

Section 144 invoked
F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In view of the prevailing law and order situation in District Kurram following the recent terrorist attacks, the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has imposed, Section 144, in District Kurram. The order, issued by the Home & Tribal Affairs Department, bans the gathering of more than five persons and prohibits the display of weapons across the district.



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Rahim Yar Khan: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Sunday talking to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

PM, UAE President discuss ways to enhance ties

RAHIM YAR KHAN (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Sunday met with His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates here and discussed matters of mutual and bilateral interest.

During the meeting, both leaders expressed their shared commitment to deepening economic, political, and cultural ties. They discussed a wide range of issues, including economic collaboration, regional stability, climate change, and the promotion of mutual interests on the global stage.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif praised the UAE's visionary leadership and its role as a key partner for Pakistan in development and investment. He under-

scored Pakistan's readiness to expand cooperation in sectors such as renewable energy, technology, trade, infrastructure and skill development.

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan highlighted the UAE's keen interest in collaborating with Pakistan in the mining, minerals, and agriculture sectors. He expressed admiration for the manner in which Pakistan's economy has stabilized and is moving in the right direction under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. He emphasized that this renewed economic vigor has created prospects for enhanced bilateral investment and collaboration.

In his remarks, His Highness also reiterated the UAE's commitment to

enhancing its longstanding partnership with Pakistan, emphasizing the importance of people-to-people connections and shared prosperity.

Prime Minister Sharif extended his gratitude to His Highness for the UAE's unwavering support during critical times, particularly in humanitarian assistance and development aid. Both leaders reaffirmed their dedication to peace and progress in the region, vowing to work closely on matters of mutual interest.

The meeting concluded with a joint resolve to foster greater cooperation, particularly in priority sectors, ensuring a brighter future for both nations.

During the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar,

Chief Minister of Punjab Ms. Maryam Nawaz, Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Syed Tariq Fatemi were present.

In a post on X, the prime minister later said, "Delighted to meet with my dear brother, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of UAE, today in Rahimyar Khan. Reaffirmed Pakistan's strong commitment to further strengthen Pak-UAE cooperation and elevate our ties to a mutually beneficial strategic partnership. Matters of mutual interest including investments in Pakistan were discussed with a resolve to move forward together."

PTI's delay in written demands barrier in talk process: Irfan

PTI's Asad Qaiser takes major U-Turn on written demands

ISLAMABAD (APP): Spokesperson for the government's coalition dialogue committee, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, on Saturday revealed that no progress has been made in the ongoing talks with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as the party has yet to present its demands.

Talking to a private news channel, Siddiqui said the dialogue process had not been proceeded a bit for the last 12 days.

The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) offered the dialogue several times before to strengthen democracy, he added.

He said that the govern-

ment under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is striving for the welfare of the country while PTI is trying to create facilities for its leader.

The PML-N government has overcome the economic downturn due to its consistent policies, he added.

PTI's Asad Qaiser takes major U-Turn on written demands

Asad Qaiser, a prominent leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and a member of the negotiation committee, has made a significant U-turn regarding the written demands. This move raises new

questions about the ongoing negotiations, as he backed away from his earlier commitment to provide written demands.

In a conversation with a private news channel, political observers interpreted Qaiser's statement as introducing 'new conditions.'

They noted that PTI appears to have reversed its stance on the assurances made during the previous two rounds of negotiations. In both joint statements, PTI leaders had promised to submit their demands in writing to the government's negotiation committee. Previously, the PTI negotiation team had

insisted on holding meetings only with Imran Khan. Qaiser reiterated that their committee's role was limited to facilitating communication, while the final decisions would be made by Imran Khan.

Observers have expressed concern that this shift in position could lead to a deadlock in the negotiations, making the scheduling of the next meeting uncertain. Government committee spokesperson Senator Irfan Siddiqui has already warned that if PTI fails to submit its written demands as promised, it could complicate the negotiations further.

PML-N always supports dialogue: Khawaja Asif

ISLAMABAD (APP): Defense Minister Khawaja Asif emphasized on Sunday that the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) as a political party is always committed to hold dialogue for resolution of the issues.

Talking on a private news channel, he said, "PML-N has consistently encouraged negotiations to strengthen democracy in the country."

"We have done numerous past efforts to promote

democratic supremacy," he added.

The minister also addressed the ongoing talks between the government and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

The negotiations have so far been limited to discussions without any concrete outcomes, he said.

He further added, "PTI has been given a week's time, and we are hopeful for positive developments in the negotiations."

Khawaja Asif condemned the recent firing on a government convoy in Kurram following a peace agreement in the region.

He assured that the federal government would stand shoulder to shoulder with the provincial administration to address such threats.

"The federal government is fully committed to combating this menace alongside the provincial government," he said.

CNG stations in KP to remain closed

ABBOTTABAD (APP): In an effort to prioritize gas supply for domestic consumers, all CNG stations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will remain closed on Sundays and Mondays.

According to the latest directives, CNG stations will also operate under restricted hours on other days. From Tuesday onward, stations will function from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily until the gas supply situation improves.

Sui Northern Gas pipelines Limited (SNGPL) Hazara division officials have warned that strict action will be taken against any violations of the schedule. CNG stations found operating outside the designated hours will face immediate disconnection of gas supply.

The move is aimed at ensuring uninterrupted gas availability for households during the winter season, as demand continues to surge.

SCBA flays recent terror attacks

ISLAMABAD (APP): Supreme Court Bar Association President Mian Muhammad Rauf Atta on Sunday expressed deep sorrow over the recent terrorist attacks in Kurram, Parachinar and Turbat which have resulted in considerable loss of life.

According to press release, in Kurram several individuals including the Deputy Commissioner and law enforcement officials sustained injuries. Meanwhile, in Turbat, four innocent civilians lost their lives due to an explosion and over thirty-two others were seriously injured.

Mian Muhammad Rauf Atta extended heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery for the injured.

Musk 'waiting for approval from govt' to launch Starlink in Pakistan

KARACHI (AA): Tech billionaire Elon Musk confirmed on Saturday that Starlink applied to launch internet services in Pakistan but was "waiting for approval from the government."

Musk responded to a post on X by a Pakistani user, who said Starlink internet services could "leap" Pakistan "into the future, where every citizen has the chance to connect and grow."

"Please, let Starlink be our bridge to tomorrow," the user urged the billionaire, who owns X and the electric vehicle company Tesla.

Later, in a second post



tagging Musk, the user claimed Pakistan had "approved Starlink!"

"Now is the perfect time to bring your transformative internet service

user said.

Musk's confirmation of his intention to launch Starlink in Pakistan comes at a time when the nation topped the list of countries that suffered the most due to internet outages in 2024.

According to Top10VPN.com, an independent VPN reviewer, the global internet disruption lasted 88,788 hours last year which caused a financial loss of \$7.69 billion.

It said Pakistan was the single most affected nation with \$1.62bn in losses, followed by Myanmar (\$1.58bn) and Sudan (\$1.12bn).

idents from the affected area may be necessary to facilitate clearance operations. A bounty will also be announced for key offenders. Meanwhile, the District Police Officer of Kurram will be provided with anti-riot equipment, lady police personnel, and other resources to maintain order. The police will remove any unauthorized blockades or gatherings on the Thall-Parachinar road, and additional police forces and Frontier Corps units will be deployed to ensure the road's security.

The government has reiterated its commitment to dealing with those disrupting peace with an iron hand. If the individuals involved in the attack are not handed over, further decisive action will be taken at the incident site. The transportation of essential goods convoys will resume shortly, and Section 144 has been imposed across Kurram district. Curfews will be enforced during the movement of convoys, and anyone found carrying weapons will be treated as a terrorist. In the event of continued non-cooperation, the government has warned that temporary relocation of res-

KP govt holds high-level meeting on Kurram Security vrisis

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government convened a crucial meeting in Kohat on January 5, 2025, to address the worsening security situation in Kurram district. The meeting was called in response to the January 4 attack on Deputy Commissioner Javedullah Mehsud and the disruption of goods convoys in the region. Senior administrative officials participated in the session, where important decisions were made to restore peace and ensure law and order.

It was decided that elders who signed the Kurram Peace Agreement will be held accountable for its

implementation. The perpetrators of the January 4 attack and their facilitators will be named in an FIR, and anti-terrorism cases will be registered against them. Arrests will be made, and the culprits will also be placed under Schedule-IV to restrict their movements. The elders have been instructed to hand over the attackers and their supporters. In case of non-compliance, strict measures will be taken, including the arrest of the accused, administrative actions on Thall-Parachinar and Tora Warai-Shasho roads, suspension of aid and compensation in the affected areas, and disciplinary proceedings against government employees found to be sup-

porting sectarian violence. The government has reiterated its commitment to dealing with those disrupting peace with an iron hand.

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Monitor reports blasts at arms depots near Damascus

DAMASCUS (AFP): A Syria war monitor said explosions on Sunday rocked an area near Damascus housing weapons depots used by the toppled government of Bashar al-Assad.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said the blasts in the Kisweh area, south of the Syrian capital, may be the result of an Israeli air strike.

The Israeli military,

which has struck many military sites in Syria since Assad's fall, told AFP in Jerusalem it did not attack the site.

The Britain-based Observatory, which has a network of sources in Syria, said that "loud blasts resonated in the wider capital area". The explosions occurred "at ammunition depots of the former regime forces... near the town of Kisweh", sending a thick

cloud of smoke billowing over the site, the Observatory said.

An AFP video journalist saw small fires burning in the blackened rubble of a flattened building on the outskirts of the town of Kisweh. Several other one-storey buildings stood undamaged nearby.

The explosions continued into Sunday evening, ringing out across surrounding areas, the journalist said.



KARACHI: A view of encroachments at Khokra needs the attention of concerned authroties. —INP Photo

Fog, low visibility disrupts flights

LAHORE (INP): Dense fog and low visibility around Allama Iqbal International Airport Lahore have led to partial disruptions in flight operations, causing the cancellation of one flight while seven were delayed.

According to details, Airblue flight PA 402 from Karachi has been cancelled while Airblue flight PA 417 from Dubai is experiencing a 12-hour delay.

Additionally, a foreign airline flight HH 7207 from Mashhad is delayed by three hours.

Moreover, Serene Air's flight ER 524 from Karachi to Lahore is facing a one-hour delay, while Saudi flight SV 739 from Lahore to Jeddah is delayed by 10 hours. Airblue's flight PA 410 from Lahore to Dubai is also experiencing a six-hour delay.

On the other hand, intense fog also engulfed the plains of Punjab resulting in the closure of several sections of the motorway.

Read more: Private airline plane 'hit by bird' minutes after take-off at Lahore airport Lahore is covered by fog, and the visibility limit in some areas is restricted to 100 meters.

Authorities in the province have shut down various sections of motorways owing to poor visibility. Motorway M-2 has been closed from Lahore to Kot Momin and M-3 from Lahore to Abdul Hakeem, owing to thick fog, the Motorways Police said.

M-4 motorway section has been closed from Faisalabad to Pindi Bhattian and motorway M-5 from Multan to Uch Sharif owing to poor visibility caused by foggy conditions.

Minister expresses grief over van accident

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique expressed deep sorrow over the tragic van accident in Bahawalnagar which resulted in several casualties and injuries.

According to a handout issued on Sunday, the minister directed health authorities to provide the best possible medical care to the injured who were immediately shifted to nearby hospitals. He emphasized ensuring that no effort is spared in treating the victims.

Rescue 1122 teams promptly shifted the injured to various hospitals for emergency treatment.

The minister praised the rescue teams for their swift response and assured the families that the government stands with them in this difficult time.

Pervaiz pays tribute to ZAB on 97th birth anniversary

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Central Punjab President and former Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf paid heartfelt tribute to the founder of the party, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, on his 97th birth anniversary, hailing him as a transformative leader who reshaped Pakistan into a strong, independent, and people-centric state.

In his message on Sunday, he described Bhutto as a leader of the masses and a staunch advocate for laborers, farmers, and youths. He credited

ZAB with embedding the spirit of democracy in Pakistan, giving the country its first unanimous constitution, and laying the foundation for an invincible defence through the nuclear program. "Bhutto's vision continues to guarantee the nation's survival and sovereignty," he remarked.

Highlighting ZAB's contributions, Ashraf stated that he elevated Pakistan's dignity on the global stage, with every decision reflecting the aspirations of the people. "His politics revolved around serving the people,

not seeking power. ZAB sacrificed his life but never compromised on the rights of the people," he added.

Raja Pervaiz Ashraf emphasized that the death of ZAB remains an eternal symbol of the struggle for democracy and inspires the nation to stand firm against challenges. He called for unity to overcome obstacles to progress, justice, and democracy. "Today, we must pledge to transform Pakistan into a strong, developed, and sovereign state, following the vision of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto," concluded Raja Pervaiz Ashraf.

Martyred city wardens, fire brigade staff honoured

KARACHI (PPI): Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab on Sunday honoured the city wardens and fire brigade staff with Tamgha-e-Karachi for sacrificing their lives for the protection of citizens' lives and property.

Speaking at the ceremony held to pay glowing tribute to the martyrs, Mr Wahab said that individuals who had rendered services for the city were valuable assets for them. He paid tribute to the martyrs of the City Warden and Fire Brigade Departments.

Deputy Mayor Karachi Salman Abdullah Murad, Deputy Parliamentary Leader Dil Muhammad, Municipal Commissioner Afzal Zaidi, elected representatives, and depart-

mental heads of KMC were also present at the event. Wahab remarked that the heroes of today's ceremony are those who made sacrifices.

He further stated that the decision to honor these individuals and martyrs was made by the City Council members, and this was the first ceremony organized by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. It was also decided that this ceremony would be held annually on January 5 to appreciate those who have contributed to making the city greater.

Wahab reiterated that no service is greater than the sacrifice of one's life. He assured that alongside infrastructural improvements and development

works, efforts to promote Karachi's cultural and heritage activities will continue. The restoration of the city's historic buildings and sites will also be undertaken.

The Karachi mayor stressed that Karachi belongs to all its residents, and services will be rendered without discrimination of any kind. He highlighted ongoing development works across Karachi's seven districts and declared 2025 as the year of Karachi's development, affirming that KMC has sufficient funds for all projects. Rejecting past complaints about lack of authority or funds, he pledged that promises made to the public would be fulfilled.

Lasting regional peace hinges on Kashmir plebiscite

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir, Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon on Sunday stated that resolving the Kashmir issue through a plebiscite in line with UN Security Council resolutions is crucial for achieving peace in the region.

In his message on Kashmir Right to Self-Determination Day, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir, Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon emphasized that on January 5, 1949, the United Nations Security Council recognized the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination, by adopting a resolution endorsing their right to decide their future through a referendum.

He stated that the Kashmiri people on both

sides of the Line of Control are currently celebrating their fundamental right to self-determination.

He stated that the Kashmiri people have been striving for their right to self-determination for over seven decades, with innocent children, women, and elders making immense sacrifices in this pursuit.

The Kashmiri people will persist in their struggle until they secure their right to self-determination.

He urged the United Nations to ensure the implementation of resolutions concerning the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination, emphasizing that the oppression and repression by the Indian government cannot suppress their movement for this right.

He said Kashmir is the jugular vein of Pakistan,

and the Pakistani people share a deep bond with the Kashmiri people. Pakistan will steadfastly continue to support the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination and their struggle for freedom.

He urged the United Nations to acknowledge the legitimate demand of the Kashmiri people for self-determination in line with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon stated that a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue is crucial, in line with the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. He emphasized that Pakistan will persist in providing steadfast moral, diplomatic, and political support to the Kashmiri people on all regional and international platforms.

LESCO detects 176,803 power pilferers

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has so far detected a total of 176,803 connections from where customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) during its ongoing anti-power theft campaign.

The LESCO spokesman told media here Sunday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against electricity thieves, out of which 164,469 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 45,667 accused have been arrested by the respective police.

Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity thieves are being conducted on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these operations. The LESCO chief vowed that the operations would continue without discrimination until the complete end of electricity theft. The electricity pilferers as well as the LESCO officers and employees who facilitate them are also being brought to justice.

During the anti-power theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were also found involved in electricity theft. Among the seized connections, 5,461 commercial, 1,712 agricultural, 359 industrial and 169,271 domestic, and all of them were also disconnected and charged with detection units. All these connections were disconnected and charged with a total of 182,014,141 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 6,912,299,654.

WCLA arranges guided tour of old havelis of Lahore

LAHORE (APP): The Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA) on Sunday organized its monthly guided tour of Old Havelis in Walled Lahore, attracting 150 tourists.

The tour showcased several historic havelis, including Mubarak Haveli, Haveli Wajid Ali Shah, Noori Building, and Haveli Barood Khana, offering visitors a glimpse into the city's rich architectural legacy.

In addition to exploring these heritage sites, participants enjoyed the vibrant Rangeela Rikshaw ride and traditional cultural performances. Refreshments were also provided for the tourists, who praised the tour for its insightful look into Lahore's past. WCLA Deputy Director (Tourism) Asghar Hussain emphasized the significance of these havelis as a window into Lahore's social and architectural history. He said the Old Havelis of Androon Lahore are a significant element of the city's architectural legacy. They not only display traditional designs but also provide a window into the daily life of the past. Visiting these historic homes is like traveling back in time, allowing one to experience how people once lived and interacted within the social fabric of Old Lahore. These tours emphasize the architectural foundations established by common people, not just by rulers or officials, which have influenced the distinct structures of the old city, he added.

WCLA Director General Kamran Lashari said that the havelis, built during the Mughal, Sikh, and British periods, are an integral part of Lahore's heritage. He further highlighted the Authority's efforts to preserve these cultural treasures amid urbanization, with the addition of cultural performances to enrich the visitor experience.

100,000 homes to get free solar panels in Punjab: CM

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has announced that more than 100,000 homes in the province will receive free solar panels at a cost of Rs 10 billion. The registration deadline for the Chief

Minister's free solar panel scheme is today, January 5. In a statement issued on Sunday, the CM said homes consuming an average of 200 units of electricity on a single meter will be eligible for solar systems, which come in 550-watt and

1100-watt variants. The CM clarified that solar systems will be provided through a balloting process in June 2025 for consumers using up to 200 units of electricity.

Successful applicants will have solar panels installed in their homes. CM Maryam Nawaz also emphasized the convenience of registration, which can be done via the official portal at cmsolarscheme.punjab.gov.pk or by sending the bill reference number and National Identity Card number via SMS to 8800. Alternatively, citizens can contact the official helpline at 990302024.

The CM stated that the provision of solar panels will offer significant relief to the public by reducing electricity bills. She further emphasized that Punjab is poised to become a hub for renewable energy. She outlined plans to gradually convert agricultural tube wells to solar energy, enhancing sustainability in the farming sector. She highlighted the initiative to distribute 100,000 e-bikes to students and introduce e-buses, aiming to transform the province's transportation culture and promote eco-friendly alternatives.

PDP demands purging of 'blacksheep'

KARACHI (PPI): Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor on Sunday expressing serious concern over the result tempering scam in the Board of Intermediate Education Karachi (BIEK) and demanded of the authorities concerned to purge blacksheep from the city board.

In a statement, the PDP chief said that the authorities should come forward with concrete measures to sack corrupt officers of the Board and ensure installing of a result tempering proof system to save educational future of students of the megacity.

Mr Shakoor said the recent tempered results of the BIEK had sparked protests of students who said that they were given less numbers and many of them were deliberately failed. The PDP chief said that the Sindh government had sacked BIEK Chairman

Ameer Qadri on pretext of a foreign tour without government permission but it was not the whole story.

He alleged that a corrupt mafia working in educational boards of Karachi for decades was not being caught because vested interests in the Sindh government protected it. He said that there was widespread corruption and mismanagement not only in the BIEK but also in the Matriculation Board, where the vested interests changed the results of students and favoured their own candidates.

He asked: "Why only the students of Karachi boards are being targeted by these mafias while there is no such complaint from other educational boards in the province or country." He said the provincial government seemed to be directly patronising the corruption mafias in the educational boards of the megacity.

Shakoor demanded a complete overhauling of examination systems in our country to ensure transparency and fair play. He said objective type examination systems should be preferred to ensure better transparency. He said modern AI tools should be incorporated into examination and scripts checking methods. He said the examination models of Japan and Singapore should be studied and replicated in our country.

The PDP chief said that permanent officers with well reputation should be posted in Karachi boards instead of officers on acting charge. He said PDP had always highlighted mismanagement in educational entities of Karachi and provided legal help to the affected students.

He said the PDP would continue to play this role in future also.

IESCO notifies power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Sunday issued a power suspension programme for Tuesday (January 7) for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work.

According to IESCO Spokesperson, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period from 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM. ISLAMABAD CIRCLE, Abpara, China Chowk, G-8/2, Burma, Khanna Dak, Navi.I, Kundrjagaan, Ayub Market, G-9/3, I-8/2, Chishanap, I-10/4, G-13/2, Railway Road, Bhara Kahu, Bhara Koh.II, Company Bagh, PC, Kohala, TDCP, PAF, New Mangyal Feeders, Rawalpindi City Circle, Saidpur Road, Malikabad, Sadiqabad, Kurry Road, KRL, Jinnah Camp, Service Road, Gulzar Quaid, Tamsamaabad, Arya Mohalla, Major Masood, Industrial, Dhok Najo, Eidgh, Gwalmandi, Jinnah Road, Sarafa Bazar, Mohanpura, Kayani Road, Dhok Chowdhury, Radio PAK.I, Officer Colony, Jhangi, P&T Winny, EME Complex, Lukho Road, I-14/3, I-14/2, Mohanpora, Gulshan, UC Lakhna, Gulshan Saeed, Cantt, Major Riaz Manzoor, Lalazar, Jhawara, Lalkarti Feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, Pakistan Railways, Adamji Road, Rahmatabad.II, Media Town.I, Model Town, Murree Brewery, AOWHS, Major Riaz,

Shahpur, Dhamyal, Quaid-e-Azam Colony, Qasim Base, Chontra, Dhok Awan, Kahota City.II, Kaler Syedan, Nara Muttur, Sagri, DHA Homes, Redco, Sukhu, Nishan Hyder, Gumti, Gagan, Emirate, Sohan, Zaraj.I & II, Zeta.I, IST, Dhok Awan, Mohra, Nagyal Feeders, Attock Circle, Nawab Abad, Jalala, Ghori, Salargah, Nisar Shaheed, Museum, Shah Allah Ditta, Sarai Kharboza, PM Colony, Lal Rukh, Rashid Minhas, Munirabad, Islampura, Ahmednagar, Hazro, Qaziabad, Hattian, Shamsabad, GBHP, Nad Topa, Shakurdra, Visa, Attock Cantt, Gharibwal, Muthial, Murt, Bhandar, Kamrial, Khore, Galial, Ahmedal, Fateh Jang, Chhab, Noorpur, Pind Pran, Veli, Gulshan Saeed, Sangjani, Paswal, Sarai Kharboza Feeders, Jhelum Circle, F-7 Kachhari, CMA Ullah Shaheed, Sanha Jhelum, Langarpur, F-13 Garmala, Shakrela, Mandi Bhalwal, Shamsabad, Sarai Alamgir, Chhapran, F-6 Machine Mahalla, Boren, F-2 Chip Board, F-10 Kala Base, Industrial,

PTC, COD Kala, City Housing, Dina, 3 Rohtas, Dina, I Bakrala, New Domili, Sohan, F-12 Singhoi, Nathwala, Safdar Shahed, Mummatz Shahed, Hyat Sir Road, Suhawa Kacheri, Pind Mate Khan, Ghori Dhamek, Main Bazar, Nai Khangah, Kalia, Chhappar Sharif, Kursal, Shah Safir, Islampura. Feeders, Chakwal Circle, Bharpur, Ara Bazar, Khairpur, Main Bazar, Adi, Dhadyal Rural, Durgi Rajgaon, Sarkal, Basharat, Rawal, Ahmedabad, KS Maniz, Jalalpur, Kursal, Dharnal, Sukha, Dharabi, Akwal, Bilalabad, Multan Khard, Tuman Feeders, GSO Circle, From 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM, Navy.I, PWD.II, Sowan Garden-II, FECHS, CBR-I, Dr. Town Feeders, From 09:00 AM to 04:00 PM, 132KV Bestway Cement Factory Grid Station, People's Colony, Lalazar, Qasim Base, Radio Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Colony, Sohawa Kachery Pind Mate Khan, Shah Safir, Ghauri Dhamek, Main Bazaar, Nai Khangah, Karsal Feeders and surrounding areas.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public at large are informed that as per record of MEO Kohat Cantt, Plot No. 24 Survey No. 311 situated at Defence Officer Housing Scheme, Bannu Cantt, is registered in the name of Lt. Col (Retd) Meher Zaman through Lease schedule IX-A. Mr. Meher Zaman passed away on 06-08-2017 and now his below mentioned successors have requested for transfer of the Lease Hold rights of their names. (1) Parveen Zaman (Widow) (2) Saima Zaman (Daughter) (3) Sobia Sajjad (Daughter) (4) Alia Abid (Daughter) (5) Kamran Zaman (Son) (6) Salman Zaman (Son) (7) Faizan Zaman (Son).

In case any person or organization has any objection on the transfer of the above mentioned property, they should contact the undersigned within 15 days of publication of this Notice in written form. Otherwise the lease hold rights will be transferred to the names of the successors, and no claim will be accepted afterwards.

(ZAHID) Military Estates Officer, Kohat Circle, Kohat Cantt. 0922-9260201

LGH provided dialysis to over 18,000 patients

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore General Hospital (LGH) provided free dialysis services to over 18,000 patients in 2024, with plans now underway to establish a dedicated lab counter at the hospital's state-of-the-art dialysis center for improved patient convenience.

Principal of Ameruuddin Medical College, Professor Dr. Muhammad Alfareed Zafar, shared the news during his visit to the dialysis center on Sunday. He highlighted that, under the directives of Punjab Chief Minister

Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the LGH's dialysis center is operational 24/7, equipped with 30 dialysis machines offering free-of-cost treatment.

Dr. Zafar further stated that the facility includes separate machines and pathways for Hepatitis B and C patients to prevent cross-contamination and ensure safety. Addressing the center's staff, he stressed strict adherence to the Punjab Healthcare Commission's SOPs, meticulous screening procedures, and the maintenance of

updated patient records.

The Principal also directed AMS Vigilance Dr. Adnan Masood, Deputy Chief Nursing Superintendent Fazilat Lal, and other senior staff to conduct daily inspections of all hospital departments, particularly the dialysis center, and submit detailed reports to the Medical Superintendent (MS).

Additionally, he emphasized the need for comprehensive health screenings of healthcare professionals working at the dial-

ysis center every six months to safeguard their well-being. He reiterated the importance of modernizing healthcare services and implementing preventive measures to meet contemporary medical standards.

During the visit, several key officials, including MS Dr. Faryad Hussain, Professor of Urology Dr. Khizar Hayat Gondal, Professor of Nephrology Dr. Abid Rehman, and other health professionals, accompanied the Principal.

Young Women Leaders Summit sponsored by KP Directorate of Youth Affairs ends

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR The four-day Young Women Leaders Summit concluded in Murree the other day. Organized by The NATIVES, a youth-led organization dedicated to the empowerment and development of youth in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Pakistan, the summit was sponsored by the Directorate of Youth Affairs KP. The event focused on empowering young women from the newly merged districts of KP.

The summit featured a mix of celebrations, educational sessions, exposure visits, social networking, and entertainment. Thirty-five young women from the newly merged and southern districts of KP participated. The attendees expressed their gratitude to the

Directorate of Youth Affairs, KP, for providing such an enriching and informative experience, especially for those young women who have often been left behind in terms of opportunities.

The summit kicked off with ice-breaking and introductory sessions where participants shared their expectations, hopes, and views about the summit. The event was hosted by Ms. Nida, a participant from Bannu Wazir Subdivision. The first day of the summit culminated in vibrant New Year celebrations marked by music and fireworks, symbolizing their aspirations for a prosperous future.

The second day focused on empowering young women with knowledge. Renowned trainer and women's rights activist Jayaa Jaggi

from Islamabad led interactive sessions on women's empowerment, the role of women in promoting social harmony, and the importance of political participations. She commended the participants for their dedication and praised the instrumental support of the Directorate of Youth Affairs KP in facilitating such initiatives. After the sessions, the group enjoyed a visit to Mall Road Murree and PC Bhurban, where they attended a live music performance.

On the third day, Dr. Zafar Khan and Dr. Nadia conducted insightful sessions on early marriages and activism against gender-based violence. The participants engaged actively with the trainers, asking numerous questions to better understand these pressing issues.

The day also included a visit to New Murree, where participants enjoyed the scenic views and various recreational activities such as swings and chairlifts.

The final day of the summit was dedicated to discussions on female education and the role of culture in women's empowerment. Mr. Asif Khan, a researcher in this field, led the session, sharing valuable insights on how education and cultural norms influence the advancement of women. The participants left with a deeper understanding of these critical issues.

The four-day event proved to be an empowering experience for the young women of KP, who expressed their gratitude towards the Directorate of Youth Affairs KP for creating such opportunities.

Pakistan's economic ties with Asean: Challenges and way forward

Marium Akhtar

ASEAN region is crucial for international trade, food, energy security, and marine biodiversity. Ten countries, including Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which was founded in 1967. As of 2024, ASEAN ranks as the third-largest regional economy in Asia and the fifth-largest global economy, with an anticipated nominal GDP of US\$3.9 trillion, following the US, China, the EU, and India. ASEAN's economic standing reflects its dynamic expansion and increasing global significance in trade and industry. The insightful reviews present economic relations between Pakistan and ASEAN, highlighting collaboration prospects.

Pakistan's trade volume with ASEAN countries reached an all-time high of US\$10.3 bn in 2022. Ninety per cent of total Pak-ASEAN trade exists between five ASEAN countries: Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. Pakistan's total trade in 2023 accounted for US\$82.8bn, of which trade with ASEAN had approximately a 10% share.

Several formal trade and commerce mechanisms exist between Pakistan and ASEAN, including the Pakistan-ASEAN Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (2004), the Pakistan-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement (FTA 2007), and the Pakistan-Indonesia Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA 2012). Pakistan -Thailand Free Trade Agreement is currently being negotiated. Pakistan became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1993 and is also a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which addresses political and security issues but indirectly affects trade by fostering stability and cooperation. Additionally, it has bilateral Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) with several ASEAN countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, promoting trade, investment, and technical cooperation.

Pakistan and major ASEAN countries also engage in informal trade and commerce through private sector initiatives, border trade, diaspora networks, trade exhibitions, maritime collaborations, logistics hubs, and small and medium-sized enterprises. Pakistani diasporas contribute to commerce by sending goods and remittances back home. The past 10 years' export data depict an upward trend in Pakistan's exports to Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia due to different conducive factors. The bilateral trade with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam has gained momentum recently. The trade volume with Malaysia and Indonesia reached US\$1.5bn and US\$3.34bn in 2023, respectively. Correspondingly, Pakistan's exports to Vietnam accounted for US\$0.35bn (Graph). The two remaining countries, Thailand and the Philippines have low trade figures. As for Thailand, the FTA is facing a delay, which should be pursued as a priority to address the trade plunge, as shown by the data. There is no formal Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Pakistan and the Philippines. They have yet to form an FTA to improve trade relations by lowering tariffs and other trade barriers.

Pakistan has excellent agricultural sector potential as the ASEAN strives for sustainable farming methods and food security. All this data suggests pursuing formal economic mechanisms and agreements between the ASEAN region and Pakistan, which is a significant challenge in creating ease of business for both sides.

The economic ties between Pakistan and the ASEAN region face geopolitical challenges, particularly the US-China rivalry and Pakistan's close ties with China, which have influenced ASEAN countries' willingness to strengthen relations with Pakistan. This has contributed to delays in granting Pakistan Full Dialogue Partnership (FDP) status within ASEAN. Lack of ease of doing business, tariff and non-tariff barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and logistical hurdles are a few to mention. Pakistan's high tariff rates and sector-specific tariffs hinder its export competitiveness, as ASEAN countries, like Vietnam and Thailand, benefit from lower intra-ASEAN tariffs, making non-member countries like Pakistan harder to compete. There are also logistical challenges due to weak infrastructure and limited direct shipping routes between Pakistan and ASEAN countries, affecting delivery times and increasing transportation costs, discouraging trade, especially for perishable goods.

The digital trade gap between Pakistan and ASEAN countries is exacerbated by the need for robust e-commerce frameworks and digital trade facilitation mechanisms, particularly in the IT and financial services sectors. Moreover, ASEAN countries enforce technical regulations, often acting as non-tariff barriers (NTBs), like Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Compliance, which are affecting Pakistan's market penetration and increasing compliance costs for Pakistani exporters. This is attributed to the need for trade facilitation agreements and Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) between ASEAN countries and Pakistan. MRAs are formal agreements between countries to recognise each other's conformity assessments, reducing the need for duplicate testing and certification.

To overcome these challenges, Pakistan would have to invest in better trade logistics gradually, negotiate better terms for market access, and try to harmonise regulatory standards with ASEAN nations to get beyond these obstacles. Improving trade flows can also be significantly aided by lowering non-tariff obstacles like SPS and TBT Compliance expenses. In this regard, Pakistan and ASEAN countries should work towards Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) to align their standards for SPS and TBT, simplifying compliance. Trade Facilitation Agreements can streamline procedures, share compliance infrastructure costs, and collaborate with ASEAN regulatory bodies and the private sector to tackle compliance challenges, underscoring the urgency and importance of these measures.

On the diplomatic front, ASEAN plays a significant role in the Asia Pacific region, influenced by the US-China rivalry. Pakistan's relationship with China, a major regional player, affects its engagement with ASEAN countries. Some ASEAN countries have troubled relations with China, influencing their willingness to strengthen ties with Pakistan. Resultantly, efforts to upgrade Pakistan to Full Dialogue Partner status have faced objections, causing delays as it requires approval from all ten member nations. To summarise the argument, Pakistan-ASEAN economic relations have significant potential for growth, diversification, and international market standing. Pursuing these ties can enhance export revenue, reduce trade imbalance, improve the balance of payments and diversify the economy, inspiring both Pakistan and ASEAN to work towards a mutually beneficial economic future.

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Khyber digital design summit concludes



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Digital Design Summit concluded at the Nishtar Hall Peshawar successfully. This significant event brought together experts, professionals, and students to discuss innovation, creativity, and digital transformation.

The summit was organized by the University of Spoken English and Computer Science (USECS), featuring

renowned speakers and experts. Mr. Alium Shah Khalji addressed the participants, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy, innovation, and professional skills. He stressed that digital marketing is essential for all types of businesses and highlighted its positive impact on the economy.

Mr. Fahim Anwar, Country Director of Cisco for Pakistan and Afghanistan, also addressed the event. He

emphasized the necessity of digital education for social development and countered concerns about artificial intelligence (AI) by highlighting its positive aspects.

He explained how AI can simplify human lives and increase business opportunities.

Mr. Fahim Anwar commended USECS' efforts in networking and innovation in digital infrastructure. During the event, successful students of USECS

shared their experiences and success stories, inspiring participants to acquire digital skills and advance in the business field.

In the final session, Alium Shah Khalji, Fahim Anwar, Hamad Safi, Akbar Shah Khalji, and Muhammad Ehsan responded to participants' questions. This session included in-depth discussions on digital literacy, current industry trends, and opportunities in the global digital economy.

The summit proved to be an excellent platform for students, professionals, and business personalities to network and exchange modern ideas. The program encouraged the youth and professionals of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to utilize digital skills to seize development opportunities.

The organizers reaffirmed their commitment to promoting digital literacy and innovation. They pledged to continue their mission to digitally empower Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Governor honors Bhutto's role in strengthening democracy

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday said that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a visionary leader in Pakistan's history who fought relentlessly for the protection of the people's rights, the promotion of democracy, and the establishment of Pakistan as an independent nation.

On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the founder of Pakistan Peoples Party, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi shared a special message, praising the legacy of the great leader.

Governor Kundi emphasized that Shaheed Bhutto gave a voice to the oppressed and marginalized segments of society and united the nation by providing Pakistan with a strong constitution.

He said that under his leadership, the country not only pursued economic and social progress but also earned a respected position on the global stage.

He further acknowledged the contributions of Bhutto's family, mentioning that Benazir Bhutto, while striving for democratic stability and the unity of the Muslim Ummah, sacrificed her life.

President Asif Ali Zardari endured oppression and violence for the cause, and today, Bhutto's grandson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari continues to confront the enemies of democracy and Pakistan with unwavering determination. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi concluded his message by saying that it is essential to uphold the democratic principles and vision of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to build a prosperous, self-reliant, and developed Pakistan.

He said that Bhutto's mission remains a beacon for the people of Pakistan, and by following his path, the dream of a flourishing, independent, and strong Pakistan can be realized.

Solar exhibition in Peshawar: A step towards a stable future: Ghulam Ali

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Former Governor Haji Ghulam Ali emphasized the crucial role of the solar energy sector in stabilizing the national economy and providing relief to the public. He urged the government to support this sector, stating that increased investments would naturally strengthen the economy. He expressed these views while speaking to the media during his visit to a solar exhibition organized by Muhammad Ishaq GES in Peshawar.

Haji Ghulam Ali was invited as a special guest by the event's organizers and distributors. During the visit, he toured the exhibition, expressed interest in the various stalls, and was briefed on the advancements and technology in the solar sector.

The former governor appreciated the distributors' efforts and urged them to not only bolster the national economy but also provide

relief to areas affected by power load-shedding. He further stressed that both federal and provincial governments should actively collaborate with investors in this sector, aiming for a transition from imports to exports in solar technology.

Participants of the exhibition applauded Haji

Ghulam Ali's insights and acknowledged his ongoing support for the business community. The event featured over 35 companies, including prominent names like Aftab Ashraf Long Life Power, Dewan Power, Antique Solar Energy, and Power One Solar Energy.

In recognition of his con-

tributions, Haji Ghulam Ali was presented with a commemorative shield and a gift during the event.

This press release highlights the growing significance of the solar energy sector and its potential to drive economic stability while providing relief to the public.



Khizer blames KP govt for deteriorating law, order

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Arbab Khizer Hayat, Additional Secretary Information of PML-N, has held the provincial government responsible for the deteriorating situation in District Kurram.

"Controlling the situation in Kurram is beyond the capability of Barrister

Saif," Khizer said. He further accused the provincial government of deliberately failing to establish peace in Kurram. Arbab Khizer Hayat suggested that the issue could have been resolved through a tribal council (Jirga) comprising representatives from all political and religious parties as well as elders of Kurram.

He also criticized Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, claiming he is unfit to hold the position of Chief Executive. Highlighting the challenges faced by the province, he proposed the option of imposing Governor Rule to restore peace and set the government on the right track in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Social safety nets to protect vulnerable segments of society

PESHAWAR (APP): In recent years, Pakistan has been grappling with mounting challenges on economic fronts resulting into an increase in poverty and unemployment in the country.

The country's most vulnerable segments including laborers, farmers, elderly, women, children, and people with disabilities have borne the brunt of socioeconomic imbalances and societal vulnerabilities due to huge debt burdens.

To mitigate these great hardships, the government and civil society organizations have increasingly turned to social safety nets for socioeconomic emancipation of the downtrodden.

These social safety nets are designed to provide a buffer against economic shocks, promote social inclusion, and

ensure a more equitable distribution of financial resources in Pakistan.

Like other socioeconomic sectors, social safety nets in Pakistan have evolved significantly over the last few decades. Initially, these were limited to emergency aid and small-scale welfare programs. However, in recent years, the government has expanded its social protection landscape, focusing on multi-dimensional poverty alleviation and resilience building for vulnerable groups.

One of the most notable programs is the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), launched in 2008 has grown into the country's flagship cash transfer initiative of the modern era.

"The basic aim of BISP is to provide direct financial support to the poorest

households, particularly female-headed families under a transparent mechanism. BISP has made significant strides in reducing poverty by offering quarterly stipends which provided the much needed relief to underprivileged households," said Ms Javaria, BISP KP spokeswoman while talking to APP.

She said the Federal Government has started major initiatives for socioeconomic empowerment of poor households and has recently signed an agreement with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Karandaaz Pakistan to further simplify and enhance the efficiency besides transparency of its funds transfer mechanism.

Under the agreement, she said Karandaaz Pakistan will facilitate

easy and transparent payment of funds to about 9.3 million beneficiaries in targeted districts of the country through the RAAST payment system.

Karandaaz would also support a nationwide digital and financial literacy training program, with its trial phase would formally launch on June 30, 2025.

She said that BISP's life cycle approach was focusing on initiatives such as Benazir Kafalat, Taleemi Wazaif, and Nashonuma programs, which play crucial roles in social security and preventing stunting in children and lactating mothers.

She said BISP Hunarmand program was being mullied to provide skill development opportunities to deserving women and their families, adding this program seeks

to enhance the economic opportunities to eligible families while creating space for new beneficiaries.

She said that efforts were underway to extend BISP support to 10 million people by next year.

"BISP is a great blessing for millions of poor families like me," said beneficiary Jasehat Bibi, a housewife of Pabbi Nowshera. She suggested disbursement of cash through bank accounts to save time for beneficiaries.

Syed Qasim Ali Shah, Minister for Social Welfare said KP government plans to include life insurance scheme in Sehat Card Program and is all set to start eight social safety and empowerment programs including life insurance for all besides setting up of Provincial Islamic

Takaful Insurance Company. He said the KP government was set to introduce universal health coverage for its entire population and to provide life insurance compensation of Rs500,000 to Rs1,000,000 for the head of a family.

Adaptive Social Protection (APS) project has been approved to transform the social protection system in the province, he said, adding APS would be implemented with the technical assistance of GIZ, aims to strengthen the social protection system with a focus on improving linkages among relevant sectors as well as institutionalizing the use of social protection in disaster management.

He said under the project, an Integrated Social Protection Information System (Data Centre)

would be established; thereby ensuring the all-time availability of complete and accurate information about the initiatives program and activities carried out in the field of social welfare sectors. Similarly, a record Rs30.3 billion has been disbursed under the Sehat Card programme from March 2024 to December 24, 2024 in KP.

"Despite the evident success of social safety net programs at national and provincial level, there are significant challenges to their full effectiveness," said Professor Dr Muhammad Naem Khattak, former chairman, department of Economic, Peshawar University.

For Pakistan's social safety nets to be more effective in the long term, the experts emphasized the need for sustainable

financing models and better targeting of vulnerable populations.

The KP government must also invest in education and infrastructure that facilitates access to services, particularly in rural areas. Digital inclusion, for instance, could ensure that financial aid reaches those in remote locations without the need for cumbersome paperwork or long travel times.

However, for these programs to reach their full potential, it will require an integrated approach that addresses both immediate needs and structural drivers of poverty.

With sustained commitment, improved governance, and a focus on long-term empowerment, Pakistan can create a more secure and equitable society for all.



In brief

14 child beggars rescued

MULTAN (APP): The Child Protection Bureau (CPWB) intensified its anti-begging initiatives and rescue operations last week and 14 children were taken into protective custody. This was disclosed by CPWB spokesperson Naveed Mukhtar. He said the children taken into custody included beggars, runaways, missing persons, and other vulnerable individuals. Rescue operations were conducted at various locations across the city, with additional support from the Child Help Line (1121), which received calls regarding children in need of protection. As part of its ongoing efforts, the bureau distributed awareness pamphlets to educate the public about child protection and the prevention of child trafficking, he added.

Gilani attends Qul Khawani

MULTAN (APP): Senate Chairman Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani attended the Qul Khawani of the mother of Syed Roshan Ali Gardezi, the custodian of the shrine of Hazrat Yousuf Shah Gardezi, in Multan. During the event, Gilani offered condolences to Syed Roshan Ali Gardezi, Syed Muhammad Raju Shah Gardezi, and Syed Ramzan Shah Gardezi. He prayed for the departed soul's forgiveness and elevation of ranks in the hereafter. Earlier, Maulana Sakhawat Ali Qoumi delivered a sermon and led a collective prayer for the deceased, national progress, stability, and the martyrs of the country. Prominent figures, including former Ambassador Syed Zulfikar Haider Gardezi, former National Assembly Speaker Syed Fakhar Imam, former Provincial Minister Syed Hussain Jahanian Gardezi, Syed Mazhar Abbas Gardezi, Syed Jawad Murtaza Naqvi, Salman Khakwani, and Naeem Khan, as well as a large number of political, social, and notable city personalities, attended the ceremony.

Computer exhibition held

F.P. Report

LARKANA: The 16th Computer Engineering Hardware and Software Exhibition was held at Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science & Technology (SZEBST) University Campus in Larkana, in which final year students of the Computer Science Department exhibited their latest innovations. The students presented software from various sectors including health, education, energy, employment, mental health, hospitality through laptops, creating question papers based on Sindhi GPT reprints, providing employment by registering workers, booking accommodation in hostels and an automated system, delivering drinks in home-cooked meals, conveying the feelings of special children to the general public through software, providing preventive measures and advice by determining sugar levels online, AI jet boat exercises to increase awareness of mental health and well-being, and collaboration between patients and doctors, collaboration and networking with the industry, along with about 200 software projects for the exhibition, including the required use of electricity generated from water and solar, and providing electricity to industries and domestic consumers through electricity transformers. During this, Dr. Zahid Abro, Head of the ZBIST University Campus Larkana, Dr. Mumtaz Mehar, Head of the Computer Science Department, Abdul Khaliq Metlo and others visited the exhibition and the students and students appreciate the skills.

Youth empowerment program to open gates of employment

SWAT (APP): Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, Chairman, Prime Minister's Youth Program here Sunday said that socioeconomic empowerment and provision of dignified jobs to youth was the top priority of the government, and the PM youth skills development program would gates of employment for them not only in the country but also abroad.

Addressing a function of youth at Malam Jabba here, Rana Mashhood said that about Rs36 billion projects were approved under the Prime Minister's youth program with special focus on their vocational, IT and technical education.

He said the students of all provinces of Pakistan would be largely facilitated from this landmark program. After necessary education and IT training, he said these youth would be sent abroad for dignified jobs.

In this regard, Youth Facilitation Centers would be established in all districts in next three months of the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, adding each beneficiary would earn about Rs 100,000 per month after passing the six month IT course at their home towns.

Rana Mashhood said that Uran Pakistan would largely benefit youth of Pakistan and economy to achieve new heights.

He expressed the hope that upcoming 2025 budget would be passed without an assistance of IMF.

The Nawaz Sharif Govt had said good bye to IMF, eradicated terrorism, addressed load shedding and made Pakistan an atomic power.

PMLN had made Pakistan defense impregnable on May 28, 1998 and now no

foreign power can keep an evil eye on it.

Rana Mashhood said that PML had created Pakistan after a lot of sacrifices by our forefathers led by Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and will make it an Asian Economic Tiger.

He said the previous 16 months Shahbaz Sharif Govt had saved the country from bankruptcy and an imminent economic default.

Rana Mashhood said that present PMLN Government has put the economy back on track of stability and foreign investment started coming back to Pakistan. He said stock exchange achieved new heights and price hikes slashed significantly.

Rana Mashhood questioned that where was the Pro PTI founder's western lobby when innocent Palestinians at Ghaza were massacred and innocent people at Lebanon bombed.

He said that Imran Khan Govt has plunged the country into foreign loans burdens, inflation and price hike after signing an agreement with IMF on very tough conditions, resulting an increase in employment and poverty in the country.

He said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had voted during referendum in favour of Pakistan in 1947 and their sacrifices and services for Pakistan were highly praiseworthy.

Rana Mashhood praised the services of Engr Amir Muqam for the party and suggested for formation of committee to discuss projects for youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially for Swat at Islamabad.

Federal Minister Engr Amir Muqam were also present.

Media is a mirror for society: Law Minister

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister on Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam Afridi Advocate has said that the media is like a mirror for the society but unfortunately now the media has also turned into a business. He said that he will wholeheartedly welcome criticism for reform, but will respond to the negative propaganda of opponents with his best performance.

He expressed these views while addressing the dinner given by the press club in honor of the elected members of assembly of Kohat at Kohat Press Club on Saturday night.

Chairman DDAC Kohat Shafi Jan MPA, Daud Shah Afridi MPA and President of Press Club Noor Muhammad Bangash also addressed the dinner. The elected members of the assembly announced a joint

struggle for all the problems of the press club and journalists including the media colony.

The Law Minister said InshaAllah, the current 5-year term of the government will prove a real change for the development of Kohat. Despite stoppage of outstanding dues and non-cooperation of the Center, the under-construction building of Liaqat Memorial Hospital Kohat will be completed within 18 months at a cost of Rs. 2.5 Billions, he said. Similarly, the Cities Improvement Project worth Rs. 12 Billions will also be completed in 18 months, while its Phase-II is also under consideration, he furthered.

He continued that funds have also been released for the widening of Kachhari Chowk to PAF Chowk Bannu Road and KDA Link Road. He disclosed, the plan of constructing a ring road is also under active consideration

to control the traffic problem in Kohat.

The Minister maintained that shelter sheds are also being constructed for the relatives of the patients in the district headquarters hospital. Similarly, the installation of CT scan and MRI machine in the DHQ hospital has also been approved, he added. He said that we are trying hard to introduce good governance in every sector including health, education and police to ensure the provision of all possible facilities to the people.

Aftab Alam Advocate said that all the elected PTI members from Kohat have ideal harmony and unity and they do everything for the collective interest of the district with mutual cooperation and consultation. He declared, there will be no compromise on merit and the culture of corruption and commission will be eradicated in every way.

PFA inspected over 150,000 food units last year

MULTAN (APP): A performance review report was released by the Punjab Food Authority to assess the actions taken in the Multan and Sahiwal divisions for the years 2023 and 2024.

According to the report, there has been a record increase in performance in 2024 as compared to the previous year. Details of the report reveal that in 2024, 69 percent more food

points were inspected compared to 2023. In 2023, 89,000 food units were inspected, while in 2024, over 150,000 food units were checked. There was a 38 percent increase in fines imposed for violations of health regulations.

In 2023, 12,642 food points were fined, while in 2024, over 17,000 food points faced penalties for violations. A 65 percent increase in cases related to

food adulteration and fraud was recorded in 2024, compared to the previous year. To prevent the sale of unsafe food, 46 percent more food production units were halted for non-compliance in 2024 than in 2023. DG Punjab Food Authority Asim Javed stated that there has been a record improvement in food safety due to timely action against health-threatening elements.



KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister on Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam Afridi Advocate addressing the function organized by Kohat Press Club.

Peace in KP vital for Pakistan's prosperity: Muqam

SWAT (APP): Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions, Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs, Engr Amir Muqam said here Sunday that peace in the province was vital for the sustainable progress and prosperity of Pakistan.

Addressing a lunch on function hosted in honour of Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme here at Malam Jabba, Engr Amir Muqam said that people of KP had rendered great sacrifices for the country and special focus should be made on socioeconomic empowerment of its youth imperative for lasting peace and economic prosperity of the province.

He said the country's overall stability and prosperity was linked with the peace of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Engr Amir Muqam said that terrorism was one of the major challenges confronted to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and collective efforts were required to wipe out this menace completely.

He said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has accorded highest priority to socioeconomic empowerment of youth and Uran Pakistan has provided an excellent opportunity to youth to contribute in the country's development progress.

Engr Amir Muqam said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was eagerly awaiting the visits of PMLN central leadership to the province.

He said that whenever difficult situation came on Pakistan the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stood like a solid record for defense of its country.

Engr Amir Muqam said that due to sacrifices of people of Swat, terrorism has been defeated in Malakand Division and the national flag was hoisted on top here.

The Federal Minister said that he also faced several terror attacks in the past with steadfastness and allways raised voices against terrorism.

Sarfraz pays tribute to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

QUETTA (APP): The Balochistan Chief Minister, Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto provided strong foundations for democracy in Pakistan as Bhutto's vision continues to guide us even today.

In his message on the occasion of the 97th birth anniversary of the founder of the Pakistan Peoples Party, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, said that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a leader in Pakistan's history who always made the welfare of the people his top priority.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti pays tribute to the public services of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and added that under his leadership, Pakistan received its first consensus-based constitution, and the people were made

aware of their rights.

The Chief Minister added that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto not only won the hearts of the people of Pakistan but also had a special love and attachment to the people of Balochistan.

He made the restoration of Balochistan's rights and the development of its projects a priority of his government, which marked the beginning of a new era of development in the province.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti added, "Bhutto Shaheed gave political awareness to the marginalized communities. He played an exemplary role in promoting national unity and sovereignty."

Mir Sarfraz Bugti further said that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

showed a keen interest in providing employment, education, and healthcare opportunities for the people of Balochistan. His vision and love for the people instilled confidence and a desire for progress among the people of Balochistan. The Chief Minister emphasized that we need to adopt Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's people-centric policies and vision to put the country, especially Balochistan, on the path to prosperity.

Sarfraz Bugti said that Bhutto's spirit of public service will always remain an inspiration for us. The Chief Minister described the services of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as a golden chapter in the country's history and said that his sacrifices will always be remembered.

BKMC-MTI, Swabi, treated 569,372 patients in 2024

F.P. Report

SWABI: Bacha Khan Medical Complex (BKMC-MTI), Swabi, a Medical Teaching Institution, has released its annual performance report for 2024, highlighting the hospital's achievements and services provided to patients.

According to the report, 569,372 patients received treatment at the hospital, 336,024 were examined in the outpatient department (OPD), and 233,348 were treated in the Emergency Department.

The hospital performed 7,930 major & minor surgeries, and 11,191 babies were delivered at the hospital during the past year. Additionally, a total of 666,796 lab tests were conducted, including 72,275 X-rays, 5,960 CT scans, 26,286 ultrasounds, 36,186 ECGs, and 956 endoscopies were conducted in 2024.

According to the BKMC spokesperson, 33,229 patients were admitted to different specialties for further treatment with over 20,000

admissions facilitated through the Sehat Card Program (SCP).

Similarly, 8,554 dialysis sessions were conducted, most of which were facilitated through the SCP program.

Hospital Director Dr. Khalid Masud expressed his commitment to providing quality healthcare services to patients. He said that the hospital had reduced the number of patient referrals to other hospitals by 90%. This achievement is a witness to the hospital's efforts to provide comprehensive healthcare services to the community. He added,

In 2024, the hospital effectively treated all victims of major accidents and explosions in Swabi. Furthermore, the number of beds was increased from 350 to 450 to accommodate the growing patient load.

The spokesperson went on to say, that the hospital has also established a 46-bed Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) with the support of UNICEF, providing specialized care to critically ill newborns. Additionally, the hospital

has established an HIV Family Care Center and T.B Center, providing free diagnosis and treatment to people of Swabi and surroundings.

A Fair Price Pharmacy has also been established within hospital premises to provide affordable medicines to patients, says spokesperson. The Infectious Diseases OPD has been started to cater to patients with infectious diseases, a rare facility in the province, spokesperson added.

Similarly, thousands of culture tests have been performed, which previously required the hospital to send samples to Peshawar or Islamabad.

The hospital's Institute-Based Private Practice (IBPP) department conducted 2,989 surgeries, showcasing the hospital's ability to offer specialized surgical services in the evening, says spokesperson.

The hospital has also upgraded its facilities, including the construction of new operation rooms and surgical units, which will be operational soon, spokesperson added.

Faisalabad – Messy arteries leaving commuters in disarray

FAISALABAD (APP): With unbridled population growth, traffic mess in Faisalabad is a microcosm of the challenges faced by rapidly growing cities in developing countries, leaving commuters in complete disarray.

The bustling arteries of the city have become a daily ordeal with increasing traffic congestion, turning routine commutes into exhausting endeavors, also affecting their productivity and well-being.

These roads designed meticulously decades ago to accommodate a much smaller population are now grappling with an overwhelming traffic load and this gridlock hampers daily routine of people, also affecting their health and environment.

The iconic Clock Tower (Ghanta Ghar), surrounded by its eight bazaars and adjacent areas have become traffic bottlenecks with overwhelming mix of vehicles, pedestrians and vendors. Commercial activi-

ty in these areas adds to chaos, turning even a short trip into a time-consuming struggle.

Sidewalks have disappeared and unregulated encroachments, makeshift stalls and illegal parking on already limited road space, leave drivers to navigate an obstacle course of vendors and parked vehicles.

Traders' organizations keep demanding action against encroachers but sometimes they themselves have negotiated dubious agreements allowing encroachers to use footpaths and spaces in front of their shops.

Although traffic police remain active to regulate vehicular traffic, yet mushroom encroachments foil their efforts largely. Past initiatives like relocating squatters and vendors to designated markets proved futile as many of them sold their allocated spaces and returned to occupy same roadsides.

The problem worsened when the vendors were allowed to use five feet of

road space for their businesses. This leniency led to further encroachments when the vendors expanded their operations to ten feet or more, narrowing busy roads.

"Our city has witnessed exponential rise in vehicles due to growing population and expanding industrial landscape," remarked Farzand Ali Jatt, a veteran educationist. "The roads that once spacious enough, now resembled clogged veins, with vehicles inching forward during peak hours."

He said lack of public transportation had exacerbated the problem with more people using personal vehicles, bikes and rickshaw making key roads leading from Faisalabad to Jhang, Sargodha, Samundri, Jaranwala, Satiana and Canal Road, the hotspots for traffic snarls.

These roads were frequently choked with vehicles ranging from rickshaws and motorbikes to heavy trucks and public buses. Planned U-turns are often ignored as

the drivers opt for shortcuts by violating traffic rules and creating bottlenecks.

"QingQi rickshaw culture has become a real nuisance and this chaos further exacerbated with motorcycles modification into passenger vehicles operating without regulation," he added. "Wrong-way driving and signal jumping are frequent mocking traffic regulators and resulting in accidents and making roads perilous for other users."

He also mentioned to improper planning and maintenance, potholes, unmarked lanes and poorly timed traffic signals as other reasons for traffic snarls.

According to recommendations of P&W Board, any arterial road bearing more than 8000 vehicles must dualized. But such roads dualized already like Faisalabad-Sheikhupura Road and Faisalabad Chiniot Road respectively experience more than 23000 and 17000 vehicles per day. The situation is similar

on other roads.

Altaf Hussain, a professional driver commented that city's public transport system, consisting of outdated and overcrowded vans, failed to meet the needs of people who have to use personal vehicles. "Although the ride-hailing services were convenient, yet they had also led to increase in vehicles on roads overburdening the infrastructure."

A local transporter Muhammad Abu Bakar mentioned that city's public transport system, consisting of outdated and overcrowded vans, failed to meet the needs of people who have to use personal vehicles. "Although the ride-hailing services were convenient, yet they had also led to increase in vehicles on roads overburdening the infrastructure."

He suggested to improve infrastructure by widening roads, improving intersections and developing bypasses to divert heavy traffic. "Improving public transport system, introducing modern public buses, enforcing traffic regulations strictly and removing encroachments can help address the problem.

Faisalabad deserves a transport system that matches its aspirations."

Health expert Dr Muhammad Qamar sees this issue in health's perspective mentioning to idling vehicles adding to air and noise pollution. "Commuters frequently sticking in suffer from stress, frustration and anxiety besides inhaling polluted air."

When contacted to comment on this situation, Muhammad Asif Chaudhary Managing Director (MD) Faisalabad Development Authority (FDA) informed that Punjab government was gearing up to launch metro bus service to address this issue. "This mega project would transform intracity travel by offering affordable and efficient transport for people."

He said Asian Development Bank (ADB) had committed to fund this project estimated to cost Rs.70 billion. "Initially, 100 environment-friendly buses would be run on eight

high-demand routes having heavy passengers load to offer a reliable alternative for daily commuters."

Asif also informed about expanding the bus network to 35 routes later on to cover significant portion of the city. "This expansion would be a game-changer for traffic management on major city roads and maintaining sustainable urban mobility."

He said as traffic mess on Faisalabad's main roads had become a critical issue, the metro bus service is expected to ease burden on busy routes. "The FDA was consulting stakeholders to finalize preparations for the project and its smooth execution in a phased manner."

"Once operational, the metro bus service would become a cornerstone of Faisalabad's urban infrastructure by alleviating traffic congestion, reducing environmental pollution and reshaping city's public transport landscape," Asif said.



South Korean protesters brave cold to demand Yoon’s ouster as detention deadline looms

SEOUL, South Korea (AP): Hundreds of South Koreans, bundled up against freezing temperatures and snow, rallied overnight into Sunday near the residence of impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol, calling for his ouster and arrest, as authorities prepared to renew their efforts to detain him over his short-lived martial law decree.

Dozens of anti-corruption agency investigators and police attempted to execute a detainment warrant against Yoon on Friday but retreated from his residence in Seoul after a tense standoff with the presidential security service that lasted more than five hours.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials is weighing charges of rebellion after the conservative president, apparently frustrated that his policies were blocked by a legislature dominated by the liberal opposition, declared martial law on Dec. 3 and dispatched troops to surround the National Assembly.

The Assembly overturned the declaration within hours in a unanimous vote and impeached Yoon on Dec. 14, accusing him of rebellion, while South Korean anti-corruption authorities and public prosecutors opened separate investigations into the events.

Last Tuesday, a Seoul court issued a warrant to detain Yoon and a separate warrant to search his residence after the embattled president defied authorities by refusing to appear for questioning. But enforcing them is complicated as long as Yoon remains in his official residence.

The one-week warrant for his detention is valid through Monday. Staff from the presidential security service were seen installing barbed wire near the gate and hills leading up to Yoon’s residence over the weekend, possibly in preparation for another detention attempt.

If the anti-corruption agency manages to detain Yoon, it will likely ask a court for permission to make a formal arrest. Otherwise, Yoon will be released after 48 hours.

As hundreds of anti-Yoon protesters rallied for hours near the gate of the presidential residence, pro-Yoon protesters gathered in nearby streets, vowing to protect him. Both groups were separated by police barricades and buses.

“With barely a day left before the execution deadline for Yoon Seok Yeol’s detainment warrant, the



presidential security service continues to hide a criminal and the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials cannot be more relaxed,” Kim Eun-jeong, an activist, said on a stage during the anti-Yoon rally.

Park Chan-dae, floor leader of the main opposition Democratic Party, called on the anti-corruption agency to move quickly to detain Yoon, accusing the agency of “hesitating and letting time slip away.”

The presidential security service blocks Yoon’s detainment

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which is leading a joint investigation with police and military investigators, has urged the country’s acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, to instruct the presidential security service to comply with their execution of the

detainment warrant. Choi has yet to publicly comment on the issue.

Park Jong-joon, chief of the presidential security service, hit back against criticism that his organization has become Yoon’s private army, saying it has legal obligations to protect the incumbent president. Park said he instructed his members not to use violence during Friday’s standoff and called for the anti-corruption agency and police to change their approach.

Park and his deputy defied summonses on Saturday from police, who planned to question them over the suspected obstruction of official duty following Friday’s events.

While the presidential security act mandates protection for Yoon, it does not authorize the service to block court-ordered detainments, which may amount to an obstruction of official

duty, said Park Sung-bae, an attorney specializing in criminal law. While the president mostly has immunity from prosecution while in office, the protection does not extend to allegations of rebellion or treason.

The agency said its outnumbered investigators had several scuffles with presidential security forces that threatened their safety.

After getting around a military unit guarding the residence’s grounds, the agency’s investigators and police were able to approach within 200 meters (about 218 yards) of Yoon’s residential building but were stopped by a barricade formed with 10 vehicles and about 200 members of the presidential security forces and troops.

Kim Seon-ho, the acting defense minister, conveyed his concern to the presidential security service, saying that using military personnel to block the execution of the detention warrant would be “inappropriate” and that the troops shouldn’t be placed in a position where they might confront police.

Yoon’s lawyers have claimed that the detention and search warrants against Yoon cannot be enforced at his residence, citing a law that protects locations potentially linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge. They also argue the anti-corruption office lacks the legal authority to investigate rebellion charges and that police officers don’t have the legal authority to assist in detaining Yoon.

Yoon’s fate now lies with the Constitutional Court, which has begun deliberations on whether to formally remove Yoon from office or reinstate him.

Yoon’s legal team said it will file complaints against the anti-corruption agency’s chief prosecutor, Oh Dong-woon, and approximately 150 investigators and police officers involved in Friday’s detention attempt, which they claim was unlawful. The team said it will also file complaints with public prosecutors against the country’s acting defense minister and police chief for ignoring the presidential security service’s request to provide additional forces to block the detention attempt.

Former Greek prime minister Simitis dies

ATHENS (Reuters): Former Greek prime minister Costas Simitis, who led the country into the European Union’s single currency in 2001, died on Sunday aged 88 at his summer house in the Peloponnese.

Simitis, a law professor and a reformist, assumed leadership of the PASOK socialist party in 1996 and was prime minister until 2004.

“With sadness and respect, I bid farewell to Costas Simitis, a worthy and noble political opponent, but also the Prime Minister who accompanied Greece in its great national steps,” conserva-

tive Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a statement.

The government proclaimed four days of mourning and said his funeral will be at the state’s expense.

While Simitis had been credited for reducing bloated government spending, critics say he did not do enough to reign in corruption.

Simitis had been vacationing at his summer residence close to Athens in the Peloponnese in recent days. He was transferred unconscious to the hospital early in the morning where his death was confirmed, the director of the

Corinth hospital told local media. He was survived by his wife and two daughters.

During his government, Simitis reduced the budget deficit and public debt to make Athens qualify for euro zone membership.

In 2012, three years after the Greek debt crisis erupted, he published a book criticising the handling of the crisis by Greek politicians and the EU.

In that book, called “Derailment”, he also accused the European Commission of turning a blind eye to overspending by his conservative successor.

Cartoonist quits Washington Post over rejected sketch

WASHINGTON (AFP): An award-winning political cartoonist for The Washington Post has announced her resignation after a cartoon depicting the newspaper’s billionaire owner groveling before Donald Trump was rejected.

Ann Telnaes posted on Substack late Friday that this was the first time she “had a cartoon killed because of who or what I chose to aim my pen at.”

The cartoon — which she included in her post — depicts Amazon founder and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos, as well as Facebook and Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg and other media and tech moguls, kneeling and holding up bags of money before a massive Trump.

Also shown is a prostrated Mickey Mouse, the symbol of the Disney Company, which owns ABC News. The television network recently reached a \$15 million settlement with Trump after he sued for defamation over reporting on his sexual abuse trial in New York.

Telnaes wrote that while previous sketches of hers had been rejected, this was the first time that had happened because of her “point of view.”

“That’s a game changer... and dangerous for a free press,” she said.

The Washington Post, whose slogan is “democracy dies in darkness,” did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

US media quoted the opinions editor, David Shipley, saying that Telnaes’s work had been rejected only because of “repetition.”

“We had just published a column on the same topic as the cartoon and had already scheduled another column — this one a satire — for publication,” he said.

The US media aggressively covered Trump’s chaotic first term, which included two impeachments and ended with his refusal to recognize defeat in the 2020 election — culminating with a mob of his supporters storming Congress.

As Trump prepares for his January 20 inauguration, after having defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in November, there are signs that top CEOs, including in the media, are eager to build good relations.

A stream of senior moguls, from Apple CEO Tim Cook to Bezos Zuckerberg, have traveled to meet Trump at his Florida estate.

Austria heads towards coalition talks led by far right after centrists fail

VIENNA (Reuters): Austria headed on Sunday towards coalition talks led by the far-right Freedom Party (FPO) after efforts to form a government without the party fell apart and prompted Chancellor Karl Nehammer to resign.

Nehammer, who announced he was quitting late on Saturday, had led three- and then two-party talks aimed at forging a centrist coalition that could serve as a bulwark against the FPO after the eurosceptic, Russia-friendly party came first in September’s parliamentary election.

Nehammer’s conservative People’s Party (OVP) appointed Secretary-General Christian Stocker on Sunday as its new leader in an interim capacity.

Stocker had long repeated Nehammer’s position that the OVP would not govern with FPO leader Herbert Kickl, but he said things had now changed.

“I expect that the leader of the party with the most votes will be tasked with forming a future government. If we are invited to these (coalition) talks, we will accept this invitation,” Stocker told reporters.

“It is therefore not about Herbert Kickl or me, but about the fact that this country needs a stable government right now and that we cannot keep losing time in election campaigns or elections,” he said.

President Alexander Van der Bellen, a former leader of the left-wing Greens who has voiced reservations about Kickl becoming chancellor, angered the FPO by not asking it to form a government after the election on the grounds that no other party was willing to join it in a coalition.

While saying the situation had now changed, Van der Bellen stopped short of saying he would ask Kickl to lead coalition talks. He is due to meet Kickl at 11 a.m. (1000 GMT) on Monday and a new caretaker chancellor will also be appointed in the coming week, with Nehammer staying in office until then.

“Voices within the People’s Party that rule out cooperation with an FPO under Herbert Kickl have become much quieter. This in turn means that a new path may be opening up that did not exist before,” Van der Bellen said in an address to the nation.

If Kickl is tasked with leading coalition talks, his party could secure a parliamentary majority and lead a government for the first time since it was formed in the 1950s under a leader who had been a senior SS officer and Nazi lawmaker.

The collapse of the centrist coalition talks in Austria highlights the growing difficulty for centrist parties in many European countries in forming stable governments without a far right that is gaining ground.

The FPO won September’s election with about 29% of the vote, and opinion polls suggest its support has grown since then, extending its lead

over the OVP and Social Democrats to more than 10 percentage points while their support has shrunk.

Nehammer said during and after the election campaign that his party would not govern with Kickl because he was too much of a conspiracy theorist and posed a security risk, while at the same time saying much of Kickl’s party was trustworthy.

The OVP and FPO overlap on various issues, particularly taking a tough line on immigration, to the point that the FPO has accused the OVP of stealing its ideas.

The two governed together from late 2017 until 2019, when a video-sting scandal involving the then-leader of the FPO prompted their coalition’s collapse.

The FPO hammered home its message earlier on Sunday.

“Austria needs a Chancellor Kickl now,” it said on the X social media platform.

Sudan’s army chief welcomes Turkish offer

PORT SUDAN, Sudan (AFP): Sudan’s army chief has welcomed a Turkish offer to resolve the brutal 20-month conflict between his forces and their paramilitary rivals, the Sudanese foreign minister said.

In early December, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a phone call with Sudan’s Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan that Ankara could help establish “peace and stability” in the war-torn African state.

At a meeting in Port Sudan on Saturday, Burhan asked Türkiye’s deputy foreign minister Burhanettin Duran to “deliver the Sudanese leadership’s welcoming of the initiative” to Erdogan, Sudanese foreign minister Ali Youssef said in a briefing after the meeting.

“Sudan needs brothers and friends like Türkiye,” Youssef said, adding that “the initiative can lead to... realizing peace in Sudan.”

Erdogan said in his December call with Burhan that Türkiye “could step in to resolve disputes” and prevent Sudan from “becoming an area of external interventions,” according to a statement from the Turkish presidency.

Following his meeting with Burhan on Saturday, Türkiye’s Duran said that the peace process “entails concerted efforts,” and that his country was ready to play a “role in mobilizing other regional actors to help overcoming the difficulties in ending this conflict.”

In a statement last week, the UAE welcomed “diplomatic efforts” by Türkiye to “resolve the ongoing crisis in Sudan.”

“The UAE is fully prepared to cooperate and coordinate with the Turkish efforts and all diplomatic initiatives to end the conflict in Sudan and find a comprehensive solution to the crisis,” its foreign ministry said.

The war in Sudan, which has pitted Burhan against his former deputy and RSF chief Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, has killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted 12 million more. It has also pushed the country to the brink of famine, with analysts warning involvement from other countries will only prolong the suffering.

France’s ex-president Sarkozy on trial over alleged Qaddafi pact

PARIS (AFP): Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, already convicted twice in separate cases since leaving office, on Monday goes on trial charged with accepting illegal campaign financing in an alleged pact with the late Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

The career of Sarkozy has been shadowed by legal troubles since he lost the 2012 presidential election. But he remains an influential figure for many on the right and is also known to regularly meet President Emmanuel Macron.

The fiercely ambitious and energetic politician, 69, who is married to the model and singer Carla Bruni and while in power from 2007-2012 liked to be known as the “hyper-president,” has been convicted in two cases, charged in another and is being investigated in connection with two more.

Sarkozy will be in the dock at the Paris court barely half a month after France’s top appeals court on December 18 rejected his appeal against a one year prison sentence for influence peddling, which he is to serve by wearing an electronic bracelet rather than in jail.

The latest trial is the result of a decade of investigations into accusations that Sarkozy accepted illegal campaign financing — reportedly amounting to some 50 million euros — from Qaddafi to help his victorious 2007 election campaign.

In exchange, it is alleged, Sarkozy and senior figures pledged to help Qaddafi rehabilitate his international image after Tripoli was blamed for bombing attacks on Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988 over Lockerbie in Scotland and UTA Flight 772 in 1989 that killed hundreds of passengers.

Sarkozy has denounced the accusations as part of a conspiracy against him, insisting that he never received any financing for the campaign from Qaddafi and that there is no evidence of any such transfer.

At a time when many Western countries were courting Qaddafi for energy deals as the maverick dictator sought to emerge from decades of international isolation, the Libyan leader in December 2007 visited Paris, famously installing his tent in the center of the city.

But France then backed the UN-sanctioned military action that helped in 2011 oust Qaddafi, who was then killed by rebels. Sarkozy has said allegations from former members of Qaddafi’s inner circle over the alleged campaign financing are motivated by revenge.

If convicted, Sarkozy faces up to 10 years in prison under the charges of concealing embezzlement of public funds and

illegal campaign financing. The trial is due to last until April 10.

Sarkozy “is awaiting these four months of hearings with determination. He will fight the artificial construction dreamed up by the prosecution. There was no Libyan financing of the campaign,” said his lawyer Christophe Ingrain.

Among 12 others facing trial over the alleged Libyan financing are heavyweights such as Sarkozy’s former right-hand man, Claude Guéant, his then-head of campaign financing, Eric Woerth, and former minister Brice Hortefeux.

“Claude Guéant will demonstrate that after more than ten years of investigation, none of the offenses he is accused of have been proven,” said his lawyer Philippe Bouchez El Ghozi, denouncing the cases as amounting to “assertions, hypotheses and other approximations.”

For the prosecution, the pact started in 2005 when Qaddafi and Sarkozy, then interior minister, met in Tripoli for a meeting ostensibly devoted to fighting illegal migration. But Sarkozy’s defense counters that no trace of the illegal financing was ever found in the campaign coffers.

The scandal erupted in April 2012, while Sarkozy was in the throes of his re-election campaign, when the

Mediapart website published a bombshell article based on a document purportedly from December 2006 it said showed a former Libyan official evoking an agreement over the campaign financing.

Sarkozy has long contended that the document is not genuine.

An embittered Sarkozy would later narrowly lose the second round of the election to Socialist Francois Hollande.

Franco-Lebanese businessman Ziad Takieddine, a key figure in the case, had claimed several times that he helped deliver up to five million euros (\$5.4 million at current rates) in cash from Qaddafi to Sarkozy and his chief of staff in 2006 and 2007.

But in 2020, Takieddine suddenly retracted his incriminating statement, raising suspicions that Sarkozy and close allies may have paid the witness to change his mind.

In a further twist, Sarkozy was charged in October 2023 with illegal witness tampering while Carla Bruni was last year charged with hiding evidence in the same case.

Sarkozy’s second conviction, in another campaign financing case, was confirmed last year by a Paris appeals court which ruled he should serve six months in prison, with another six months suspended. This verdict can still go to a higher domestic appeals court.



Nijmegen, Netherlands: Snow blankets much of the Netherlands on Sunday morning but quickly melts as the temperature rises and rain moves in Nijmegen, Netherlands, on Sunday.

The Frontier Post

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Opportunity for seeds of peace to be planted

UNTIL quite recently, a negotiated end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict seemed to be a non-option for either Ukraine or the NATO countries which promised to have its back. Negotiating with Russia, as opposed to defeating it, was apparently off-limits for both Kyiv and its NATO supporters. Anything short of Ukraine reclaiming territory lost to Russia since 2022, even 2014, appeared to be unacceptable.

There has been a subtle change in the rhetoric of Ukraine's Western allies, however, that may have significant implications for the way the conflict, which has lasted nearly three years, unfolds, or even potentially ends.

While the latest discussions about NATO's support for Ukraine remain focused on sustaining, if not significantly boosting, the flow of aid to it, that might not be simply business as usual.

In a news conference on Tuesday, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte urged allies to increase military aid to strengthen Kyiv's position should it enter negotiations with Moscow.

Likewise, while warning that a Russian victory would threaten Europe's security, stability and prosperity, United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer for the first time mentioned the prospect of the war ending in a negotiated settlement.

Even the letter Ukraine's Foreign Ministry sent to the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in session now in Brussels effectively opened the door to a negotiated solution, although the precondition of NATO membership is likely to be a stumbling block.

How things actually play out, however, probably hinges on how the incoming US administration approaches the situation.

While mystery surrounds the US president-elect's claim that he will be able to end the conflict in "24 hours" after his inauguration, with much speculation about what, if anything, he has up his sleeve, the fact that maneuvering a negotiated end to the conflict has become a common topic itself brings hope that there is a general consensus building that the hostilities have dragged on for long enough.

Despite some obvious foot-dragging at times, the NATO allies have generally followed the Joe Biden administration's lead on Ukraine. A lead that has been characterized by its consistent pugnacious animosity.

While the Biden administration is fast-tracking military aid to Ukraine in its last days in office, it is probably not with the intention of giving Kyiv leverage in negotiations with Moscow, but rather with the aim of convincing it that it can prevail by force of arms.

Having finally given the green light to Ukraine to use US-supplied long-range missiles against targets inside Russia, the Biden administration on Monday announced a new package of weapons for Ukraine worth \$725 million.

The challenge now for the international community is how to seize the window of opportunity that has opened to get the two belligerents to sit down for actual negotiations and make the necessary compromises to secure a deal.

Since Kyiv's demand for NATO membership would seem to preclude the possibility of any face-to-face talks with Moscow, a way must be found to provide the two conflicting parties with credible security guarantees as a prelude to meaningful talks aimed at a political solution. Throughout the conflict, China has held an objective and impartial position and promoted peace talks. To this end, it has consistently urged the parties to the conflict to de-escalate the situation and create conditions conducive to direct dialogue.

With talk of negotiations on NATO's lips, China hopes that the belligerents will step away from their entrenched positions on the preconditions for peace talks, so they can explore the pathways to a lasting political settlement of their differences.

China will continue to carry out exchanges with all stakeholders and concerned parties in the belief that seeds of hope can be planted for peace.

Although the protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine has deep-rooted causes, China believes that, if handled with care, the toxicity of these rotten roots can be treated so there is fertile soil for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

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Western double standards on international arrest warrants

Farhan Ahmad

SOME countries' reactions to the International Criminal Court warrants to arrest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant have revealed their inconsistencies, if not outright double standards.

Granted, this is the first time officials from a Western-allied country have been the subject of warrants issued by the court. However, given the extraordinary support that it enjoyed in the past, it is surprising how the same countries would come to the opposite conclusion in the case of Israel. While some, such as the US and Hungary, have outright rejected the International Criminal Court's decision, others have issued convoluted opinions undermining them. Still others have said that maybe they were wrong in the past, when they were too quick to support the arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Immediately after the warrants were issued, US President Joe Biden issued a statement calling them "outrageous," adding: "Let me be clear once again: whatever the ICC might imply, there is no equivalence — none — between Israel and Hamas. We will always stand with Israel against threats to its security."

Some US lawmakers went overboard. In an interview with Fox News last week, Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham threatened US allies: "If you are going to help the ICC as a nation and force the arrest warrant against Bibi (Netanyahu) and Gallant, the former defense minister, I will put

sanctions on you as a nation." He added more clarity: "To any ally, Canada, Britain, Germany, France. If you try to help the ICC, we're going to sanction you ... We should crush your economy, because we're next."

On other occasions, Graham emphasized that the court was not established so it can "come after us," referring to fears that it could soon turn on US politicians over Washington's role in Israel's ongoing genocide in the Gaza Strip. For some time, the US has strenuously lobbied countries not to cooperate with the court should it issue arrest warrants against US personnel. Now the threshold has been raised to include Israeli officials.

While a minority in Congress have adopted a more balanced approach, Republican Sen. Tom Cotton referred to the International Criminal Court as a "kangaroo court" and its prosecutor Karim Khan as a "deranged fanatic." He ludicrously threatened military action against the court, The Hague and the Netherlands, a close US ally, if the Israeli officials were to be detained and put on trial, citing The Hague Invasion Act of 2002 as allowing such action. Although a military invasion of an ally is outlandish, the court itself could be sanctioned if American lawmakers get their way, meaning its American-based financial dealings and funding could be in jeopardy. This would make its work more difficult. While US politicians appear to be under a spell when it comes to Israel and the International Criminal

Court, it is surprising that some other nations, which have invested in the past in protecting international law administration, including this court, are now doubtful.

Take France's initial reaction to the arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant. Le Monde reported last week that the court "has been dealt a harsh blow by one of its founding states, which also prides itself on being the 'homeland of human rights.'" It cited Paris' "cryptic statement undermining both the authority of this judicial body and the arrest warrants."

France at first said that the arrest warrants were "legally complex," before the French government implied that it would not comply with the court's decision because Netanyahu enjoys immunity due to Israel not being a signatory to the Rome Statute, the court's founding treaty.

The French Foreign Ministry also issued a statement saying that, "France intends to continue to work in close collaboration with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other Israeli authorities to achieve peace and security for all in the Middle East." Out of all the G7 countries, only France has cited alleged immunity for Netanyahu and the US has outright rejected the court's action without citing immunity. The rest of the grouping have been silent or issued ambiguous statements.

Paris later tried to climb out of the "immunity" trap it set for itself, because France enthusiastically supported all previous International Criminal Court warrants, even when they were issued

for individuals whose countries were not members. The argument is legally void because, if the officials of a country can become immune just by not being a signatory to the statute, then all that the perpetrators of war crimes or crimes against humanity need to do is decline to join the court or withdraw their signatures from its treaty, leaving the court ineffective and useless.

From a legal point of view, the crimes cited by the court in the arrest warrants fit the descriptions set forth in the Geneva Conventions and, more relevantly, the Rome Statute itself, for the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The court took six months to deliberate over the prosecutor's request.

Its judges are among the world's most highly regarded lawyers and scholars of international humanitarian law, including for example Theodor Meron, the 94-year-old American lawyer and professor of international law. Meron was born in Poland in 1930, emigrated to Palestine in 1945 and later became a senior Israeli official. He served as a judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals. After all, as Josep Borrell, the former EU chief diplomat, said: "Respecting the ICC is the only way to have global justice." As he left office last week, he added some parting advice to his successors: "Use our leverage," meaning the EU's, adding, "We have leverage but we do not want to use it."

Papa Biden is a liar, and American justice is a lie

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

PAPA Joe Biden is a blatant liar and the embodiment of a perverse lie that sustains America's phantom democracy.

Only the familiar stable of wind-up partisans who appear on US cable news networks and silly naifs who cling to the fantastical idea that America is a shining-city-on-a-hill model of liberty, equality, and fraternity would deny the essential truth of that blunt opening sentence.

That is why the overwrought brouhaha over Papa Biden's predictable volte-face to pardon his wayward son after insisting that he would not exercise his prerogative to wave a presidential wand and erase Hunter's criminal convictions, strikes me as missing a larger and obvious point.

All presidents lie. It is the American way. It always has been. It always will be.

Indeed, there are two defining qualities that every American president must possess in order to fulfill their duties and responsibilities. They must be able to lie with an almost pathological ease and they must be content to order others to kill without pause or a scintilla of remorse.

Presidents lie about war. They lie about peace. They lie about negotiating "truces". They lie about "intelligence" produced by spy services whose business is deceit. They lie about bridging the schism between rich and poor. They lie about protecting "innocents" at home and abroad. They lie about preventing the planet from burning into extinction.

They lie about pardons. They lie when they place their hand on a bible and swear to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States". The biggest lie of all is when

they reassure "the American people" — again and again — that they will, without fail, tell the truth.

Which raises a necessary question: Why do they lie? They lie to convince the gullible that presidents are "peacemakers" who oppose war rather than fuel conflict with money and arms.

They lie to obscure the fact that, as president, their principal obligation is to serve the parochial interests of the few at the debilitating expense of the many.

They lie to promote a myth that America is a symbol of hope and freedom in order to deny the historical record that US president after president has been the unrepentant architect of loss and suffering on an almost incomprehensible scale across this ever-turbulent world.

Biden's eager complicity in the genocide being perpetrated with such ferocious and lethal efficiency in the desolate remnants of Gaza and the occupied West Bank is more convincing evidence of America's defining and anti-human past, present and, no doubt, future.

America's 46th president has passed the litmus test that every president must pass. Biden has proven throughout his septic tenure as president that he has, all along, had the right stuff all right to be commander-in-chief.

And, like many other presidents who preceded him and are, of course, destined to follow him, Biden will have a shrine — euphemistically known as a presidential library — built in his honour to celebrate his facility to lie and kill.

So, the duelling camps on what constitutes the "right" and "left" in America who, on one hyperbolic side, are excoriating Biden for his hypocritical assault on the

"rule of law" and, on the other sentimental wing, are defending the president's understandable act of love, are both guilty not only of naivete, but a glaring double standard which confirms their profoundly unserious natures.

Biden's detractors wail like colicky babies that he has reneged on a solemn pledge not to grant his second, troubled son clemency because they were convinced of this president's once-uncompromising fidelity to the "norms" that gird the American democratic "experiment".

This may come, I suspect, as a revelation to these starry-eyed chumps, but the pampered and powerful elites in Washington, DC and beyond — who dictate the terms and conditions of the American "experiment" — have never had to abide by any of your fictive "norms".

There are an exculpatory set of rules for the governors and a decidedly different set of incriminating rules for the governed.

Exhibit A: Not one of the grinning nest of Wall Street plutocrats who engineered the sub-prime mortgage racket that triggered the near collapse of the rigged US economy and caused such grief and hardship among "Main Street" America were held to even a perfunctory measure of account.

Instead, they were handed golden, life-time-do-not-go-to-Rikers tickets and bailed out by the legion of "blue-collar" American taxpayers whom they damaged, often beyond repair.

Not surprisingly, they were abetted on this rule-of-law defacing score by a succession of compliant presidents.

In happy league with their grateful Wall Street patrons and donors, not one sitting president has ever

been charged, let alone convicted and jailed, like millions of their much less fortunate "fellow citizens".

God-fearing, law-abiding, Boy Scouts all.

I suggest the "I'm shocked, shocked that the president lied" crowd take out a tissue and dab their embarrassing spigot of crocodile tears.

As for The Washington Post columnist and his like-minded brethren on CNN and MSNBC who chafed at Papa Biden's U-turn but gave him credit for saving his kid from an unpleasant fate since that's what any father would do, apparently these maudlin apologists require reminding that poor, little Hunter is a 54-year-old married man who ought to be responsible for his illicit actions and his pop is the president of the United States.

The scales of justice aren't blind when your dad can lift the blindfold and take a good, long peek at the accused in the dock to find out whether they are related to you or not.

Papa Biden should spare an ounce of his mercy for the deserving victims of the "miscarriages of justice" that are rife in America's unsparing "judicial system", which routinely imprisons the poor, minorities, non-violent offenders, and the innocent, who, in many outrageous cases, face the death penalty.

Towards that — dare I say it — just end, Biden better carve out some time during his dwindling days in office to call the Innocence Project — a group of honourable volunteers who work hard to free the condemned — and seek its advice on who he should pardon next.

That might temper the shameful stain on the "truth" and "justice" he has left behind.

— Aljazeera

The arrogance of power: A reminder of divine sovereignty

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

POWER is a formidable force that holds the potential to shape societies, dictate fates, and influence minds. Its allure often tempts individuals into a dangerous realm of arrogance and entitlement. The intoxication of power is unlike any other; it speaks loudly, sometimes deafening its possessor to reason, morality, and the delicate balance of life. This phenomenon has been observed throughout history, as those who ascend to positions of authority often become blind to the responsibilities and transient nature of their station. They forget that the very source of power, Allah Almighty, can retract it at His will, for no worldly rise is eternal.

The intoxication of power stems from the illusion of invincibility. A person who achieves

of individuals who forget their Creator and the transient nature of their authority. The intoxication of power leads them to commit injustices, oppress the weak, and prioritize their desires over the collective good. Such behavior not only invites the wrath of Allah but also paves the way for their downfall. The Quran warns: "And We do not send the Messengers except as bringers of good tidings and warners. And those who disbelieve dispute by [using] falsehood to [attempt to] invalidate thereby the truth, and they have taken My verses and that of which they are warned in ridicule. And who is more unjust than one who is reminded of the verses of his Lord but turns away from them and forgets what his hands have put forth? Indeed, We have placed over their hearts coverings, lest they

The intoxication of power stems from the illusion of invincibility. A person who achieves power begins to feel untouchable, surrounded by sycophants and shielded from critique. This state of mind leads to arrogance and a sense of superiority over others. The Quran cautions against this mindset, reminding believers of the story of Pharaoh, who, in his intoxication of power, declared himself a god. His downfall was swift and severe, a reminder that no one is beyond the reach of divine justice. Allah states in the Quran: "Indeed, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people into factions, oppressing a sector among them... Indeed, he was of the corrupters" (Surah Al-Qasas, 28:4). His fate serves as a stark warning that the abuse of power leads to ruin. The fall of those intoxicated by power is inevitable, for apart from Allah, every rise has a fall. This universal truth is often ignored in the euphoria of success. Yet, history is replete with examples of once-mighty rulers and leaders who met humbling ends. Their stories serve as lessons for those who come after them, yet the cycle continues. Why does this happen? The Quran explains that such arrogance stems from ingratitude. Allah says: "And when We bestow favor upon man, he turns away and distances himself; but when evil touches him, then he is full of extensive supplication" (Surah Ha-meem-Asajadah, 41:51).

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The blindness caused by power is not just a loss of sight but a loss of insight. It clouds judgment, leading individuals to act against principles they once held dear. This blindness often manifests as an inability to empathize with others or recognize their struggles.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned against such arrogance, stating: "The most despicable among people in the sight of Allah on the Day of Judgment will be those whom others avoid because of their arrogance and tyranny" (Sahih Bukhari). This Hadith underscores the responsibility that comes with power and the dire consequences of misusing it.

The Quran further emphasizes that power is a trust from Allah. It is not a privilege to be abused but a trust to be upheld with justice and humility. Allah says: "Say, 'O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honor whom You will, and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is [all] good. Indeed, You are over all things competent'" (Surah Aal-e-Imran, 3:26). This verse is a reminder that power is neither permanent nor absolute; it is a temporary responsibility that must be exercised with accountability.

Despite these reminders, history and contemporary times reveal countless examples

understand it, and in their ears deafness. And if you invite them to guidance, they will never be guided — then ever" (Surah Al-Kahf, 18:56-57).

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The antidote to the intoxication of power is humility and a constant remembrance of Allah. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) embodied this principle throughout his life. Despite being the leader of a growing Muslim Ummah, he lived modestly, treated everyone with kindness, and upheld justice without favor. He reminded his followers: "The leader of a people is their servant" (Sunan Abu Dawood). This Hadith encapsulates the essence of leadership in Islam: it is not about dominion but service.

In conclusion, power is a trust from Allah, not a possession to be abused. Its intoxication is a test of character, separating those who rule with justice and humility from those who succumb to arrogance and tyranny. The Quran and Hadith provide ample guidance on the proper use of power and the consequences of its misuse. As believers, it is imperative to recognize that all power belongs to Allah alone. The one who gives can take it away, and every rise is followed by a fall. Remembering this truth can keep a person grounded, ensuring that their authority is exercised with responsibility, justice, and a constant awareness of their accountability before Allah.

There is now a window of opportunity for peace in Syria

ON November 27, merely hours after a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon came into effect, a coalition of Syrian opposition factions launched their biggest military operation in years. Led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), they attacked positions of the Syrian regime in Aleppo province, quickly advancing as their opponents retreated.

Within days, they managed to gain control of Syria's second-largest city Aleppo and the entire Idlib governorate, reaching the outskirts of Hama.

This unexpected campaign by the Syrian opposition has rekindled a conflict that was long considered "frozen". It has also shattered the perception that Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad has achieved victory and may pave the way for renewed peace negotiations.

For nearly 10 years, a coalition of Russian forces, Hezbollah, and Iran-linked groups have helped al-Assad retain control of most of Syria, with the exception of the north.

Over the past two years, this coalition has been degraded due to a series of developments, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and this year's Israeli war on Lebanon.

In 2023, after the rebellion of mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin and his subsequent death, Russia ordered his Wagner Group forces, which had played a critical role in ground battles, to leave Syria. This year, Moscow was forced to pull some of its air force units back from Syria which had long provided

much-needed air cover for the Syrian regime forces. The fleet of Russian aircraft currently stationed at the Hmeimim base in Latakia has dwindled compared with its peak strength before the onset of the Ukraine war.

Hezbollah forces deployed in Syria have also declined. The war with Israel inflicted heavy losses on the group, as many of its

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upper echelons and its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, were killed. As a result, the group has had to withdraw a good part of its forces deployed in the Aleppo and Idlib countryside towards Lebanon. Iran's military presence in Syria has also been weakened by frequent Israeli attacks.

The Syrian regime forces have also been degraded over the past 14 years of war. Defection and combat losses have dwindled significantly, while the financial crisis has limited Damascus's ability to pay regular wages.

When the opposition launched its attack, it faced a completely worn-out army that had lost the will to fight. Morale had

Marwan Kabalan

collapsed, especially with the absence of allies on the ground and the Russian Air Force in the sky; they retreated quickly.

By contrast, the opposition's performance has improved significantly in recent years, as it has become better organised and more disciplined, especially HTS. It has

also been better equipped as a result of local manufacturing, seizing weapons from the regime's positions and its allies, and obtaining them from external parties. The Syrian opposition's advance was surprising to many probably because for years, al-Assad has been acting as a victor in the Syrian civil war. Since his forces regained control over large parts of the country in 2018, including the three de-escalation zones in the south, Damascus countryside and northern Homs, it has refused to make any concessions or even engage in any serious negotiations – whether through the United Nations-spon-

community of nations and secure economic aid for reconstruction without having to make any concessions, neither to the Arab countries nor to the Syrian opposition.

In addition, believing that he has the upper hand, al-Assad turned down several offers by Turkiye to resolve the Syrian refugee problem and move the political process forward. The rapid advance of the opposition has shattered the illusions of victory that the regime and its allies have cradled. The opposition now controls most of northern Syria, including Aleppo, home to about one-fifth of the Syrian population. With its economic, industrial, human and political

sored Geneva process or the Russian-sponsored Astana process.

Normalisation of relations with Arab countries also boosted al-Assad's self-confidence. Just last year, he was invited to attend the Arab Summit in Riyadh which ended 12 years of Arab isolation. All of this had convinced the regime that it could regain its membership and legitimacy in the

weight, Aleppo could become a pivotal point for the Syrian opposition and a major asset in any potential negotiations. The situation on the battlefield also reflects new geopolitical realities. Al-Assad's main allies, Iran and Russia, have been losing influence due to regional and international conditions, whereas Turkiye, the main regional ally of the opposition, is on the rise.

As a result, there is now a window of opportunity to launch a genuine political process that could end the 14-year-old conflict, which has left hundreds of thousands of Syrians dead, millions displaced and the country in tatters.

As things stand now, Russia and Iran lack the troops and firepower to reverse the tide. To save al-Assad this time around, they have no alternative but to commit themselves to a political process.

The incoming US administration may also encourage this. Although previously, US President Donald Trump turned away from Syria, describing it as a land of "sand and death" and ordering the withdrawal of US troops in the Kurdish-held northeast, this time around, the Syrian war may present him with an opportunity for a quick foreign policy success and making good on his promise to "end wars".

Syria is low-hanging fruit, and Iran and Russia may be eager to strike a deal with Trump. Succeeding where his Democratic predecessors failed may be a good enough incentive for the new US president to put his weight behind the negotiation of a peace agreement.

China ready to meet challenges of Trump era

THE meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden on Nov 16 has set a crucial stage for the future of China-US relations. As the world's two largest economies navigated through fraught dynamics during Biden's tenure, this meeting offered a glimpse into their intentions for shaping global stability. Both leaders expressed optimism about trade cooperation and the fight against climate change, though significant disagreements on the Taiwan question and technology transfers were apparent.

The outcomes of this meeting underscore the complex interdependence between the United States and China. Biden aims to leave office with a stable bilateral relationship — though his actions contradicted this purpose — but the return of Donald Trump to the White House as the 47th president of the US creates new uncertainties for global geopolitics, particularly concerning China. A hawkish stance toward China marked Trump's first term as US president. Trump has emphasized the importance of reducing trade imbalances, addressing intellectual property rights concerns and countering China's growing global influence, and his "America first" strategy, defined by economic nationalism and strategic competition, could intensify tensions between the two countries.

Trump's likely focus on domestic priorities — such as re-industrialization and reshoring manufacturing — may restrict his capacity to engage in multilateral diplomacy. This could lead to a more unilateral and selective approach to foreign engagements, creating a power vacuum in global governance.

However, his transactional approach to international relations could lead to unpredictable engagements with China, ranging from escalated economic decoupling to selective cooperation on issues such as Korean Peninsula denuclearization issue or supply chain stability. This shift in US foreign policy under Trump may present opportunities for other global players, particularly the BRICS-Plus bloc, to

Marcus Vinicius De Freitas

play a bigger role in global affairs. The potential impact of Trump's policies on US-China relations could lead to a more confrontational approach, creating more opportunities for BRICS-Plus to expand its influence.

As US-China relations face renewed volatility, BRICS-Plus has an opportunity to position itself as a stabilizing force in a fragmented world. The bloc's capacity to provide alternative frameworks for development and cooperation makes it uniquely suited to address the Global South's ever-growing needs, including economic development, infrastructure improvement and sustainable growth. The group's economic agenda, including the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and Brazil's expertise in agricultural innovation, could help address critical challenges such as food security and sustainable infrastructure development across Africa and Asia, one of the main issues raised in the last G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Furthermore, the potential de-dollarization of the global economy — driven by China's economic policy and ongoing initiatives within BRICS-Plus — signals a shift away from the long-standing dominance of the US dollar. This transformation could empower emerging economies to pursue development models independent of Western financial systems. BRICS-Plus can seize the opportunity to advocate for significant reforms in key international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. By championing multipolarism and localized solutions, the bloc could inspire greater autonomy and resilience among its member states and partners, leading to a more equitable and diversified global order. This era of uncertainty offers BRICS-Plus the opportunity to redefine the Global South's role in global governance. With its potential to establish itself as a credible alternative to the US-led world order, the bloc can inspire hope and optimism through initiatives focusing on trade liberalization, regional integration and sustainable development. Such efforts would enhance economic

growth and address pressing global challenges such as climate change, digital inclusion and infrastructure deficits, instilling a sense of hope for a better future. The meeting between Xi and Biden has underscored the urgent need for pragmatism and cooperation in addressing the world's pressing challenges. As Trump prepares to take office, his policies will undoubtedly reshape US-China relations, creating challenges and opportunities for the international community. BRICS-Plus, with its collective economic strength and a shared vision for a fairer world, holds the potential to lead the way in this new era of global transformation, inspiring and motivating the international community to act swiftly and decisively. Finally, it is important to stress that the widespread flawed concept of the "Thucydides trap", a term used to describe the likelihood of conflict when a rising power challenges an established power, while provocative, needs to be revised when applied to China. This concept needs to consider the rich nuances of Chinese history and its historical commitment to peaceful coexistence. Unlike the Western tradition of zero-sum power struggles, China's historical approach to international relations has often emphasized the importance of harmony, balance and mutual benefit. A long history of 18 centuries as one of the world's largest economies shows a country not imposing its military power on other countries in the way Western powers have historically done. China has traditionally been a center of gravity for neighboring states through cultural and economic influence. Projecting a Western historical pattern onto a fundamentally different civilization ignores China's long commitment to resolving power transitions through diplomacy and strategic accommodation. China's rise is a clear testament to its will to pursue peace, prosperity and stability, not a new Cold War. BRICS-Plus will follow the same commitment, and the new administration in Washington must keep that in mind when shaping its policies.

What the Arab world means to the planet

THE Arab world stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the edges of the Arabian Gulf and from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea. It has, therefore, always formed a crossroads between continents and between peoples, connecting the world and radiating enduring influences. Today, its 22 countries, covering an area of 13 million sq. km, have a combined population of almost 500 million people. From the cradle of civilization to the birth of the world's three big monotheistic religions, from a wealth of innovation — past and present — to a wealth of resources, the Arab world has always played a crucial role in the world and in our lives, whether we realize it or not.

In recent decades, much Western discourse concerning the Middle East has tried to paint the Arab world as closed and backward, while elevating Israel as a paragon of democracy and innovation. As is almost always the case, it serves to look beyond the conventional discourse to discover a rather different, and far more nuanced, picture. Yes, the Arab world continues to experience major upheaval and conflict in Syria and Lebanon, in Iraq and Yemen, in Palestine and Libya, in Sudan and Somalia. Of course, this represents a tremendous challenge for broad populations, acting as a restraint on progress and a drain on shared resources. But there are major reasons to believe that the Arab world today is a region driving change for much of the rest of the world, as it is rapidly transforming and progressing.

While the Arab world's combined gross domestic product of about \$3.56 trillion includes substantial disparities between individual countries, the rate of economic growth has exceeded global averages in recent years, with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries leading the way. These numbers only tell a fraction of the story, as the Arab world is setting the trend in

a number of crucial areas for the future.

Particularly in the areas of renewable energy, sustainable urban development, food and water security, innovation and education, the Arab world has been breaking new ground. With

The UAE and Qatar's large infrastructure projects, tech hubs and research universities aim to provide similar opportunities for their populations. The great potential of solar and wind power is being tapped by all these countries in their drive for renewable energies, alongside Morocco with, for example, its Noor Solar Plant. The Arab world has also become a leader in sustainable and water-efficient farming, in salt-water irrigation and water desalination. And we must not forget the healthcare innovation that is taking place, especially in the Gulf region, which is paving the way in telemedicine and genetic research. Saudi Arabia has also invested heavily in artificial intelligence and fintech, or modern financial technologies. As a progressive overhaul of education and a youthful push in entrepreneurship take hold, the region's young population stands on the cusp of a new era of potential and opportunity. These profound developments in the Arab world do not derive from anywhere. Centuries ago, the Arab world was the origin of major advancements in algebra, medicine, navigation and trade. Just as the Arab world once built qanat systems to transport water to arid regions or developed ingenious irrigation systems, today the Arab world leads the way in smart water management, water recycling and desalination. Just as the Arab-Muslim caliphates found themselves at the center of regional diplomacy through the practice of Islamic principles such as "shura" (consultation) and "hudna" (truce), making peace by "sulh" (tribal reconciliation) and "waqf" (resource redistribution) in the interest of cohesion, today a number of Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt play an oversize role in conflict resolution and mediation. The caliphates were also known for their architectural innovation, mirroring the visionary projects of today's Arab world.

one-third of its population under the age of 15, a youthful Arab world is being buoyed by a new sense of dynamism and enthusiasm, not least due to the shrewd decisions of a young and visionary set of leaders.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Morocco have all been launching innovative and forward-looking projects. Saudi Arabia, in particular, has shown a tremendous capacity for transformation over the past seven years with the realization of Vision 2030, as outlined by the young Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman under King Salman. Launching innovative projects, transforming Saudi Arabia's economy, opening up its society and providing ever-growing opportunities for its youth, the country has achieved a tremendous sense of progress, enthusiasm and opportunity over recent years.

The Kingdom has invested heavily in renew-

Hassan bin Youssef Yassin

able energies, sustainable urban development, education and innovation. From the world-leading King Abdullah University of Science and Technology to the National eLearning

Center, from Neom's smart city that emphasizes sustainability and innovation to the New Murabba development's focus on cultural offerings and quality of urban life, there is something major underway in Saudi Arabia today. The UAE and Qatar's large infrastructure projects, tech hubs and research universities aim to provide similar opportunities for their populations. The great potential of solar and wind power is being tapped by all these countries in their drive for renewable energies, alongside Morocco with, for example, its Noor Solar Plant. The Arab world has also become a leader in sustainable and water-efficient farming, in saltwater irrigation and water desalination. And we must not forget the healthcare innovation that is taking place, especially in the Gulf region, which is paving the way in telemedicine and genetic research. Saudi Arabia has also invested heavily in artificial intelligence and

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fintech, or modern financial technologies.

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Both East and West are looking toward us as a land for environmental awakening, for youthful innovation and for future stability. Our Israeli cousins and neighbors must also rouse to a dynamic they can be a part of, accepting our extended hand to partner with us for peace and progress.

The Jewish people have formed an integral part of the Middle East for as long as we Arabs have. Until the creation of the state of Israel, we all lived together in peace and in mutual respect. Jews occupied top posts in government and in business in Iraq, Egypt and beyond; they were always regarded as important constituents of Arab society. The three monotheistic religions carry a message of peace for the world: they all belong to this region. This is an opportunity to be seized. The time is right for understanding and empathy, not for being petty or talking by the gun. A peaceful and prosperous Palestinian state living side by side with an Israeli state fully integrated into a dynamic and forward-looking region would be the best hope for us and for global stability and progress.

Just like our great desert, the Sahara, hides tremendous riches and opportunities for the future in terms of mineral resources, underground water reservoirs and opportunities for agriculture and carbon capture, the Arab world, living in peace with Israel, has much to offer the world and this 21st century.

NATO helping US

AS Ukraine presses for NATO membership to secure its future, the alliance faces deeper questions about its direction and unity. Many are wondering what the future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization would be like given US president-elect Donald Trump's skepticism over the military alliance. Despite the uncertain outlook, however, the United States has already steered NATO away from its avowed role as global peacekeeper toward a confrontationist and meddling organization because of its continued eastward expansion and attempts to interfere in Asia-Pacific affairs.

The 75-year-old NATO is a relic of the Cold War era, not least because it deploys a large number of nuclear weapons across Western Europe and Turkiye and conventional forces across the world. Established in 1949 with 12 founding member states, NATO has expanded to include 32 members. Throughout NATO's history, the US has controlled the defense system of European countries, regarding it as a symbol of its hegemony.

For the past few years, the transatlantic military alliance, led by the US, has been trying to establish its presence in the Asia-Pacific region to maintain its global hegemony. In its Washington Summit Declaration in July, NATO said that it would continue to support Ukraine on "its irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership", that China poses a challenge to "NATO's interests, security and values", and that it attaches great importance to Asia-Pacific partners and cross-regional cooperation in "supporting Ukraine, cyber defense, countering disinformation, and technology".

However, NATO's summit in Washington did not project solidarity as the US expected, for Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez urged the military alliance leaders to adopt "consistent political positions" on Ukraine and Gaza instead of resorting to "double standards". Besides, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban is opposed to Ukraine joining NATO, and paid surprise visits to Kyiv, Moscow and Beijing before the summit and soon after Hungary assumed the presi-

Jia Ruixia

dency of the Council of the European Union on July 1. EU officials, the US and NATO have criticized Orban for visiting the three capitals. Ignoring the criticisms, Orban wrote in an article published in Newsweek in September that "If it (NATO) chooses conflict instead of cooperation, and war instead of peace, it will be committing suicide." Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, too, is opposed to Ukraine's NATO membership. In fact, one month after winning the Slovak election on Sept 30, 2023, Fico halted military aid to Ukraine. And Turkiye, whose military force is second only to the US in NATO, said the transatlantic military alliance resorts to double standard on international laws. Turkiye also denounced Israel's assault on the Gaza Strip while maintaining neutrality on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Turkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's close ties with Russia have made the US uncomfortable.

Equally important, during NATO's summit in Washington, Erdogan and Orban exchanged views on maintaining peace efforts.

That the European Union is divided, politically and ideologically, became clear when far-right parties won more than expected seats in the European Parliament election in June, splitting the parliament itself and the political structures of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and many other EU countries. Following the election, voices against military aid to Ukraine and for a peaceful solution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict have been rising in the new European Parliament. According to German think tank Kiel Institute, from Jan 24, 2022, to Aug 31, 2024, the US provided Ukraine with aid worth 84.73 billion (\$89.19 billion), and the EU offered 118.23 billion, including military assistance such as long-range missiles, mobile artillery rocket systems, armored vehicles, air defense systems and ammunition. In the eurozone, the government debt to GDP ratio was more than 80 percent in 2022 and 2023, though the debt ratio has declined slightly since then. At the end of 2023, the gov-

ernment debt to GDP ratio ranged from 20.2 percent in Estonia to 167.5 percent in Greece. In July, the EU executive initiated so-called excessive deficit procedures against Belgium, France, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia, whose deficits exceeded the bloc's fiscal limit of 3 percent of annual GDP in 2023. Many non-eurozone EU members are facing high debt risks, with most of the EU member states being NATO members.

The US has been calling on NATO members, especially European members, to increase their defense spending. The EU is in transition to low-carbon development in order to mitigate the effects of climate change. Along with that, the aging population and slow economic growth pose severe challenges to the bloc. As such, increasing the military budgets will deepen the financial plight of EU countries.

The United Kingdom government, in what can be seen as a response to the US' call, announced in July that the country was "broke and broken", showing an empty pocket to Washington.

Before the US presidential election in November, the US limited Ukraine's use of US weapons against military targets in Russia, which suggested the US did not want to expand the war. And although the transatlantic military alliance has somewhat eased the restrictions, the fact that Ukraine is not a NATO member leaves room for negotiation and compromise on Ukraine's neutrality or demilitarization. But with Trump set to take office in 45 days, the Joe Biden administration lifted the ban on Ukraine using US-supplied weapons to strike deep into Russian territory, casting a shadow over global peace.

From heated debates in the United Nations to the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro in November, peace has been the priority for most countries, because they want to focus on development, especially green development.

The US does not want to give up its control in NATO and has used the military alliance to maintain its global hegemony. But NATO should not forget that it was created for the defense of Western European countries and stop acting against the will of countries around the world.



Federal Minister presided performance review meeting

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, spearheaded a Performance Review Meeting attended by Additional Secretary MoMA, Umer Zafar Sheikh to assess the progress of key maritime organizations and Board Member/Trustees of the respective organization attended the meeting for their valuable input. These included the Port Qasim Authority (PQA), Karachi Port Trust (KPT), and Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC).

The meeting provided a comprehensive overview of the monthly performance metrics, tackling challenges and pinpointing areas ripe for improvement. Strategic discussions centered on amplifying efficiency, productivity, and overall service delivery within the maritime sector.

The meeting concluded with a commitment to put into action the proposed recommendations and strategies designed to drive growth and progress in the maritime sector.

After the Performance Review meeting, Minister for Maritime Affairs, Mr.

Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, chaired a Khuli Kachehri session, providing an open platform for employees of maritime organizations and industry stakeholders to voice their concerns, suggestions, and ideas. This interactive forum enabled direct engagement with the Minister, fostering a collaborative environment to address grievances and enhance the maritime sector.

The Minister provided stakeholders with a reassuring commitment that their concerns would be duly recognized and their issues promptly addressed, ensuring a timely resolution to

their matters.

The Khuli Kachehri, an open forum, was attended by representatives from various organizations under the Ministry of Maritime Affairs. Notable attendees included the Chairman of Port Qasim Authority (PQA), the Chairman of Karachi Port Trust (KPT), and Executive Directors of the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation, along with team members from their respective maritime organizations were also present in Khuli Kachehri.

Directives were issued to resolve the issues on a priority basis.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh presiding over a performance review meeting.

Cost of chicken meat skyrockets

LAHORE (INP): Amid government claims of reducing inflation, the prices of essential commodities continue to soar, with chicken meat witnessing an unprecedented surge of nearly 100% across the country.

The abrupt rise in prices has left consumers reeling, struggling to manage household budgets. In the federal capital, Islamabad, the price of chicken meat skyrocketed to Rs880 per kilogram, marking a steep increase of Rs430 within a week.

The cost of live chicken also rose sharply, climbing from Rs285 to Rs460 per kg. Meanwhile, desi chicken, renowned for its superior quality, was being sold for a staggering Rs900 per kilogram.

The situation in Punjab's capital, Lahore, is no different. Broiler chicken meat prices surpassed Rs700 per kg, with reports from Tollinton Market indicating sales at Rs730 per kg. This figure far exceeds the government's official price of Rs595 per kg, reflecting a widening gap between official rates and market prices.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the rising poultry prices have added to consumer woes. In Peshawar, chicken prices increased by Rs70 in a single week, reaching Rs510 per kg from the previous week's Rs440. Though the increase is less dramatic than in Islamabad and Lahore, it underscores the uniform upward trend across regions.

Export of sports goods to China rises

ISLAMABAD (INP): The exports of sports goods to China have witnessed a substantial increase of six point six eight percent as ten point seven million dollars of sports goods were exported to China last year.

The country's sports industry gained global recognition due to the governmental efforts and Special Investment Facilitation Council.

The Pakistani made basketball and volleyball have been popular in Chinese schools and professional leagues. China reposed confidence on Pakistani quality sports products for preparations of major sporting events in their own country.

The advance technology of China and its trade network have brought revolution in sports industry of Pakistan. China is an important market for Pakistan's sports goods as it is providing new opportunities to Pakistan.

Ever-rising production cost real threat to small-scale businesses

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF) has said that ever-increasing cost of production in the country is the real threat to small-scale businesses (SMEs), as frequent upward revisions in policy rate and continuous fluctuations in rupee against dollar are posing further threat to the economy.

APBF President Syed Maaz Mahmood observed that the aggressive economic measures, high borrowing rates, inflation, oppressive taxation and unstable currency have been negatively affecting running businesses, many of which have closed their operations, while the remaining are struggling for survival.

With a view to deal with fiscal challenges, he asked the upcoming elected government to work on the three-way strategy by implementing short-term goals that will help to keep generating resources for smooth fiscal operations, medium-term goals where the government should focus on financial inclusion, documenting the economy by designing a system where all businesses can be registered and properly document their income including collection of sales tax, initiating the process of privatization as well as improving govern-

nance by introducing reforms in each sector.

As a long-term goal, the country must focus on improving its human capital, and revamping IT sectors by extending facilitations and providing all the requisite supports. In the same way, we also need to work on designing a comprehensive and proactive strategy to tackle challenges related to strengthening border security and implementing effective and comprehensive Anti-

Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing measures holding accountable and taking to task all those who are involved in illegitimate activities, undermining both our economy and national interests.

The APBF Chairman Ibrahim Qureshi said that the government does not have any pragmatic plan to address this liability, apart from asking for more loans to repay existing debt. Likewise, the target for current financial year's exports is too low to meet the country's revenue.

Ibrahim Qureshi said that the conventional approach of focusing solely on improving exports while pursuing a passive and imprudent foreign policy towards neighboring countries, poses a significant challenge in meeting export targets. Despite strained relations, the United States

remains the largest importer of Pakistani products. Still, there are no efforts to tap into the vast markets of neighboring countries or negotiate trade agreements with them.

The APBF President said that even though Pakistan and China enjoy close relations, yet the volume of exports to China is significantly lower compared to USA. Furthermore, the existing Pakistan China Free Trade Agreement (PCFTA) tends to benefit Chinese-origin corporations more than Pakistani businesses, giving them greater market access at the expense of Pakistani products.

Syed Maaz Mahmood said that the government is neglecting two important factors, namely, Information Technology and export of human capital that together can contribute towards generating foreign exchange and mobilizing revenue. It is essential to concentrate on nurturing a skilled workforce and assisting them in securing international employment opportunities. This approach would have a positive impact on our foreign policy and help in building foreign exchange reserves. Given the era of the fourth industrial revolution, Pakistan should prioritize facilitating IT businesses, enabling their access to international markets.

PIAF wants steps as economy faces low growth, high domestic debt

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial & Traders Association Front (PIAF) has said that the economy is stuck in low growth trap with poor human development outcome and increasing poverty, as economic conditions leave Pakistan highly vulnerable to climate shocks with insufficient public resources to finance development and that international experience suggests that domestic debt re-profiling did not always work unless associated with sharp and sustained structural reforms identified over four decades ago but remain pending to this day.

PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol in a joint statement along with senior vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and vice chairman Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary, while referring

to a report, observed that business community has long been urging the government to reform the power sector, since decades ago when circular debt was in millions of rupees which today is a whop trillions of rupees, to reform the tax structure that continues to rely heavily on indirect taxes whose incidence on the poor is greater than on the rich, a major contributory factor in poverty levels reaching a high of 40 percent today, to continuing the policy of steadily raising the budgeted current expenditure, thereby shrinking the available fiscal space annually and, last but not least, warning the government of an impending water scarcity decades ago that went unheeded resulting in the country's current status of a water-stressed country.

Nasrullah Mughal advised the government to look at the bigger picture while cautioning domestic stakeholders that creation of a new institution that envisages billions of dollars of investment inflows backed by pledges may not provide a quick fix of the

economy. This is not to undermine the concerted ongoing efforts to make Pakistan an attractive destination for foreign investment but to emphasise the fact that basic economic theory dictates that foreign investment would flow into those countries where the economy is strong, growth is projected to rise and key macroeconomic fundamentals, including foreign exchange reserves, are more than sufficient to forestall the possibility of inability to meet the import bill, which includes basic inputs/essentials for industry as well as the household.

Tahir Manzoor Chaudhary said that structural reforms are therefore the way forward and until and unless the administration supplements its crackdown with these reforms that are minutely identified in reports but continue gathering dust in all relevant ministries, the situation is unlikely to lead to sustainable long-term improvement.

Faheemur Rehman Saigol said that the government is forced to borrow from the domestic and

external resources to finance the fiscal deficit as the country's tax revenue collection is insufficient to meet the expenditures. While, in absence of external financing the government is completely dependent on domestic borrowing, of which domestic debt stocks are sharply increasing.

The PIAF leaders noted some home truths about the steady regression of key macroeconomic indicators due to resistance and reluctance to implement the necessary reforms by civilian and military dispensations that, in his words, accounts for the worst ever economic crisis in the country today. There is no doubt that the crackdown against multiple market players - the speculators in the foreign exchange market, consumers engaged in electricity theft and smugglers of essential commodities, has yielded significantly positive results.

He called upon the government to announce clear and robust economic strategies, as the country has stuck in low economic growth situation.

DG convenes meeting following stray dogs video



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Director General of Airports (AVM Zeeshan Saeed) convened a meeting at PAA Headquarters to address the matter of stray dogs spotted in the General Aviation Area. The session was attended by the Deputy Director General Airports Sadiq UR REHMAN, Directors of APS, HR, and SQMS representatives, as well as other key officials. The acting Airport Manager and Manager Airside were also present.

During the meeting, the Manager Airside provided a detailed briefing on wildlife and vegetation control measures implemented in

the airside. It was emphasized that the airside is fully fenced and under 24/7 surveillance by specialized bird and wildlife control teams. Comprehensive safety inspections are carried out before every landing and takeoff, ensuring the highest standards of operational safety. Records show no formal reports of stray dogs or wildlife presence on the airside.

The Director General instructed officials to explore the use of advanced technology to further enhance airside safety and security.

The DG also visited the General Aviation Area, which is adjacent to but separate from the main air-

port premises. Due to its semi-open location, the area is more vulnerable to stray animal intrusions. Efforts to fortify the area are ongoing, with repairs to breaches in the existing boundary wall nearing completion.

It was further clarified that no flight cancellations due to wild animals' intrusions have occurred, as confirmed by operational records. Additionally, there have been no formal reports of stray dogs coming near taxiing aircraft in the General Aviation Area.

The Pakistan Airports Authority remains committed to maintaining the highest safety and security standards across all its facilities.

BMP for encompassing long-term vision for sustained progress

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has asked the government that its strategies should not only focus on short-term gains but also encompass a long-term vision for sustained progress, focusing the national economic agenda, giving priority to address the issues of trade and industry in consultation with the business community which is the key stakeholder.

FPCCI former president and Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar observed emphasized that such transparency from the government is crucial for instilling confidence in the business community and investors,

as Pakistan, with all its resources and opportunities, cannot afford to continue to muddle through economically due to political polarization.

FPCCI former president observed that Pakistan requires a political consensus on economic policy. Freeing the country from its economic calamities should not be a matter of party affiliation, but a common task for all political actors who want to see Pakistan flourish.

He observed that the country has had trouble raising enough money to cover its expenses. Due to the low tax-to-GDP ratio, borrowing and outside help are heavily relied upon to close the fiscal imbalance. There is a recurring budget deficit because the government spends more than it

takes in. The national debt burden has risen, as a result, needing substantial financial resources for debt repayment. Both internal and external debt in Pakistan has been constantly rising.

He called upon the government to announce clear and robust economic strategies, as the country has stuck in low economic growth situation, where double-digit policy rate for the last few years has diminished capacity to increase domestic production, and exports, negatively impacting domestic resource mobilization.

Anjum Nisar said that the new government that comes into office will have its work sharply cut out as far as the economic challenges are concerned. Coming at the back of fast-

unfolding climate change crisis and recent Covid pandemic that pushed millions into poverty with little fiscal capacity of government to provide anywhere near close to what was needed in stimulus spending. Then there is acute debt distress, and seriously high inflation at the back of global aggregate supply shock, and accentuated by a world of rising conflicts, mainly in Ukraine, and the Middle East.

He said that even though Pakistan's economic crisis is a recurring factor in the country's political unrest, it has a history of ignoring the nation's true issues, which include poor governance, a broken judicial system, outdated laws, complicated tax system, lack of transparency, duplication in the gov-

ernment system, ineffective bureaucracy, improper use of our human, natural and water resources, lack of efficient local government, inadequate data for country's planning, and the consistent flaws in policies in execution by the government departments. Pakistan's growth rate has always remained below its potential despite efforts to boost economic growth.

The former FPCCI President said that the development of important sectors and investment prospects was hampered by inadequate revenue collection, structural problems, and governance issues.

Since it has been causing serious governance and economic issues for years, the cost of goods, food, petrol, and other necessities has increased, which is not

bearable for the common man. On the other hand, there has been an increase in dissatisfaction among the public that no state institution is performing well and to save them from the haughtiness and bad administration pervasive in the system.

There is a dire need for a functioning economic strategy, and for continuity in its implementation, and protecting it from political meddling.

He said that Pakistan's economy is working, but only for its elite. Sustained, rapid, and equitable economic growth has remained elusive due to policy distortions that serve its selective sectors and classes.

Mian Anjum Nisar said that the business community is the key stakeholder to run the economy and the

government should finalize the upcoming federal budget in consultation with major chambers and other trade bodies.

He maintained that only solution that can steer Pakistan out of the crisis is indigenous with few basic elements, including making all economic policies in consultation with real stakeholders of the economy; simplification & broadening of the tax base instead of squeezing the existing tax payers; encouragement of remittances through bridging the gap between banking channels and open markets and protecting the assets of overseas Pakistanis in the country; incentivizing industry and export substitution.

The FPCCI former president said that Pakistan was in dire need of boosting

trade and industrial activities in order to achieve early revival of economy and stressed that the government should bring down policy interest rate to single digit in the next budget that would pave way for availability of low cost credit to the private sector and accelerate the pace of industrialization and investment in the country.

He said that high GST was a major factor for high cost of doing business and hike in inflation for the common man; therefore, he urged that the government should bring down GST to single digit level in the upcoming budget in order to reduce the production cost and decrease inflation in the country. It would also make our exports more competitive in the international market.



In brief

Tiger Club wins final

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Tiger Hockey Club won the final match of Inter-Club National Hockey Championship played at the Dring Stadium Bahawalpur here. The final match of the Inter-Club National Hockey Championship was played between Tiger Hockey Club and Young Fighter Hockey Club. Tiger Hockey Club won the final match by three goals. Young Fighter Hockey Club made two goals while Tiger Hockey Club team made five goals and won the match. President, Pakistan Hockey Federation, Mir Tarique Hussain Bugti distributed trophy and prizes among the hockey players. Divisional Sports Officer, Bahawalpur, Aamir Hameed, Coordinator of Inter-Club National Hockey Championship, Karmran Basheer, Incharge, Hockey Stadium, Qamar Abbas, Secretary and District Hockey Association Bahawalpur, Taimore Sameen Khan also attended the prize distribution ceremony held at the Dring Stadium Bahawalpur.

Gauff beats Swiatek

SYDNEY (Agencies): Taylor Fritz got the better of Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in a third-set tie-break to clinch victory for the United States in the United Cup final in Sydney. The 6-4 5-7 7-6 (7-4) success for the world number four followed a straight-set win for Coco Gauff over Iga Swiatek in the opening women's singles match. It is the second win for the US in the mixed team event after they took the inaugural title in 2023. Gauff, the world number three, claimed a second successive win over Swiatek after beating the former world number one on her way to the WTA Finals title in Riyadh in November. The Pole, who is now world number two, took a medical timeout at 5-4 down in the second set to have strapping put on her left thigh, which has bothered her all week, and after the 6-4 6-4 defeat she left the court in tears, walking gingerly. The win continued a perfect week for Gauff, 20, who had won all six of her previous singles and doubles matches at the event as she continues her preparations for the Australian Open, which begins on 12 January in Melbourne. "I think I have the belief that I am one of the best players in the world, and when I play good tennis, it's hard for me to be beaten," said Gauff, who has not lost a singles match since a defeat in October by world number one Aryna Sabalenka in the Wuhan semi-finals.

Ljubic edges Holdener

KRANJSKA GORA (AFP): Croatia's Zrinka Ljubic held her nerve to edge Wendy Holdener for victory in the women's World Cup slalom in Kranjska Gora on Sunday. Ljubic, who won the Semmering slalom last weekend, and her Swiss rival had been tied as leaders after the first leg. But the Croat did just enough on the second run down the Podkoren slope to clinch victory, her combined time of 1min 39.62sec meaning she finished 0.16sec ahead of Holdener. Sweden's Anna Swenn Larsson rounded out the podium, at 1.19sec. "I'm speechless," the 20-year-old Ljubic said after her victory in the Slovenian resort. "I didn't know how well Wendy skied," Ljubic admitted. "I had my own idea and I was really focusing on myself. I decided the tempo of the run, how I wanted to ski, and I really tried to stick to that vision."



CAPE TOWN: Shan Masood and Babar Azam put on Pakistan's first century stand for the opening wicket since December 2022.

Australia win gripping fifth India Test to take series 3-1

SYDNEY (AFP): Australia clinched a knife-edge fifth Test against India in Sydney by six wickets to seal a riveting series 3-1 Sunday and book their place in the World Test Championship final.

India were dismissed 45 minutes into the morning session of day three for 157, adding just 16 to their overnight 141-6 with the irrepressible Scott Boland ending with 6-45 and 10 wickets for the match.

Set 162 to win, the hosts reached the target before tea against an attack missing injured strike bowler Jasprit Bumrah to regain the Border-Gavaskar trophy for the first time since 2014-15. Australia lost three wickets before lunch to leave the Test finely poised, including Steve Smith who agonisingly fell just one short of becoming only the 15th player and fourth Australian to reach 10,000 Test runs.

But Usman Khawaja hit a composed 41 before Travis Head (34 not out) and debutant Beau Webster (39 not out) steered them home. "This is unreal, this (a series win against India) is one that a few of us didn't have. It's been an amazing series ... it's really lived up to all the hype," said Australia skipper Pat Cummins.

"I'm immensely proud. I love playing with these guys, they are such a special group. I feel privileged to have this job and what

we have been able to achieve together. "Pretty satisfied at the moment."

Thrilling tour Victory was enough to ensure Australia will defend their World Test Championship in the June final at Lord's against South Africa. It culminated a thrilling tour full of twists and turns that saw record crowds and some spectacular individual performances.

The five-Test series witnessed the emergence of exciting young talents in the form of Australian opener Sam Konstas and Indian all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy. At the same time, ageing veterans, notably Rohit Sharma, showed that the clock is ticking on their careers.

India won the first match in Perth convincingly before Australia bounced back in the day-night affair at Adelaide. The rain-hit Brisbane clash ended in a draw before the hosts took all the momentum into Sydney with a pulsating day-five win in Melbourne.

Indian pace spearhead and skipper Bumrah, who has been dealing with a back issue, batted briefly when his team resumed after bowling just one over and leaving the field on Saturday. But in a huge setback the 31-year-old did not appear again, leaving Mohammed Siraj and Prasidh Krishna to lead the bowling attack, with Virat Kohli in charge.

"A little frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body, and you can't fight your body," said Bumrah. "The whole series was well fought," he added. "Younger players have come in, and the learnings will help us in future. They have gained a lot of experience and they will go from strength to strength. "It is all about adapting and learning."

Rapid-fire Konstas It appeared to be a difficult run chase on a deteriorating surface offering plenty for the bowlers, but Konstas and Khawaja had other ideas. They raced to 35 off the first three overs, with teenager Konstas hitting out.

It proved his downfall when on 22, unnecessarily lashing at a good length ball from Prasidh only to sky it to Washington Sundar at mid-off. Prasidh then knocked over Marcus Labuschagne for six, caught by Yashasvi Jaiswal at slip, with the same pair removing Smith on four, fending off a rising ball.

Veteran Khawaja, who had a poor series, produced some cracking boundaries on his way to 41, but he mistimed a pull shot off Siraj with wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant collecting the edge. It gave India a glimmer of hope before Head and Webster took the game away. India resumed after a counter-attacking 61 from Pant helped build their second-innings lead.

Sohail Adnan advances to British Junior Open's final

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's promising squash player Sohail Adnan continued his impressive run at the prestigious British Junior Open Squash Championship in Birmingham on Sunday.

In a dominant display, Adnan defeated Egyptian opponent Amr Moustafa 3-0 in the semifinal match by the scoreline of 11-7, 11-6 and 11-7, according to information made available here by Pakistan Squash Federation.

This victory sets the stage for a thrilling final encounter against top-seeded Egyptian player Moez Tamer Elmaghazy in the Under-13 category. Adnan will be aiming to cap off a remarkable tournament with a gold medal.

Saim Ayub to travel to London for ankle treatment

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided to send Saim Ayub to London immediately for the treatment of his right ankle fracture incurred during the second Test match against South Africa in Newlands, Cape Town.



Saim Ayub was scheduled to stay with the team in Cape Town and travel to Pakistan as he was advised six-week rest by the doctors. Saim will travel to London from Cape Town on the first available flight.

Upon intervention of PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi, it has been decided to send Saim Ayub to London immediately as appointment has been fixed with the renowned orthopaedic experts in London. Assistant coach Azher Mehmood will accompany Saim Ayub to London. The decision has been taken after consultation with doctors.

The PCB chairman talked to the opening batter Saim and inquired about his well-being and expressed good wishes for swift recovery.

Mohsin Naqvi said: "Saim Ayub will be checked up by sports ortho specialist doctors in England as an immediate appointment has been made by the PCB. The medical team is looking into the entire case and Dr. Mumraiz has shared Saim's medical reports with specialists in England."

The PCB chairman said that Saim Ayub is a stylish batsman and an asset to Pakistan cricket.

"Saim's treatment will be ensures at the best hospital of the world and all resources will be used for his treatment. We hope that the left-handed batter will make a full recovery before the ICC Champions Trophy."

Saim Ayub is sure to miss the two Test matches against the visiting West Indies but the PCB wants to see the batter fit for the ICC Champions Trophy scheduled to be hosted by the defending champions Pakistan from February 19 to March 9.

Captain Masood leads Pakistan fight back in second Test

CAPE TOWN (AFP): Shan Masood and Babar Azam shared a record opening partnership as Pakistan fought back after conceding a 421-run first innings deficit on the third day of the second Test against at Newlands on Sunday.

Pakistan were 213 for one in their follow-on innings at close of play, still 208 runs short of making South Africa bat again.

Pakistan captain Masood made 102 not out, his sixth Test century, and Babar scored 81, his third successive half-century in the series.

Babar, who has not scored an international century since August 2023, fell short again when he was caught in the gully off Marco Jansen 14 minutes before the close of play.

Their partnership of 205 was the highest for the first wicket for Pakistan in Tests against South Africa. It also exceeded Pakistan's first innings total of 194, which prompted South African captain Temba Bavuma to enforce the fol-

low on.

It was the second significant partnership of the day for Babar, who was forced to open the batting after Saim Ayub was ruled out of the match with a broken right ankle.

Babar made 58 in the first innings and put on 98 for the fourth wicket with Mohammad Rizwan (46) before his dismissal triggered a collapse.

Babar and Rizwan resumed at the overnight 64 for three and batted comfortably through the first hour, seeing off the threat of Kagiso Rabada and Jansen, South Africa's premier strike bowlers.

The stand was broken by 18-year-old debutant Kwen Maphaka five balls after the morning drinks break when Babar was caught behind by Kyle Verreynne, glancing a loose ball down the leg side.

Babar had batted solidly in a 127-ball innings. He stood in seeming disbelief at his dismissal before returning to the pavilion.

Rizwan followed five overs later when he charged down the pitch against Wiaan Mulder and edged a wild slog into his stumps.

There was minimal resistance from the rest of the batsmen.

Masood and Babar showed in the second innings that there were no demons in a pitch on which South Africa scored 615.

They kept the scoreboard moving with positive stroke play and good running between the wickets and seldom looked in danger of getting out.

South Africa's frustration boiled over when Mulder, after bowling a ball which Babar struck back firmly, threw the ball at the batsman, who was on 56.

The incident led to an exchange of words, which also involved wicketkeeper Verreynne, and an intervention by the umpires.

The left-handed Masood struck 14 fours in posting his century off 159 balls.



SYDNEY: The Australians got their hands on the trophy after a long gap.

Muzammil, Amna win tennis c'ship titles

ISLAMABAD (APP): Muzammil Murtaza and Amna Ali Qayum clinched the Men's and Ladies' Singles titles, respectively of the 10th Begum Kulsum Saifullah Khan National Ranking Tennis Championships at the PTF-SDA Tennis Complex, Islamabad on Sunday.

Murtaza delivered a commanding performance, defeating Muhammad Shoab 6-3, 6-2 in the Men's Singles final.

In the Ladies' Singles, Amna Ali Qayum showcased her skill and composure, overcoming Soha Ali 6-3, 6-4 to secure the

championship title.

In the Boys' Under-14 category, rising star Hassan Usmani triumphed over Ruhab Faisal with a dominant 6-2, 6-0 victory. Meanwhile, in the Boys' Under-12 final, Shayan Afridi defeated Rashid Ali 6-1, 6-0, cementing his place as a promising young talent.

The closing ceremony was attended by dignitaries and tennis enthusiasts. Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Pakistan, attended the event as chief guest, while Senator Salim Saifullah Khan, Patron of the Pakistan Tennis

Federation (PTF), served as guest of honour.

A moment of silence was observed during the ceremony to honour the passing of the father-in-law of PTF President Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi.

Highlighting young talent, a cash award of Rs. 25,000 was presented to Hassan Usmani for his outstanding international performances in Saudi Arabia and Aghabat.

Additionally, veteran coach Mahboob Khan was honoured with a shield for his decades-long dedication to nurturing tennis in Pakistan.

Henry, Young power New Zealand to win

WELLINGTON (AFP): Matt Henry claimed four wickets and Will Young scored an unbeaten 90 Sunday as New Zealand coasted to a nine-wicket win over Sri Lanka in the first one-day international.

The tourists never recovered after slumping to 23-4 inside 10 overs, dismissed in the 44th over for 178 after being asked to bat in cold, windy Wellington.

In response, Young was barely flustered during a fluent 86-ball knock, putting on 93 for the opening stand with Rachin Ravindra, who scored 45.

Mark Chapman was not out 29 as the home side reached the target from 26.2 overs in an emphatic start to the three-match series.

Coming off a productive Test series against England, Henry was a handful with the new ball in seam-friendly conditions, taking the key wicket of opener Pathum Nissanka for nine in the fifth over.

The relentless seamer returned to help mop up the tail, finishing with 4-19 off 10 overs. Seamers Nathan Smith

and Jacob Duffy snared four wickets each, capitalising on bouncy conditions offering some sideways movement at the Basin Reserve.

Captain Mitchell Santner praised the patience shown by his pace attack.

"The boys up front did the job with the ball but when there's movement there, you're expected to take wickets," Santner said.

"We were patient, especially at the start, and were able to chip our wickets out that way. All four seamers did a hell of a job."

Opener Avishka Fernando rode out the early storm to top score with 56 off 63 balls, hitting five fours and a six.

He put on 87 for the fifth wicket with Janith Liyanage, who departed for 36, caught in the deep.

Off-spinner Santner took one wicket and three catches, as well as executing a sharp run-out of danger man Kamindu Mendis with a direct hit.

Tailenders Wanindu Hasaranga (35) and Chamidu Wickramasinghe (22) scored late runs

before both were caught off Henry.

Batting conditions improved and the in-form Young took advantage, hitting 12 fours.

The 32-year-old was named player of the series following the 3-0 Test sweep in India and scored 42 and 60 in his only appearance during the home Test series loss to England before Christmas.

Wickramasinghe took the only wicket, when Ravindra was caught on the deep square leg boundary.

Visiting skipper Charith Asalanka refused to blame the cold and blustery conditions for a substandard display.

"We knew when we came here it's too windy and it's going be hard for us but that is not the reason we lost," he said.

"As professionals we have to play any kind of situation.

"I think they bowled really nicely up front and it's hard for us to come back."

The second game is in Hamilton on Wednesday.

New Zealand won the preceding Twenty20 series against Sri Lanka 2-1.



In brief

Gillani flays attack

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Turbat, Balochistan, where a blast targeted a bus traveling from Karachi to Turbat. The Chairman Senate expressed deep sorrow over the loss of lives and conveyed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. "Terrorists are the enemies of progress and are fearful of Pakistan's development," he remarked, adding that their aim is to disrupt the nation's journey toward prosperity by spreading chaos. Gillani affirmed the unwavering determination of Pakistan's people and security forces to eradicate terrorism from its roots. "We stand resolute in our fight against these heinous acts of violence," he said. Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani also prayed for the swift recovery of the injured and assured that all necessary measures would be taken to bring the perpetrators of attack to justice. The blast, which occurred in the New Bahman area of Turbat, claimed the lives of four individuals and injured 32 others.

27,300 cusecs water released

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 27,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 37,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1474.46 feet and was 76.03 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 15,600 cusecs and 6,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1133.05 feet, which was 83.05 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 9,800, 16,400, 9,900 and 1,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 11,900 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 5,500 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

8 busted; weapons seized

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police apprehended eight outlaws involved in different criminal activities including possessing illegal weapons recovered from their possession, on Sunday. A police spokesperson told APP that the Shalimar police station teams took legal action against accused involved in possessing illegal weapons and arrested two accused. He said police teams recovered a pistol and MP5 rifle with ammunition from their possession. Moreover, six absconders were also arrested from various areas of the city during the last 24 hours. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operation Muhammad Arslan Shah Zaib said that the ICT Police is actively working to ensure the safety of citizens' lives and property in the federal capital, emphasizing that no elements will be allowed to disrupt citizens' peace. Protecting the lives, property, and dignity of citizens is the Islamabad Police's top priority, he added.

NA speaker stresses self-determination as fundamental right for Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD (APP): National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering support for the Kashmiri people, emphasizing that the right to self-determination is an inherent and fundamental right of all nations.

In his message on Right to Self-Determination Day, observed annually on January 5 for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the speaker praised the Kashmiri people for their steadfast struggle over seven decades to secure this right. He emphasized that the day represents their unwavering commitment to attaining their inalienable freedom, as acknowledged by the United Nations.

Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq underscored the significance of January 5, 1949, when the United Nations Security Council

passed a resolution endorsing the Kashmiri people's right to determine their future through a fair and impartial plebiscite. However, he expressed regret that despite the lapse of more than seventy years, these resolutions remain unimplemented, leaving the Kashmiri people's aspirations unfulfilled.

NA Speaker strongly condemned the Indian government's actions of August 5, 2019, when it unilaterally abrogated the special status of Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. He described these measures as draconian and a blatant assault on the rights of the Kashmiri people.

He reaffirmed that such oppressive tactics would never diminish the Kashmiri people's resolve to pursue their rightful demand for self-determination.

Reiterating Pakistan's

unwavering support for the Kashmiri people's struggle, Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq urged the international community to recognize the legitimate demand of the Kashmiri people for self-determination and to take meaningful steps toward resolving the long-standing Kashmir dispute. He emphasized that a peaceful resolution, in accordance with UN resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people, is essential for regional stability and global peace.

Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq assured that Pakistan stands resolutely alongside the Kashmiri people in their just cause. He reiterated that Pakistan will continue to provide moral, diplomatic, and political support for the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue across all regional and international platforms.



ISLAMABAD: People busy purchasing dry fruits from vendor at H-9 weekly bazaar in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

CTP Driving School empowering women

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Driving School of City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi on the directives of City Traffic Officer (CTO), Beenish Fatima is empowering women under 'Women on Wheels Program' as over 1258 female learners were given training in 2024.

Total 2,796 citizens including 1258 female and 1538 male were given training in CTP Driving School last year while 112 women also got training to drive bikes and scooters under the 'Women on Wheels Program.' In addition to purchasing four new bike/scooters for the women on Wheels Program in 2024, the CTP Rawalpindi also appointed female instructors for the first time in the driving training school.

According to CTO Rawalpindi, CTP have also introduced modern driving simulator for the first time in CTP Headquarters to train the learners. She informed that a modern driving simulator with necessary components such as gear, clutch, accelerator, steering wheel and brake was introduced for the first time in the driving training school of CTP Rawalpindi.

The simulator allows the

learners to immerse themselves in a complete road-driving experience.

The CTP are trying to ensure the use of modern technology to provide the best driving training to the citizens. Through, the driving simulator, those learning to drive will be able to practice driving in different situations without any danger, she said adding, this modern simulator will not only provide awareness of traffic rules but will also provide training on correct response in difficult and emergency situations.

In order to ensure smooth flow of traffic on city roads, City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi are utilizing all available resources and taking action in accordance with the law against the traffic rules violators while 848,000 challans slips were issued in 2024. Beenish Fatima said that uninterrupted flow of traffic and facilitation of the road users are top priorities of CTP.

Talking about the performance of CTP during 2024, she said that Traffic Police issued a total of more than 848,000 challans on violations of traffic rules and imposed fines of amounting to Rs 490 mil-

lion, while 2,874 cases were also registered on severe traffic rules violations.

The CTO while giving the annual performance figures said that during 2024, over 17,654 challans were issued on one-way violations, 56,314 for negligent and careless driving, 48,226 on disrupting the flow of traffic, 68,507 on lane violation, 162,982 for driving without licenses and 15,813 challans were issued to smoke emitting vehicles. 163 vehicles were impounded in different police stations, 22,149 underage drivers were penalized, 49,591 bikers were imposed fines for driving without safety helmets and 162,982 for driving without licenses.

Similarly, 49,591 two-wheelers were imposed fines for one wheeling and 6,552 for wrong parking. Over 46,751 vehicles parked in no parking areas were removed by lifters, 76,012 vehicles were challaned for using unauthorized number plates, 3,480 school vans were challaned and 179 impounded in different police stations under the ongoing campaign regarding school van safety.

charging sockets in coaches, and provision of water dispensers in coaches to provide clean drinking water to passengers.

Besides this, the department has installed Ticket Vending Machines (TVM) for purchasing tickets, information counters to guide and facilitate passengers, digital display boards for the arrival and departure of trains, and provision of wheelchairs and ramps for disabled people.

To improve the punctuality of trains, he said Pakistan Railways is removing speed restrictions through special maintenance of track, the signaling system is being improved through computerized interlocking and installation of solar system, locomotive failures

Uzbekistan plans to launch direct flight to Karachi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Alisher Tukhtaev announced the Uzbek government's plan to introduce a new direct flight route between Uzbekistan and Karachi this year, describing it a significant step to foster closer ties between the two nations.

During his official visit to Karachi from January 2-4, Ambassador Tukhtaev addressed the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), and members of the business community in Sindh's metropolis. He highlighted the historic and brotherly relations between Uzbekistan and Pakistan, underpinned by shared cultural and religious affinities.

"Our two nations are closer than ever, thanks to the realization of the long-awaited vision of regional connectivity," the ambassador said, emphasizing the ongoing efforts to enhance economic cooperation and strategic collaboration.

Ambassador Tukhtaev shared that Uzbekistan implemented a soft visa

regime for Pakistani citizens in September 2023, facilitating business and tourist travel. This initiative, coupled with the recently launched direct flights between Tashkent and Lahore, underscores Uzbekistan's commitment to fostering people-to-people connections and promoting mutual understanding.

Highlighting the trade potential, the ambassador noted that mutual trade between Uzbekistan and Pakistan has tripled over the past five years, rising from \$122 million in 2019 to \$387 million in 2023. He stressed the untapped opportunities for further collaboration, particularly in sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, leather and tannery, food processing, and agribusiness.

Ambassador Tukhtaev also commended the success of the "Made in Pakistan" single-country exhibition held in Tashkent last June, which provided an invaluable platform for entrepreneurs from both nations to forge new trade and investment agreements. Building on this momentum, he announced plans for a "Made

in Uzbekistan" industrial exhibition in Karachi later this year, expressing confidence that it would further strengthen economic ties.

The ambassador extended an invitation to a delegation from the KCCI to visit Uzbekistan and explore investment opportunities in regions such as Bukhara, Sirdarya, Surkhondarya, and Kashkadarya. He assured full support from the Uzbek Embassy in facilitating government-to-business (G2B) and business-to-business (B2B) meetings during such visits.

"Uzbekistan offers a safe, conducive, and liberal environment for investment," he stated, urging Pakistani businesses to capitalize on opportunities in various sectors where Sindh excels. He also welcomed the idea of organizing B2B meetings alongside business delegation visits to materialize trade and investment prospects. Ambassador Tukhtaev's visit underscored the commitment of both nations to advancing regional connectivity, strengthening economic partnerships, and fostering deeper bilateral ties.

Police arrest 33 lawbreakers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other lawbreakers here arrested 33 accused besides recovering charas, liquor, mobile phones, weapons and other items from their possession.

A police spokesperson said that Airport, Morgah, Saidqabad, Bani and Waris Khan police arrested seven accused namely Kamran, Aurangzaib, Hamza, Najeeb, Kamran, Muhammad Mustafa and Dilbar Ali on recovery of 48 liters liquor. Westridge police arrested Imran for having 25 liters liquor while Civil Lines and Bani police rounded up Tanveer, Imran, Saddam, Muhammad Ashfaq, Ashfaq Ahmed on recovery of total 25 liters liquor.

Similarly, Gujar Khan, Saddar Wah and Ratta Amral police rounded up four accused namely Kamran, Faisal, Ahmed, Shahzaib, and recovered two rifles, two 30 bore pistols and other items. Airport and Gujar Khan police netted Tayyab and Imran for carrying two 30 bore pistols. Rawalpindi district police in search operations conducted in different areas arrested 10 lawbreakers namely Tasawar, Ghulam Mustafa, Farrakh, Nawaz, Noor Badshah, Rafiullah, Liaquat, Usman, Saeed and Ahsad.

The spokesman informed that Rawalpindi District Police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani here on Sunday enhanced security at churches. Sub-Divisional Police Officers (SDPOs) and Station House Officers (SHOs) on Sunday checked security at churches in their respective areas and briefed the police personnel deployed there.

He informed that Rawalpindi police made strict measures to ensure security of the Christian community at churches. Saddar Baroni police in an operation arrested two accused who helped a wanted person in a murder case escape. Police also recovered weapons, two vehicles and other items from their possession. The spokesman informed that Saddar Baroni police arrested Suleman and Sarmad who helped a proclaimed offender flee the scene and recovered Kalashnikov, pistol, a vigo vehicle and Land Cruiser with revolving lights.

4th Int'l Hydropower conference to be held

ISLAMABAD (APP): 4th International Hydropower Conference 2025, hosted by Energy Update in Collaboration with Private Power Infrastructure Board (PPIB) & International Hydropower Association, is set to be held here on January 9. This landmark event will bring together industry leaders, policymakers, and global experts to discuss hydropower's transformative role in shaping a sustainable energy future for Pakistan.

The event will feature an inaugural session with key addresses by M. Naeem Qureshi, Managing Editor of Energy Update; Shah Jahan Mirza, Managing Director, Private Power Infrastructure Board (PPIB); Eddie Rich, CEO of the International Hydropower Association (joining online); Hafiz Isahaq, CEO, TNB Remaco Malaysia; and Dr. Musadik Malik, Federal Minister for

Water Resources, who is expected to join as the Chief Guest, will also deliver an address.

Interactive sessions will include presentations by Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Azam Joya (GM C&M Water), Asim Javed (Hydropower Expert), Dr. Irfan Yousaf (CEO, MKAI Climate Consulting), Dr. Hassan Daud Butt (Senior Advisor, CEEC), and Dr. Jehanzeb Nasir (Energy Systems Engineer, NUST), who will cover topics ranging from financing challenges to emerging technologies and strategic hydropower roles.

Panel discussions will delve into hydropower's critical role in Pakistan's energy sector, featuring contributions from Dr. Munawar Iqbal Kamboh (DG Hydel, PPIB), Arfan Miana (CEO, Neelum Jhelum Hydropower), Shukree (Outgoing CEO, TNB Remaco Malaysia), Dr.

Parvaiz Naim (External Advisor, KfW Development Bank), and M. Ayub Khan (CEO, KPKTDC).

The conference will culminate with a session on parliamentary leadership in energy transition, chaired by Prof. Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, who is also expected to join as chief guest.

The session will feature prominent voices, including Dr. Nafisa Shah (MNA), Dr. Shazrey Munsab Ali Khan (MNA & Parliamentary Secretary, MoFA), Dr. Amjad Ali Khan (MNA & Member, Energy Nexus Economy Forum), and Senator Saadia Abbasi.

This event provides an unparalleled platform to discuss hydropower's transformative potential, untapped opportunities, and the collaborative efforts needed to secure Pakistan's energy future.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of motorcyclists crossing Srinagar Highway through overhead bridge in Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Citizens advised to check status of Housing Societies

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) has advised the citizens to check the status of the housing societies before investment at website www.rda.gop.pk.

According to the Director General (DG), RDA, Kinza Murtaza, RDA was taking strict action in accordance with the law against the rules violators and issued 149 notices to illegal/fake housing schemes, as part of the Authority's ongoing efforts to protect the general public from exploitation and financial losses.

RDA had warned the public against investing in 149 housing schemes in the district that have not obtained the necessary NoCs or approvals from the authority, she added.

She informed that RDA had intensified its action against illegal/unapproved housing schemes which were misleading the citizens. The illegal schemes, which have been operating under false pretenses, have caused substantial financial loss by promising ownership of homes that only existed on paper, often limited to mere maps and advertisements.

"RDA is committed to

ensuring that the general public is protected from the harmful effects of these illegal schemes and utilizing all available resources to take strict action against illegal projects," said DG Kinza Murtaza.

She urged the citizens to always verify the legality of any housing scheme before investments. "We advise everyone to consult with RDA to ensure that the scheme they are interested in is legally approved, and their investment is secure," she added. The DG said the RDA had also stopped the approval of new housing schemes. A comprehensive survey was conducted, categorizing these schemes into three groups based on their legal status.

On the directives of the Divisional Intelligence Committee, RDA Task Force was regularly conducting its operations against illegal housing schemes. The RDA enforcement squad while conducting operations against illegal housing schemes took action against a various rules violators including Top View City (D-17) Project of Orbit International, Al-Baraqa Garden, Kohsar Extension (F-Block) and Nabeel Block (Near Kohsar

Extension), Ring Road Enclave (A Project of Jawahir City Pvt. Ltd.), Hurtus Floare, COUNTRY Farmhouse and Resorts, Gilgit City, Mehmod Town (K & M Construction and Developers (Pvt) Ltd.), Hamdard City, Top View City, Wanni in Tehsil Taxila, Green Hurtus, illegal Land Subdivision near Gandhara City and Farm Land Estate, and others and demolished road infrastructure, security offices, sewerage lines, containers and removed advertisement boards, panaflexes besides sealing the site offices.

RDA had also launched a comprehensive public awareness campaign about housing schemes to protect the general public from financial losses, she said.

The DG advised the citizens to visit the RDA website www.rda.gop.pk or contact the RDA's One Window Operation center to get information about legal and illegal housing schemes. Ms Murtaza said there were only 69 housing schemes that had obtained approval from the RDA under the law while all others were illegal, adding, "We have prepared a list of the housing schemes which will face legal actions".

Taliban export rare parrots

KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban's Department of Agriculture in Kandahar province of Afghanistan announced Sunday the export of 600 rare parrots of the Lovebird species from a private zoo in the province to Kuwait. In a statement, the department said the parrots had undergone a 15-day quarantine period and were subjected to necessary health examinations to secure international health certification before their transfer.

Ministry holds tender

KANDAHAR (BNA): The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum held a tender meeting for the sale of lead and zinc from Kandahar province. The meeting was organized for the sale of 1,460.64 tons of lead and zinc ore, the Ministry's share from the Bibi Gohar area in Khakrez. The meeting was attended by Mullah Abdul Rahman Rahmani, DG of Cadastre, Engr. Gul Mohammad, Director of Small Mines Contract Implementation, the appointed committee, and bidding companies.

Trade volume reaches \$12.4 billion in 2024

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce has reported that Afghanistan conducted trade transactions worth \$12.422 billion with various countries in 2024. The ministry stated that Afghanistan's exports during this period amounted to \$1.803 billion, which represents a 4% decrease compared to 2023. The total value of imports was reported to be \$10.619 billion. According to Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the spokesperson for the ministry, the country's imports in 2024 increased by 38% compared to the previous year. Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad further said: "Afghanistan's total trade in 2024 reached \$12.422 billion. Of this, exports accounted for \$1.803 billion, while imports were approximately \$10.619 billion." He also mentioned that Afghanistan's exports to China and Pakistan declined last year; however, as a result of efforts by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, trade volumes with Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan have doubled. The ministry spokesperson said: "Our exports to Pakistan and China decreased this year compared to the previous year, but they increased with Turkey and India. Most notably, exports to four neighboring and Arab countries—Iran, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and the UAE—have doubled." Representatives of the private sector emphasize that increasing Afghanistan's exports globally depends on introducing more facilities, including establishing packaging factories and providing visas for Afghan traders. Khairuddin Mayel, Deputy Head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment, stated: "Facilitating visa and travel conditions for our traders in other countries will enable them to find markets for Afghan products, agricultural goods, and overall exports globally." Wasim Safi, head of the Agricultural and Livestock Chamber, said: "To access international markets with high standards, we need to focus on packaging and standardization efforts for our products." The Ministry of Industry and Commerce also highlighted that after the political changes in the country, Afghanistan's annual exports to regional countries were initially around \$850 million. However, due to the efforts of the Islamic Emirate, this figure has now reached around \$2 billion annually.

500 Afghan children killed or hurt by explosives

KABUL (Ariana News): More than 500 Afghan children lost their lives or suffered injuries in 2024 due to explosions caused by unexploded ordnance and remnants of war, according to a report released by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). UNICEF highlighted the ongoing risks posed by explosive remnants of conflict, which continue to endanger children across Afghanistan. In response, the organization has ramped up efforts to educate communities about the dangers. Last year, over 3 million children and their guardians were trained to identify and avoid explosive hazards. In a social media post on Sunday, UNICEF shared an image of children participating in one such training session, where they learned how to recognize and safely avoid explosive remnants. The agency emphasized the urgent need for continued mine clearance and awareness programs to prevent further casualties, particularly among children who are disproportionately affected by these hidden threats. The situation underscores the long-lasting impacts of conflict in Afghanistan and highlights the critical importance of mine education and clearance initiatives to protect vulnerable populations.

Badri stresses acceleration of TAPI project

KABUL (Ariana News): Hedayatullah Badri, the Acting Minister of Mines and Petroleum, held a meeting with Mohammad Murad Amanov, the Executive Director of the TAPI project in Kabul. The discussions centered around expediting the implementation of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project, which has been underway in Afghanistan for over two months. During the meeting, both parties reviewed the recent progress of the project and identified strategies to accelerate the remaining phases. Particular attention was given to creating more job opportunities for Afghan workers, enhancing the technical expertise of Afghan engineers, and addressing other critical aspects of the initiative.



The TAPI pipeline project is a cornerstone of regional energy cooperation, aiming to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. Beyond its energy implications, the project is expected to bring significant economic benefits, including employment generation and capacity-building initiatives for local communities. Officials emphasized their commitment to overcoming challenges and ensuring the successful completion of the project, which is seen as vital for fostering regional economic integration and energy security.

Guided rocket Milan Konkurs activated



KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of National Defense of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has announced the activation of a new guided rocket named Milan Konkurs (9M135) and the graduation of a group of soldiers who completed training on its use. In a press release, the ministry stated that the rocket was activated in the Artillery Directorate under the supervision of the Chief of Staff. Additionally, 13 young soldiers graduated from a month-long professional and practical training course on operating the Milan Konkurs (9M135) rocket. The graduation ceremony was attended by the head of the Artillery Directorate, Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob Mansoor Aka, the Commander of the Recruitment and Induction Command, the device's instructor Mullah Sediqullah Mestari, and several other officials and personnel. Notably, this guided rocket has been activated for the first time in the country and is capable of targeting armored tanks, warships, and low-flying helicopters.

Afghanistan to participate in exhibition

HERAT (BNA): The Directorate of Information and Culture of Herat held a meeting with officials from Herat's tourism companies, transportation services, and hoteliers to plan participation in The 18th International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition 2025 (TITE). Officials from the Directorate of Information and Culture in Herat stated that representatives from these tourism, transportation, and hotel companies will participate on behalf of Herat in the exhibition. Mawlawi Rahmatullah Mohammadi, Head of Tourism at the Directorate of Information and Culture in Herat, mentioned that the purpose of participation is to attract tourists, introduce Herat's historical and natural attractions, strengthen international relations, and showcase industries related to the province's tourism sector. Participants in the meeting expressed that this exhibition provides a great opportunity to showcase Herat's tourism potential. They hope to establish new connections and attract foreign tourists by participating in this major event. It is noteworthy that The 18th International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition 2025 (TITE) is scheduled to take place in the month of February 11-14 this year, with representatives from 30 countries around the world.

Iran criticizes Afghanistan over new dam projects

KABUL (TOLONews): The filling of the Pashdan Dam in Herat and the Afghan government's efforts to build two new dams on the Farah River have drawn a strong reaction from the Iranian government. Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has stated that the construction of these water and power dams violates bilateral agreements between the two countries and disregards Iran's rights. The spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said that Afghanistan, under the treaties between the two nations, must remove obstacles preventing the flow of river water to Iran. Esmail Baghaei added that utilizing water resources

and basins cannot be done without respecting Iran's rights under bilateral treaties, customary international law, the principle of good neighborliness, and environmental considerations. He stated: "The utilization of water resources and basins must align with Iran's rights under bilateral agreements, customary rules, the principle of good neighborliness, and environmental concerns." Some experts, however, argue that there are no treaties or agreements concerning the Harirud and Farah rivers between Iran and Afghanistan, and that Iran has no right to interfere in the construction of dams on these rivers. Mohammad Rafiq

Shaheer, head of the Herat Specialists Council, stated: "Afghanistan has been at war for 50 years, which has severely impacted its economy and agriculture. Now that peace has come, decisions must be made to combat unemployment and provide food for the people. It is Afghanistan's natural right to utilize its water resources first." Some citizens emphasize the need to manage the country's water resources to advance agriculture and address economic challenges. They urged the Afghan government to expedite the construction of water and power dams. Ghulam Nabi, a resident of Herat, told TOLONews: "Currently, in the cold sea-

son, our canals are dry, but if we have surplus water, we should also address the needs of neighboring countries." Ramin, another resident of Herat, said: "Afghanistan is an agricultural country, and most residents of Herat are farmers. The dams must be completed to support agriculture in this province." The Pashdan Dam, built on the Karokh River, a branch of the Harirud, has recently begun its water-filling process. Meanwhile, the construction of the Bakhshabad Dam in Farah is progressing rapidly. According to the Afghan government, the construction of the Kaj Samad Dam in Farah is also set to begin soon.

Poetry Night held to promote literary activities

JAWZJAN (TOLONews): A Poetry Night program was held in Sheberghan, the capital of Jowzjan province, with the participation of poets, writers, and youth. The event aimed to promote and expand literary-cultural activities and to encourage young people to engage in reading and book culture. Several poets and young participants highlighted the value of such programs in strengthening the culture of reading and expanding literary activities. They urged the youth to contribute to the country's progress through reading and gaining knowledge. Qamaruddin Poya Aziz, a poet and writer, stated: "Youth can present their poems and writings through these programs. Such gatherings provide an opportunity to benefit from others' experiences and to nurture talents." Abdul Ghafoor Makhdoom, another poet and writer, said: "Organizing this Poetry Night keeps the culture of reading alive among young people and helps strengthen it." Shafiullah Haidari, a resident of Jowzjan, said: "Such gatherings are highly beneficial for promoting reading, increasing knowledge, and spreading the culture of book reading." Meanwhile, the Jowzjan Directorate of Information and Culture expressed its support for organizing literary and cultural programs and emphasized the continuation of such initiatives.

Ahmad Shahrokh Joyenda, head of culture and tourism at the Jowzjan Directorate of Information and Culture, stated: "Poetry Night is part of the directorate's programs. Poets and youth eagerly organize such events during winter nights, which have proven effective in promoting the culture of reading and book culture." According to the Jowzjan Directorate of Information and Culture, more than 40 scientific, literary, and cultural programs have been held in the province since the beginning of the current solar year, playing a significant role in encouraging and raising awareness among young people.

Afghan doctors contribute to Iran's healthcare system



KABUL (TOLONews): The Center for Foreign Nationals and Immigrants Affairs at Iran's Ministry of Interior has announced that nearly 700 Afghan specialist and subspecialist doctors are currently working in hospitals across Iran. Naderyar Ahmadi, head of the center, stated that in recent years, many Afghan migrants residing in Iran, including educated individuals, have been able to

access necessary services through obtaining special cards issued by service-providing institutions. He emphasized that an "Employment Atlas" has been developed, outlining specific professions where Iranian employers can utilize foreign labor to address their needs. He said: "Nearly 700 Afghan doctors are working in Iran, providing invaluable services." Iran is one of the largest host countries for Afghan migrants. According to available figures, millions of Afghans live in Iran, many of whom migrated due to economic and security challenges in Afghanistan. Despite restrictions, skilled Afghan labor, particularly in the healthcare sector, has played a significant role in meeting Iran's needs.

Arab investor plans investment in Kandahar

KANDAHAR (BNA): Officials from the Kandahar Chamber of Industries and Mines report that an Arab investor, Abu Muhammad, has expressed interest in investing in the packaging and juice production of Kandahar's pomegranates. Sayed Masroor Amani, the head of Kandahar's Chamber of Mines, told Bakhtar News Agency that this Arab investor is ready to invest in the export, packaging, and juice production of pomegranates in the industrial town. Amani added that a significant portion of Kandahar's pomegranates was exported to neighboring countries annually. However, due to high tariffs imposed by neighboring countries this year, pomegranate orchard owners have suffered substantial economic losses. He stated that this issue can be resolved by enhancing the processing and packaging capacity of pomegranates and other fruits, and the investment by the Arab investor is considered a positive step in this direction.

Journalists in exile: Taliban detained 300 media workers over three years

KABUL (Amu TV): The Afghanistan Journalists in Exile in a statement on Sunday said that the Taliban have detained at least 300 journalists and media workers during their three years of rule in the country, describing the detainees as having endured "profound and indescribable violence" while in custody. The media watchdog said that only 200 of those detained were willing to have their names made public. The statement also reported that 17 journalists and media workers had been killed or had died under mysterious circumstances, both inside and outside Afghanistan, during the same period. Additionally, 28 others were reported injured in various incidents. Media under Taliban rule The statement highlighted the sharp decline in the number of

active media outlets in Afghanistan since the Taliban regained power. Of the 536 media outlets operating prior to their takeover, 250 have shut down, while about 50 new outlets have been launched under the Taliban's oversight. According to the exiled journalists, the Taliban have issued 12 decrees and directives during their rule, all of which impose severe restrictions on media operations. Among these is the so-called "Command of Good and Prohibition of Evil" law, which they argue has effectively dismantled independent journalism and "driven the final nail into the coffin of free expression." The plight of female journalists has worsened significantly under the Taliban, the statement said. Of the approximately 2,000 women who worked in media prior to their return to power,

fewer than 100 have been allowed to continue their work, the statement noted. Most others have been barred from their jobs entirely. The statement also described the mass exodus of media workers following the Taliban's return. Out of 12,000 journalists and media staff who were active before the Taliban takeover, only 4,500 are still working in Afghanistan. Those who left the profession have either sought alternative livelihoods or fled the country. According to the statement, an estimated 1,500 journalists and media workers are believed to have relocated to Europe or North America, while about 3,000 remain in neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and India, as well as Central Asia, awaiting decisions on their immigration cases.

Syria's new Islamist rulers urge US to lift sanctions during visit to Doha

DOHA (Reuters): Syria's new Islamist rulers said on Sunday that U.S. sanctions on Syria were an obstacle to the war-torn country's rapid recovery and urged Washington to lift them during a visit by Syrian officials to Qatar.

"These sanctions constitute a barrier and an obstacle to the rapid recovery and development of the Syrian people who await services and partnerships from other countries," Syria's Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani told reporters after meeting with Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who also serves as foreign minister.

"We reiterate our calls for the United States to lift these sanctions, which have now become against the Syrian people rather than what they previously were: imposed sanctions on the Assad regime," he said.

Shibani, on his second foreign trip less than a month after former President Bashar al-Assad was ousted by rebels on Dec. 8, said that Qatar will be a partner in the new phase in Syria.

Doha had not normalised ties with Assad over his government's violent response to 2011 protests and backed the Syrian opposition instead.

Shibani, who was joined by Syrian Defence

Minister Murhaf Abu Qasra and Head of Intelligence Anas Khattab, met with other senior Qatari officials including Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Al-Khulaifi, a Qatari official told Reuters earlier.

Shibani presented the Qataris a clear roadmap for the near future in Syria and steps that would be taken by the new Syrian administration, Al-Khulaifi told reporters after the meeting.

"We are working together to prevent any foreign interference in Syrian affairs," Al-Khulaifi added.

Shibani said the roadmap is meant to "rebuild our country, restore its Arab and foreign

relations, enable the Syrian people to obtain their civil and basic rights, and present a government that the Syrian people feel it represents them and all their components."

He is expected to also visit the United Arab Emirates and Jordan this week to "support stability, security, economic recovery and build distinguished partnerships," according to his account on X.

Shibani embarked on his first foreign trip to Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, less than a month since former President Bashar al-Assad was ousted by rebels on Dec. 8, where Saudi officials discussed how best to support Syria's political transition.



DOHA: Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, appointed by the country's new rulers, arrives in Doha, Qatar, on Sunday.

President, PM reiterate support for Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has reaffirmed its commitment to the Kashmiri people's struggle for self-determination, with President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif urging the international community to act decisively to uphold their rights.

In a message on the 76th anniversary of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) resolution, Zardari emphasised Pakistan's continued political, diplomatic, and moral support for Kashmiris.

The UNCIP resolution, adopted on 5 January 1949, guarantees a free and impartial plebiscite under UN auspices for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Today, we reaffirm the inalienable right of Kashmiris to self-determination, which is enshrined in international law and supported by human rights instruments," Zardari said.

The President condemned India for denying this right for over seven decades and criticised its actions since 5 August 2019, which he said aim to alter the demographic and political fabric of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

"These steps are an attempt to turn Kashmiris into a disempowered community in their own homeland," he said, adding, "Despite systemic brutalities, the spirit of the Kashmiri people remains unbroken, and their struggle for freedom cannot be suppressed."

Zardari also called on the international community, particularly the United Nations, to fulfil its responsibility and support Kashmiris in exercising their right to self-determination.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif echoed these sentiments, urging global powers to honour their commitments to the Kashmiri people.

In a message on Right to Self-Determination Day for the People of Jammu & Kashmir observed on 5 January 2025, he said the fifth of January is annually observed as the 'Right to Self-Determination Day' for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

On this day in 1949, he said the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) adopted the historic resolution that guarantees a free and fair plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir, to enable the Kashmiri people to realize their inalienable right to self-determination.

"Right to self-determination is a core principle of the UN Charter, as well as of international law. Every year, the UN General Assembly adopts a resolution that advocates the legal right of people to decide their own destiny. It expresses unequivocal support for the realization of the right to self-determination for peoples under occupation.

Regrettably, the Kashmiri people have not been able to exercise this inalienable right for over seven decades," he explained.

He said the international community must also call for immediate cessation of human rights violations, release of political prisoners, and restoration of fundamental rights and freedoms of the Kashmiri people.

"Today, India continues to take multiple steps to consolidate its occupation of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), undermining the internationally recognized disputed nature of this territory.

Through a series of illegal and unilateral actions taken since 5 August 2019, India is trying to alter the demographic and political structure of the disputed territory, aimed at transforming the majority Kashmiri people into a disempowered minority community, in their own homeland."

Syria monitor says fighting between pro-Turkiye, Kurdish forces kills 101

BEIRUT (AFP): More than 100 combatants were killed over the last two days in northern Syria in fighting between Turkish-backed groups and Syrian Kurdish forces, a war monitor said on Sunday.

Since Friday evening, clashes in several villages around the city of Manbij have left 101 dead, including 85 members of pro-Turkish groups and 16 from the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

In a statement, the SDF said it had repelled "all the attacks from Turkiye's mercenaries supported by

Turkish drones and aviation."

Turkish-backed factions in northern Syria resumed their fight with the SDF at the same time Islamist-led rebels were launching an offensive on November 27 that overthrew Syrian president Bashar Assad just 11 days later.

They succeeded in capturing the cities of Manbij and Tal Rifaat in northern Aleppo province from the SDF.

The fighting has continued since, with heavy casualties.

According to Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the Observatory, the Turkish-backed groups

aim to take the cities of Kobani and Tabqa, before moving on to Raqqa.

The SDF controls vast areas of Syria's northeast and parts of Deir Ezzor province in the east where the Kurds created an autonomous administration following the withdrawal of government forces during the civil war that began in 2011.

The group, which receives US backing, took control of much of its current territory, including Raqqa, after capturing it from the jihadists of the Daesh group.

Ankara considers the SDF an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party

(PKK), which has fought a decades-long insurgency in southeastern Turkiye and is banned as a terrorist organization by the government.

The Turkish military regularly launches strikes against Kurdish fighters in Syria and neighboring Iraq, accusing them of being PKK-linked.

Ahmed Al-Sharaa, Syria's new leader and the head of the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), has previously said the SDF would be integrated into the country's future army.

HTS led the coalition of rebel groups that overthrew Assad last month.

Massive winter storm to slam half of US with snow, bitter cold

WASHINGTON (AFP): A powerful winter storm began hammering the central United States on Saturday, with meteorologists warning that millions in the east of the country would face blizzard conditions, treacherous ice, frigid temperatures and severe travel disruptions.

Over 60 million people are in the path of the dangerous storm, which is set to plunge the eastern half of the US into a deep freeze of Arctic air through Monday.

The National Weather Service (NWS) has warned of ferocious weather and severe travel delays, with ice, snow and gale-force winds in states from the central plains to the Mid-Atlantic.

"Disruptive winter storm to impact the Central Plains to the Mid-Atlantic through Monday with widespread heavy snow and damaging ice accumulations," the NWS said in its latest report.

The agency warned that areas from northeastern Kansas to north-central Missouri would see "the heaviest snowfall in a decade."

Scientists say extreme weather is becoming more common and more severe as a result of man-made climate change.

Commuting, travel issues

The first major storm of 2025 was already wreaking havoc on travel, with Kansas City International Airport announcing the closure of its flight operations Saturday "due to rapid ice accumulation."

Parts of the eastern states of New York and Pennsylvania are facing "heavy lake-effect snow" coming off the Great Lakes that could dump as much as two feet (61 centimetres) there, according to the NWS.

Forecast company AccuWeather said Saturday that the lake-effect snow total in the region, already blanketed in snow this week, could top four feet.

A blizzard will rage across the Central Plains by early Sunday, and "whiteout conditions will

make travel extremely hazardous, with impassable roads and a high risk of motorists becoming stranded," the NWS said.

The US capital Washington could be blanketed in five inches or more of snow, with up to 10 inches possible in nearby areas.

With the jet stream diving southward, temperatures are expected to plunge, in some places to -18 degrees Celsius, while strong wind gusts will compound the dangers. The mercury could sink tens of degrees below seasonal norms down to the US Gulf Coast. Before then, severe thunderstorms are expected across the lower Mississippi Valley, the NWS forecast.

Another major concern is freezing rain and sleet

expected from Kansas eastward to Kentucky and Virginia, setting the stage for thick ice to coat roads, making travel hazardous, bringing down trees and electricity lines, and potentially leaving millions of customers without power during a cold snap.

The NWS warned that it expected widespread tree damage and "long-lasting power outages" from Kansas to the central Appalachian Mountains.

Conditions could prove especially perilous in the Appalachians, where a deadly hurricane in late September devastated communities and ravaged multiple southeastern states including Kentucky. Many of those communities are still recovering from the effects of that hurricane.

The new storm "will likely cause significant disruption and dangerous conditions on our roads and could cause significant power outages just 24 hours or so before it's going to get really cold in Kentucky," Governor Andy Beshear told an emergency meeting.

The governors of Missouri and Virginia have declared a state of emergency in their states, and they took to social media to warn residents to expect hazardous weather this weekend.

December most polluted month in Capital's history

ISLAMABAD (APP): With smog and air pollution rising in federal capital, December had been the most polluted month in terms of particulate matter 2.5 microns since this phenomenon first time started occurring in Islamabad in 2018.

Hazardous smog spells in winters with clout of dust, smoke, particulate matter and fog soared to new levels of ambient air pollution on December 22, 2024 after the AQI spiked up to 250 making air quality unhealthy.

Inhabited next to Margalla Hills, the capital, couple of decades back, was an attraction for visitors, tourists and travelers due to its cleaner roads, serene and calm evenings and above all natural environment.

But, rising human and vehicular population, unruly development of housing societies and smoke emitting industries continued marring its beauty and ambience.

Just during past decade over a million vehicles were registered with Islamabad's Excise and Taxation Department and besides these, not less than half a million vehicles regularly enter the metropolis emitting various gases and smoke.

"Dust is the main particle adding to air pollution with addition of smoke and particulate matter of 2.5 microns," said Director

Labs and National Environmental Quality Standards (NEQS), Dr. Zaigham Abbas. "Temperature inversion and fog caused after suspension of dew drops in atmosphere due to drop in mercury during winters also leave a misty and vague ambience."

Mentioning to some infrastructure projects executed during last year that added to rise in dust particles, Dr Zaigham also described brick kilns operating in capital's periphery and steel manufacturing units in its industrial areas as real nuisance and cause of dark smoke and air pollution.

"But, by now 30 kilns have been converted to zigzag technology and Pak-EPA after concerted efforts and intervention of the Supreme Court has introduced an indigenous dry scrubber technology to sequester dark carbon and help spew white smoke without hazardous black carbon."

"We shall also be offering Punjab government this technology to control dark smoke in Lahore emitted by different industrial units as it is cost effective and can help chip many blocks together," Zaigham said.

Air Quality Index (AQI) data maintained by Pak-EPA's fixed and mobile air quality monitors revealed that November and December remained the most polluted months with

November hosting two very unhealthy days and December a total of five very unhealthy days including December 22, the most polluted day bearing 250 AQI and over 200 micrograms per cubic meter PM 2.5 emissions.

Pak-EPA records ozone (O3), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and Sulphur dioxide (SO2) besides PM2.5 as main ambient pollutants in the air.

Interestingly, all of remaining pollutants remained below permissible levels except PM2.5 that persistently surged obviously due to increasing vehicular emissions, construction activities, garbage or compost burning and cross-boundary pollution.

"We are planning a massive onsite air quality monitoring activity with the support of third party organizations registered with Pak-EPA," Dr Zaigham said. "This time it will be beyond urban and repeatedly monitored areas and new housing societies grown around federal capital will be targeted to assess their share in air pollution."

"It will help EPA devise better strategy and punitive measures to contain air pollution," he said and also mentioned to imposing section 144 in the capital banning all sorts of waste, stubble, dead leaves and compost burning.

PPP blasts PML-N govt on constitution of maritime body

KARACHI (INP): People's Party's spokesperson Shazia Marri has criticized constitution of Pakistan Maritime and Seaport Authority by the federal government.

Marri in a statement said that the PML-N's federal government used to take decisions without taking the PPP into confidence.

"The Sindh government and the PPP both were kept in dark over the decision of the authority's constitution."

"We are repeatedly saying the federal government has the backing of the PPP, when the People's Party takes back its support, the government will fall down," she warned. "Perhaps the PML-N has been unaware of it," Shazia Marri said.

"We have demanded again and again to convene the session of the Council of Common Interest (CCI), but the session didn't summon even after 11 months passed," PPP leader said.

She said the constitution is being repeatedly and blatantly violated. "The prime minister has been bound by the constitution to summon the CCI session within three months".

Marri demanded that the government bring the Maritime and Seaport Authority's matter in the CCI's session.

"Is it wise to take decisions on crucial matters without taking the allies as well as provinces into confidence," she questioned. "Federal government's behaviour has been above the common wisdom and this will increase differences," spokesperson said. "It will be better for all to run the country as per the constitution and the law," she remarked.

Shazia Marri called the government to get opinions of allies and the federating units first before taking any decision about the maritime sector.

India's copter crashed

NEW DELHI (INP): Three crew members, including two pilots, died on Sunday after a Coast Guard helicopter crashed at Porbandar airport in Gujarat. The incident occurred at 12.10 pm, Porbandar Superintendent of Police Bhagirathsinh Jadeja said.



GAZA: Smoke billows in the Gaza Strip, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, as seen from southern Israel.

Moscow and Kyiv say Ukraine is pressing attacks in Russia's Kursk region

KYIV, Ukraine (AP): President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says he will urge allies to boost Ukraine's air defenses at a meeting this week in Germany, while both sides said Kyiv's forces pressed new attacks Sunday in Russia's Kursk region.

Russian shelling, meanwhile, killed at least one person and wounded another in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region, local officials said.

Dozens of partner countries will participate in the meeting of the Ramstein group at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Thursday, Zelenskyy said, "including those who can help boost our capabilities not only to defend against missiles but also against guided bombs and Russian

aviation." "We will discuss this with them and continue to persuade them," Zelenskyy said in his nightly address on Saturday. "The task remains unchanged: strengthening our air defense." U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin will attend the meeting, which originally had been scheduled for October with U.S. President Joe Biden present. The session was postponed in the aftermath of Hurricane Milton striking the state of Florida.

The Biden administration is pressing to send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before Trump is sworn in Jan. 20. Trump claimed during his election campaign that he

could end the nearly 3-year-old war in one day, and his comments have raised questions over whether Washington will continue to be Ukraine's biggest — and most important — military backer. Zelenskyy said last week that Trump is "strong and unpredictable," and those qualities can be a decisive factor in his policy approach to the war.

Russia controls about a fifth of Ukraine and last year advanced slowly in eastern areas despite high losses of troops and equipment. The war's trajectory isn't going in Ukraine's favor, with the country short-handed on the front line and in need of more support from its Western partners.

In Ukraine's incursion in the Kursk region, Zelenskyy said Russian and North Korean troops had suffered heavy losses in fighting in Russia's Kursk region.

"In battles yesterday and today near just one village, Makhnovka, in the Kursk region, the Russian army lost up to a battalion of North Korean infantry soldiers and Russian paratroopers," he said. "This is significant."

Zelenskyy said last month that 3,000 North Korean troops had been killed or wounded in Kursk, where Ukrainian forces launched an incursion in August, dealing a blow to Russia's prestige and forcing it to deploy some of its troops from eastern Ukraine.