conducting a joint investigation into the cause of the accident," Choi said at a disaster response meeting Wednesday.

"A comprehensive analysis and review of the aircraft's structure and the black box data will reveal the cause of the accident," Choi added. The US investigators had arrived Monday and headed straight to Muan, with the initial on-site joint probe focusing on a navigation system known as a localiser that assists in aircraft landings. The localiser, installed on a concrete structure at Muan International Airport, is the barrier that has been blamed for exacerbating the severity of the Jeju Air crash.