

Independent

dailyindisb@gmail.com

Chief Editor: Syed Farooq Shah

www.dailyindependent.com.pk Hub

Ph: 2841470/2841473 Vol: XVIII No. 348, Jamadi-us-Sani 14, 1445 AH Thursday December 28, 2023, Pages 04, Price Rs.15

Caretaker PM urges Muslim Ummah to get united to overcome challenges

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday underscored the significance attached by Pakistan to fraternal ties with the Muslim world, particularly with the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

He said the ties were anchored in mutual trust, common understanding and close cooperation on bilateral as well as regional matters of common interest.

The prime minister met the resident ambassadors of Muslim countries from the MENA region over lunch earlier in the day. The meeting was attended by the ambassadors of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The caretaker foreign minister, secretary to the PM and foreign secretary were also present, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The caretaker prime minister shared Pakistan's perspective on a number of issues, particularly the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Other challenges confronting the Muslim world such as Islamophobia were also discussed.

Prime Minister Kakar emphasized the need for the Muslim Ummah to continue to work closely and collectively, especially through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to deal with the complex issues.

He also praised the ambassadors for their efforts to forge stronger ties between Islamabad and their respective capitals.



Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar talking to the resident Ambassadors of Muslim countries from the Middle East and North African [MENA] region over lunch in Islamabad.

CPEC helps further strengthen Pak-China relations: President

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday said the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) had helped further expand and strengthen the bilateral relations.

He expressed these views while talking to Pakistan's Ambassador to China, Khalil-ur-Rahman Hashmi who called on him at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

The president said under CPEC, a network of roads, had been laid across the country whereas infrastructure projects of strategic importance were also included in the mega project.

Terming China as Pakistan's brotherly country and a permanent strategic partner, he said the bilateral ties between Pakistan and China were of special importance.

"China is the largest trading partner of Pakistan and was an important source of Foreign Direct Investment in the country, President Alvi remarked.

Further, he pointed out that the cultural and educational exchanges were important for the strong friendship of the two countries. Congratulating the recently appointed ambassador to China, he hoped that the strategic partnership with China would further strengthen in future.

The president directed the ambassador to further deepen the trade, economic and cultural relations with China.



LAHORE: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information & Broadcasting, Murtaza Solangi addresses the 4th Convocation of Information Technology University while Punjab Governor Balighur Rahman is attending the event at Information Technology University, Main Campus.

Research, pursuit of knowledge, key to overcome Pakistan's current challenges: Solangi

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday said that research and pursuit of knowledge were imperative to overcome multiple challenges, currently faced by the country.

Delivering the speech at Fourth Convocation of Information Technology University, he said nations did face challenges and Pakistan, with the grace of Allah Almighty, would also overcome multiple challenges being faced now.

The minister said that a country could develop only through the acquisition of knowledge and education.

Stressing the role of students in overcoming these challenges, he said it was necessary to end negative propaganda.

The motto of almost all the religions, was that humans should become good persons, Murtaza Solangi said adding that education promoted humanity and friendly attitude in the society. He said Pakistan was facing diverse, unprecedented and extraordinary challenges including economic crisis, intolerant and violent behaviour. He said every day, impacts of climate emergency were being witnessed by everyone in the country.



QUETTA: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki presiding over a high level meeting regarding law and order situation

EC issues SOPs regarding accreditation cards for media men

ISLAMABAD (Online): Election Commission (EC) has issued SOPs in connection with accreditation cards for local observers and media.

According to SOPs all media representatives can submit application for obtaining accreditation cards.

The representatives of local NGOs and civil society can also apply for accreditation card. EC will provide maximum facility for observing and coverage of electoral process.

EC has issued letter to all returning officers.

Pakistan-bound ship from Saudi Arabia attacked in Red Sea

RED SEA (INP): Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi militia claimed responsibility for a missile attack on Tuesday on a Pakistan-bound container ship in the Red Sea and for an attempt to attack Israel with drones.

MSC Mediterranean Shipping said there were no injuries to its crew from the attack on its ship, the United VIII, en route from King Abdullah Port, Saudi Arabia to Karachi.

It said the ship had informed a nearby coalition naval warship that it had come under attack and had taken evasive manoeuvres.

Israel said separately that its aircraft had intercepted a hostile aerial target in the Red Sea area.

Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea in a televised address said the group had targeted the vessel, which he identified as the MSC United, after the crew failed to respond to warnings.

He also said the Houthis had carried out a military operation targeting Eilat and other areas in Israel, which he referred to as occupied Palestine. He did not say whether any of the targets were successfully hit.

Pak successfully conducts flight test of FATAH-II missile

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan on Wednesday conducted the successful flight test of Fatah-II, equipped with the most modern avionics, sophisticated navigation system and unique flight trajectory.

The weapon system is capable of engaging targets with high precision up to a range of 400 kilometres, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said.

The flight test was witnessed by senior officers from tri-services and dedicated scientists and engineers.

The President, Prime Minister, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of Army Staff congratulated the participating troops and scientists on the successful conduct of the flight test.

Bilawal emphasized the party's dedication to implementing top-notch education projects and alleviating the burden of inflation by providing free electricity to the underprivileged, with a specific commitment of 300 units.

In a strategic move towards sustainable energy, Bilawal also highlighted key initiatives, including health and farmer cards, direct subsidies for small-scale farmers, and a comprehensive social security program for laborers. The introduction of the Benazir Worker Card and a youth employment loan scheme were outlined as efforts to support workers and the younger population.

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'Master of Roster' concept alien to Constitution: SC

Court issues detailed verdict on SC (Practice and Procedure) Act 2023 case, decided earlier with a 10-5 majority

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued a detailed verdict in the case pertaining to the law clipping the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP), stating that the "Master of Roster" concept is alien to the Constitution and cannot be considered above the charter even if it is a conventional notion.

The top court issued a detailed verdict in the SC (Practice and Procedure) Act 2023 case, which was decided in October, with a full court bench — comprising all 15 judges of the apex court — sustaining the law

as "constitutional" with a 10-5 majority.

The apex court had struck down a section dealing with retrospective effect of the law, in its decision.

Five members of the bench — Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Justice Muneeb Akhtar, Justice Sayed Mazahir Ali Akbar Naqvi, and Justice Ayesha A Malik, and Justice Shahid Waheed — had opposed the law in their judgments on the pleas challenging the law.

By a majority of 8-7 — CJP Isa, Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice

Amin-ud-Din Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Athar Minallah, and Justice Musarrat Hilali dissenting — sub-section (2) of section 5 of the Act (granting a right of appeal retrospectively) was declared to be ultra vires the Constitution. By a majority of 9-6 (Justice Ahsan, Justice Akhtar, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Naqvi, Justice Malik, and Justice Waheed dissenting) sub-section (1) of section 5 of the Act (granting a right of appeal prospectively) was declared to be in accordance with the Constitution.



LARKANA: Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a public gathering on the occasion of 16th death anniversary of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh.

Bilawal kickstarts PPP election campaign with 10-point welfare agenda

GARHI KHUDA BAKHSH (INP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari revealed a comprehensive 10-point charter outlining the party's vision and commitment to addressing the nation's challenges ahead of the general elections. Bilawal Bhutto said that the resolution to the country's issues lies in the manifesto of the people. He was addressing a large gathering held in connection with the death anniversary of his mother former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh.

A core focus of the PPP's agenda is the commitment to doubling the salaries of government employees within a five-year timeframe.

Bilawal emphasized the party's dedication to implementing top-notch education projects and alleviating the burden of inflation by providing free electricity to the underprivileged, with a specific commitment of 300 units.

In a strategic move towards sustainable energy,

the PPP leader unveiled plans to establish green energy parks in every district, ensuring affordable electricity for all. Bilawal expressed the party's stance that institutions like WAPDA and K-Electric are unnecessary, proposing a paradigm shift towards a more efficient healthcare system through public-private partnerships.

The PPP chairman pledged to provide housing for those affected by floods, ensuring the construction of 20 lakh houses. Empowering the most economically vulnerable women, the party aims to grant ownership rights to their homes.

Bilawal also highlighted key initiatives, including health and farmer cards, direct subsidies for small-scale farmers, and a comprehensive social security program for laborers. The introduction of the Benazir Worker Card and a youth employment loan scheme were outlined as efforts to support workers and the younger population.

Qureshi rearrested, shifted to unknown destination

RAWALPINDI (Online): Punjab police have taken PTI vice chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi into its custody and shifted him to some unknown destination soon after his release.

Shah Mehmood Qureshi was released in cipher case following the acceptance of his bail plea by the Supreme Court (SC). However he was taken into custody by Rawalpindi police soon after he came out of jail and was shifted to some unknown destination in armored vehicle.

Shah Mehmood Qureshi while standing on armored vehicle said in his address on the occasion "I was released by Supreme Court (SC). Arresting me again is injustice. I am being punished for serving the nation."

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday said that research and pursuit of knowledge were imperative to overcome multiple challenges, currently faced by the country.

Scrutiny of nomination papers of candidates contesting elections on various NA, PA seats continues

Independent Report

QUETTA: The scrutiny of nomination papers of the candidates contesting elections on different seats of National and Provincial assemblies remained continued on third consecutive day i.e., Wednesday.

While the scrutiny of papers of the candidates for general seats of the assemblies is being done by the respective returning officers, the scrutiny of papers of the candidates for the reserved seats is being done by the provincial election commissioner in Quetta.

Govt committed to solve issues of Islamabad sit-in within constitutional framework: CM

Our doors are always open for meaningful negotiations; Genuine grievances of participants of the Islamabad sit-in would be addressed

Independent Report
QUETTA: Chief Minister Balochistan, Ali Mardan Domki on Wednesday said the provincial government has formed an investigation committee to probe into the Balach Baloch Turbat incident.

"Genuine grievances of the participants of the Islamabad sit-in would be addressed", the Caretaker CM assured. He said the federal government has also formed an inquiry committee to probe into the incident.

CM Domki chaired a high-level meeting in the provincial capital to review law and order across the province.

Addressing the meeting, the CM stated that the provincial government was committed to solving the demands of the Islamabad sit-in within the constitutional framework. "Our doors are always open for meaningful negotiations", CM Domki stated. CM Domki called for an end to protests and said that his government was committed to addressing issues through political means.

Caretaker Home Minister Balochistan, Captain @ Zubair Ahmed Janali, Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan, Additional Chief Secretary (Home), Zahid Saleem and other high-level officers attended the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani calls on President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

IHC tells police to not treat Baloch protesters as 'enemies'

Orders police to present 34 arrested protesters in identification parade, submit report on female protesters' arrest

Monitoring Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) asked the federal capital's police on Wednesday to not treat the Baloch protesters as "enemies".

Justice Miangul Hasan Aurangzeb's remarks came as he heard a petition filed last week challenging the protesters' arrests and denying them the right to protest in Islamabad.

The hearing was attended by the senior superintendent of police (SSP) operations, the advocate general (AG) Islamabad and the lawyer representing the organisers of the protest, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC).

Expressing his indignation, Justice Aurangzeb asked the SSP operations whether the order to treat the protesters 'harshly' was given by him. "You make some people sit in your lap while you treat others like this", the judge remarked as he referred to the mass arrests the protesters were subjected to on reaching Islamabad on foot from Kech, in Balochistan. "They have come [here]. Let them sit".

During the hearing, the petitioner's counsel stated that 34 Baloch protesters were still in custody who were still to be presented in an identification parade. He added that an individual named Zaheer, named in the first information report (FIR) registered at the Kohsar police station, is missing. At this, the SSP informed that Zaheer was in jail and could not be released due to non-payment of bail money.

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RAWALPINDI: View of conducted successful flight test of Fatah-II, equipped with state of the art avionics, sophisticated navigation system and unique flight trajectory.

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While the scrutiny of papers of the candidates for general seats of the assemblies is being done by the respective returning officers, the scrutiny of papers of the candidates for the reserved seats is being done by the provincial election commissioner in Quetta.

Meanwhile, the papers of leader of JUI and former Speaker Balochistan Assembly, Malik Sikandar Advocate were found corrected as scrutiny of his papers was completed on Wednesday.

Malik Sikandar Advocate has filed nomination papers for NA-262.

Similarly, the papers of PPP leader and former caretaker Minister Jamal Raisani were also declared correct for NA-264.

Moreover, papers of Khushal Khan Kakar and Yousaf Kakar were also found corrected. They had filed papers for NA-263. The papers of central leader of Balochistan Awami Party, Mir Ziaullah Langave were also approved for PB-36.

Similarly, the papers of candidate of Majlis Wahdatul Muslemeen (MWM) Jaffar Ali Jaffri were also approved for the NA-262. The papers of PTI's leader and former Governor, Syed Zahoor Ahmed Agha and leader of Balochistan National Party, Mir Maqbool Lehi were also found corrected. They had filed papers for NA-263. The papers of central leader of Balochistan Awami Party, Mir Ziaullah Langave were also approved for PB-36.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent

Inclusive politics

It is encouraging to see that in the upcoming elections, the number of women candidates filing nomination papers has surpassed the figures of 2018 and 2013. While this is a positive indicator of the evolving role of women in politics, the fact that they constitute only 11pc of the total candidates underscores a persistent gender disparity in political representation. This year, 3,139 women candidates have stepped forward, a significant rise from the 1,687 in 2018 and 1,171 in 2013. Such an increase should be celebrated, yet when viewed in the context of over 28,000 candidates overall — in itself a record — the figure is starkly disproportionate.

This discrepancy highlights a missed opportunity by political parties to promote a more balanced representation. The expectation was for parties to this time around actively encourage and support a greater number of women candidates, yet this has not materialised to a satisfactory degree. The situation within the PML-N offers a microcosm of the broader issue. The discord among women candidates in the party, who feel sidelined in favour of a select few — primarily from influential backgrounds — raises questions about the criteria for selecting candidates for reserved seats. This practice not only discourages dedicated party workers but also undermines the essence of reserved seats, which should ideally serve as a platform for diverse and representative female participation. So, what could have been done differently? First and foremost, political parties need to establish and adhere to transparent and equitable criteria for selecting candidates, especially for reserved seats.

This process should prioritise merit and dedication to public service over familial or socioeconomic connections. Additionally, there should be a concerted effort to scout and mentor potential women leaders from various walks of life, ensuring more inclusive and representative choices. Moreover, political parties and the ECP must work together to remove barriers that deter women from political participation. This includes addressing societal prejudices, ensuring the safety of women candidates, and providing the necessary resources and training to potential women politicians. The current state of women's participation in national politics underscores the need for urgent action. Political parties, civil society, and government institutions must shoulder the responsibility to foster an environment where women's political engagement transcends tokenism and becomes a cornerstone of our democratic fabric. This is not just about meeting quotas or surpassing previous statistics; it is about fundamentally redefining the political landscape to be truly inclusive, equitable, and representative of diverse voices. The journey towards this goal is arduous but essential for the health and maturity of our democracy. It is time to embrace a vision where women's voices are not just heard but are instrumental in steering the course of our nation's destiny.

A single vote



Furqan Hyder Shaikh

Prosperity, development, and sustainability in Sindh are linked to the number of people casting their vote — hopefully for someone who has a vision, a plan, and an executable strategy to deal with problems. Socioeconomic challenges, unfortunately, dominate the landscape, with poor education and health systems, water and food scarcity, and a dearth of livelihood opportunities.

This begs the question: is it our vote winners who lack the skills and abilities needed to serve the people, or is it the voters who fail to comprehend the qualities a poll candidate must possess in order to ensure effective governance once elected? The value of a vote is neither taught well, nor comprehended clearly. With general elections scheduled for February, votes are needed to transform Sindh into a well-managed province by a qualified political leadership.

Of course, it is the number of votes that decides who wins and who loses. But what criteria should be employed to assess the likely performance of a candidate in Sindh, the kind of leadership qualities he or she possesses, and what constituency issues matter most to him or her?

Undoubtedly, even a single vote has the potential to make a difference. For example, John F. Kennedy won the American presidential election of 1960 by the very narrow margin of less than two-tenths of a percentage point. Democracy works only if people

come out to show their concern by casting their vote. Sindh is a poverty-stricken province hit by myriad problems including the impact of climate change. If one were to think of a 'voting policy' for Sindh, what criteria should the electorate keep in mind?

In fact, there are several elements informing well-thought-out voting choices. For instance, one could ask what sort of a plan the candidate has to address Sindh's water woes. What does the candidate, if elected to power, intend to do about economic empowerment in the coastal belt, as well as sea intrusion in the Badin, Sujawal and Thatta districts? Does the candidate have a strategy to put an end to the barbarous practice of abducting girls? Does the candidate have a viable proposal for a state-of-the-art education system in his or her constituency? If elected, would the candidate be willing to take responsibility for a woman dying due to the unavailability of medical facilities in a rural setting? How will the candidate protect the rights of the minorities in his or her constituency? Such questions need to be reflected on by voters and be posed by them to the campaigning candidates. If today's voters want themselves and their generations to live a healthy life and have all the advantages of a modern education system, prosperity, and development, they need to think now. Only performance will count.

The general aim of elections is to bring to power a government which can make policies that benefit the people at large. But the picture of previous elections shows that before and during elections, some voters are influenced or made to cast their vote for a particular candidate. Sometimes, the carrot of Rs5,000 against

each vote is dangled before them. If vote-seekers can 'organise' themselves to 'induce' voters to cast their ballot in their favour, why can't voters similarly prepare themselves to vote in the best, ie, those who would actually make a difference?

For prosperity in Sindh, voters from Karachi to Kashmore, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Badin, and Tharparkar have to think of a 'voting policy', keeping in mind the challenges their respective constituencies face. For this, the role of social activists in urban and rural settings is pivotal. They must educate people about the importance of the single vote, and convince them that their vote should not be cast just to perpetuate a 'legacy'; it must be cast for a prosperous future. The electorate should understand that their vote should go towards the fulfilment of their rights

and the future of their offspring. The right decision today will positively impact the future. Unfortunately, so far the votes of Sindh's unaware masses have only enriched the vote winners who are past masters at playing with the rights of the destitute and illiterate.

At the end of the day, it is only voters who can change Sindh's destiny. NGOs, civil society, school teachers, influencers in rural Sindh, and activists with deep knowledge of the importance of elections should act to create awareness, particularly in the province's rural areas, so that voters have an understanding of what they should be looking for in those who want to represent them. They must be made aware that elections ultimately aim to seek good governance — from the village unit to the provincial level. — Courtesy Dawn

Obliterating Gaza



Mahir Ali

It took several days of diplomatic negotiations for the Security Council to come up with a sufficiently bland Gaza resolution that the US would not feel obliged to veto. Even after it had been diluted to a meaningless plea for unspecified measures that "create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities" — which Israel would interpret as a green light to persist with its genocidal military campaign — the wretched Biden administration could only bring itself to abstain.

The resolution also called on all parties to "facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale" to the Palestinians in Gaza — almost 90pc of whom have been displaced, pushed into ever-diminishing "safe zones" that are often promptly targeted by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

Even if by some miracle the Security Council had managed to clearly demand a ceasefire, Israel would have ignored it, as it has routinely done since 1948, without facing consequences. The protection of its American godfather is paramount. Western media outlets have lately been promoting the impression that the US is striving to persuade Israel to reduce the intensity of its onslaught.

That's the equivalent of requesting a serial killer to be less indiscriminate, while supplying him with weapons to accomplish his aims. Had the US seriously wished to halt the slaughter in which entire branches of Palestinian

family trees are being hacked off, it could have done so by cutting off the military, diplomatic and financial supply chains crucial to sustaining Israel's capacity for monstrosity. But don't hold your breath.

After all, it took decades, plus the relentless efforts of activists, for the US to recognise the horrors of South African apartheid (propped up with surreptitious Israeli back-kick) and endorse sanctions against Pretoria. Going further back, the Nazi regime enjoyed the sympathy of key components of Western elites, from the British royal family to American captains of industry.

Long before that, the US King-Crane commission was dispatched to the Levant in 1919 to solicit popular opinion about the region's future following World War I. It found vast support for a united Syria encompassing latter-day Lebanon and Palestine. Facts on the ground shifted the erudite commissioners' views from backing the Zionist project endorsed by the Balfour Declaration to pointing out that it would entail "a practically complete dispossession of the present-day inhabitants of Palestine" and "the gravest trespass upon the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine".

It presciently reminded the then US president, Woodrow Wilson, that "if the American government decided to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, they are committing the American people to the use of force in that area, since only by force can a Jewish state in Palestine be established or maintained". By then, the US Congress had effectively endorsed the Balfour Declaration, and the State Department decided that publishing the report "would not be compatible with the public interest".

It had little effect when eventually published by Editor & Publisher magazine in 1922, and continued to be disregarded when US backing for Israel went into high gear following the 1967 "pre-emptive" Israeli assault against its neighbours. A Palestine Liberation Organisation pamphlet noted that the population density "jumped in a few weeks from 208 to more than 6,000 persons per square kilometre".

Gaza's population has more than quadrupled since then, and the conditions have deteriorated. The IDF has lately been re-viewing the status of long-standing refugees — often from territories adjacent to the Gaza Strip, the areas violated by Hamas and its associates on Oct 7 — by casting them into the wilderness. The atrocities committed in the kibbutzim cannot be denied, while acknowledging that some of the deaths and damage can be attributed to the manner in which the IDF response unfolded.

The precise details may never emerge, but the century-long context of repression and dispossession in occupied Palestinian territories cannot be ignored in contemplating today's dire realities as the seeds of hatred are sown anew. Benjamin Netanyahu's response to the UN resolution was to visit his troops in Gaza on Christmas Day and declare that his war would be intensified, even as Bethlehem marked the occasion with a rubble-strewn Nativity scene. Reading about a Children's Happiness Centre levelled by the IDF in its scorched earth campaign alongside hospitals, homes and schools, I was reminded of Northern Irish freedom fighter Bobby Sands' prison diary entry shortly before he succumbed to the privations of a hunger strike: "Our revenge will be the laughter of our children." — Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

Pak first foray into global jobs market with record agreements for manpower export

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan, through its Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD), participated for the first time in the International Human Resources & Labour Services Expo in Riyadh from December 24 to 27. The significant step, led by Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD) Jawad Sohrab Malik, marks a new era in showcasing Pakistan's workforce on the global stage, said a press release. The SAPM

orchestrated Pakistan's participation in the expo and also inaugurated Pakistan's Pavilion there. Over a dozen agreements with Saudi and international companies were executed during the Expo to boost employment opportunities abroad for the Pakistani workforce. The agreements would open doors for Pakistani workforce in various sectors such as construction, hospitality, information technology, services industry and various other fields globally, the press release said. The Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC), which is part of

Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, was also present at the expo through its Managing Director Naseer Khan Kashani. Other dignitaries at the expo included Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Ahmad Farooq and representatives of multinational organizations.

Underlining the importance of the expo, the SAPM stated that the expo served as a pivotal forum, bringing together human resources and recruitment companies alongside reliable and accredited labour services entities.



SIALKOT: Senior Trainer National institute of Management, Masood Ahmed addressing to the delegation at SCCL.

Cotton Yields drop in Pakistan due to adverse weather

KARACHI (INP): Ehsanul Haq, Chairman of the Cotton Geners' Forum, painted a concerning picture of the country's cotton harvest, predicting a significant decline due to adverse weather and pest problems. Despite a similar trend internationally, this dip casts a shadow on hopes for price hikes. "Pakistan initially aimed for a robust 1 crore 28 lakh bales of cotton in 2023-24," Haq stated. "However, harsh weather conditions and a severe whitefly infestation have forced us to scale back that

target to 1 crore 11 lakh 50 thousand bales. Even that seems optimistic, with current estimates hovering around 85 lakh bales, particularly in Punjab's cotton belts." This sharp downward trajectory, exceeding even the adjusted target highlights the crippling impact of environmental factors on Pakistan's cotton production.

The news comes amidst reports of similar struggles for major cotton-producing nations worldwide, suggesting a broader crisis for the industry.

Rupee gains 18 paise against Dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani Rupee on Wednesday witnessed the 11th consecutive recovery session as it gained 18 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs282.19 against the previous day's closing of Rs282.37.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market stood at Rs282 and Rs284.5 respectively. The price of the Euro increased by 33 paise to close at Rs311.60 against the last day's closing of Rs311.27, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen came down by 01 paise and closed at Rs1.97; whereas a decrease of 78 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which traded at Rs359.26 compared to the last closing of Rs358.48. The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 04 and 03 paise to close at Rs76.84 and Rs75.24 respectively.



Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis, Muhammad Jawad Sohrab Malik inaugurated Pakistan pavilion at Human Resource and Labour Services Expo 2023 in Riyadh, KSA.

Commerce minister to address status of SEZs in Karachi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries, Dr. Gohar Ejaz here on Wednesday chaired high-level meeting to address the status of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Karachi for creating investment friendly environment the country and to assess the current status of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Karachi.

The meeting was attended by key officials including Sauleh Ahmed Farooqui, Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Rashid Langrial, Secretary of the Ministry of Industries and Production and Sohail Rajput, Secretary Board of Investment. The meeting focused on the operational status of the Port Qasim SEZ, which is now ready for prospective investors. The Port Qasim SEZ boasts comprehensive utility services, creating an ideal environment for businesses to thrive. During the discussions, the minister highlighted the importance of diversification and growth, specifically addressing the establishment of a SEZ dedicated to the Information Technology (IT) sector. The IT SEZ is

poised to play a crucial role in fostering innovation and technological advancement in Pakistan.

A key agenda item centered on initiatives to enhance the skill set of the labor force in Pakistan. The Ministry of Commerce, in collaboration with other relevant authorities, plans to implement programs to improve the overall skill level of the workforce, with a particular emphasis on IT skills. This strategic approach aligns with the goal of boosting IT exports and positioning Pakistan as a competitive player in the global IT industry.

Ministry announces BoP improvement of \$5.6b

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Ministry of Commerce on Wednesday announced remarkable trade Performance and Year-on-Year Balance of Payments (BoP) Improvement worth \$5.6 billion as a significant achievement in Pakistan's trade sector. Caretaker Minister of Commerce Dr. Gohar Ejaz said that the positive trade figures and upward trend showcased Pakistan's resilience, said a press release issued here.

The minister said, "We will continue to work towards enabling our exporters and to find new destinations for exports." According to the Ministry, for a Year-on-Year Increase in exports in the first 20 days of December 2023, Pakistan experienced an outstanding year-on-year increase in exports, amounting to \$479 million, reflecting an impressive growth rate of 33.1 percent. On Year-on-Year decrease in Imports, conversely, imports during the same period saw a substantial decrease of \$405 million, marking a -12.8 percent reduction.

This positive trend contributed to an \$884 million improvement in the balance of trade for December 2023. According to the data, from July 1st, 2023, to December 20th, 2023, Pakistan's exports soared to \$14 billion, showcasing a remarkable year-on-year increase of \$709 million, translating to a substantial 5.3 percent improvement. Import figures during the same period (1 July 2023 to 20 December 2023) dropped to \$2.4 billion from \$29.2 billion in FY-2022, reflecting a notable year-on-year decrease of \$4.9 billion.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor is selling seasonal fruit Oranges at Khana Bridge to earn daily wages for the livelihood of his family.

Economic outlook stays optimistic despite challenges: Report

ISLAMABAD (APP): Despite significant challenges, the overall economic outlook remained optimistic, marked by receding inflationary pressures, positive prospects in agriculture, signs of potential recovery in the industrial sector, imports, and a favorable external environment.

According to Monthly Economic Update and Outlook for December issued by the ministry of finance, the optimistic economic outlook is also evident by the 2.13 percent growth achieved in the first quarter

of FY2024, largely contributed by agriculture and industry.

Further, the report says, the twin deficit is on a downward trajectory signifying better economic management to reduce the macroeconomic imbalances. "This lays the foundation for progressing towards higher and sustainable economic growth. It is therefore expected that this positive momentum will further strengthen in the upcoming months," the report adds. Meanwhile, the report says for the Rabi season 2023-24, wheat

crop has been cultivated on an estimated area of 8.733 million hectares against the target of 8.998 million hectares to achieve the production target of 32.3 million tonnes.

Punjab has surpassed its sowing target (6.475 million hectares) by 2 percent to 6.592 million hectares, while in other provinces it is in progress.

The Large Scale Manufacturing (LSM) declined by 0.4 percent during Jul-Oct FY 2024 against the contraction of 1.7 percent same period last year. In October 2023, LSM decreased by 4.1 percent on Year on Year

(YoY) basis against -1.4 percent in the same month last year.

While on a monthly basis, it is declined by 2.0 percent in October against the decrease of 3.2 percent in September. During Jul-Oct FY2024, 12 out of 22 sectors witnessed positive growth. These includes, food, beverages, coke & petroleum products, wearing apparel, leather, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, non-metallic mineral products, rubber products, fabricated metals, machinery and equipment, and others (Football). The Consumer Price

Index (CPI) inflation recorded at 29.2 percent on a YoY basis in November 2023 as compared to 23.8 percent in November 2022. During Jul-Nov FY 2024, CPI stood at 28.6 percent against 25.1 percent in the same period last year. On basis, it increased to 2.7 percent in November 2023 compared to an increase of 1.0 percent in the previous month. The Sensitive Price Index (SPI) for the week ended on December 21, 2023, recorded a decline of 0.51 percent as compared to previous week. Prices of 9 items declined, 24 items remained stable and 18 items increased.

Naqvi visits Ganga Ram Hospital, expresses dismay

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi made a surprise visit to Ganga Ram Hospital on Wednesday where he found cleanliness arrangements inadequate. There were piles of filth and dirt in the washrooms. Patients and their attendants complained about being charged for surgeries in the hospital. A female patient also complained about having to procure medicines from outside. Expressing his strong dismay, CM Naqvi issued a final warning to the MS [medical superintendent], stating that hospital affairs should be rectified without further delay.

He said, "I am giving you a final warning: I will visit again soon. If the situation does not improve, you will be held responsible." He ordered an inquiry into an incident of charging money for surgery by the Chief Minister's Inspection Team and directed the CMIT to immediately reach the hospital to probe the matter and submit the inquiry report to him by evening. He ordered to refund the money and told the MS, "If even a single round of the hospital had been conducted by you, the cleanliness situation would not have been like this. I don't want to see any dirt on my next visit."

He also inspected the upgradation work and ordered to complete the project within the timeframe, emphasising that there would be no tolerance for delay in the upgradation work. Meanwhile, the caretaker Punjab government has successfully revitalised another stalled welfare project, completing the construction of 245 houses under the low-cost housing scheme in Raiwind. These affordable homes are slated to be handed over to deserving government employees on January 15, following special directives of Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi.



LAHORE: Caretaker Federal Minister for information Murtaza Solangi meeting with Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi. Provincial Minister for information Amir Meer is also present.

CM encourages students to harness their energies positively

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Chief Minister KPK Justice @ Syed Arshad Hussain Shah Wednesday distributed laptops to students at Hazara University Manshera under the Prime Minister Laptop Scheme. The Chief Minister also inaugurated the Khyber Medical University Abbottabad Campus and new building of Ayub College of Dentistry in Abbottabad. Additionally, he unveiled the Online Complaint Management and Patient Facilitation Center, along with the Cornea Transplant Service at Ayub Teaching Hospital (ATH) Abbottabad. During his address at the event, Chief Minister Arshad Hussain Shah expressed his concern and underscored that Ayub Teaching Hospital is the largest teaching hospital. He assured that all issues at the hospital would be addressed on a priority basis through preferential foundations. Emphasizing the urgency of a meeting among relevant departments to tackle the hospital's challenges, the Chief Minister outlined the need for swift action. Clarifying the provincial cabinet's stance in response to the caretaker Prime Minister's announcement, Justice Arshad Hussain Shah said that we have granted approval to Ayub Medical College and Khyber Medical College for university status.



GARHI KHUDBUX: A large number of supporters and activists of Peoples Party (PPP) are gathered to mark 16th death anniversary of PPP Chairperson Benazir Bhutto held at Bhutto Mausoleum in Garhi Khuda Bux.

700 kg substandard chips, over 100 kg rotten edible items discarded

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety and Halal Food Authority on Wednesday recovered and discarded 700 kg substandard chips and over 100 kg rotten food items in Peshawar and Nowshera. The Food Authority while taking notice of public complaints received in an online public hearing conducted operations in Peshawar and Nowshera, said the spokesperson of Food Authority. A team of the authority conducted raiders on Chips factories located on Charsadda Road here and found use of non-food grade colour and in the preparation of chips. The team confiscated and discarded more than 700 kg of substandard chips. Similarly, during operations in different markets of Tehsil Pabbi, district Nowshera the teams inspected pop and chips wholesalers, chicken and kebab shops, and chips and spices factories.

PoG decides to provide electric bikes to students at low rates

LAHORE (Online): Punjab government has decided to provide electric bikes to students at subsidized rates to contain environmental pollution. The care taker transport minister of Punjab Ibrahim Hassan Murad said in an interview Punjab is facing big problem of fog.

LHC grants protective bail to Cheema

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Wednesday granted protective bail to former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Mussarat Jamshed Cheema for five days in cases related to May-9 violence. Justice Shehram Sarwar Chaudhry heard the petition, filed by Mussarat Cheema. Her counsel argued before the court that his client wanted to join the investigation of cases besides attending the scrutiny process of her nomination papers for general elections.

Chief Secretary advocates collaborative approach for GLOF-II Success

GILGIT (APP): The Provincial Project Steering Committee (PPSC) meeting of GLOF-II Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) was convened on Wednesday. It was chaired by the Chief Secretary GB Abrar Ahmed Mirza and was attended by the Additional Chief Secretary (Dev) Capt. (Retd) Mushatq Ahmed, Secretary Finance Aziz Ahmed Jamali, Secretary Home Capt. (Retd) Syed Ali Asghar, Secretary Forest Zafar Waqar Taj, Secretary Agriculture Tariq Hussain, Secretary Water Management and Irrigation Riaz Ahmed, Director General GBDMA Safdar Khan, Deputy Chief Planning and Development Department Ali Jabbar, and representatives from various implementing partner organizations. During the meeting, UNDP Provincial Coordinator Mr Abdul Basit provided a comprehensive overview of the progress achieved by the GLOF-II project in the year 2023 and presented the proposed work plan, detailing activities and costs earmarked for the year 2024. The forum engaged in a thorough deliberation on the achievements thus far and discussed future strategies. Chief Secretary GB, Abrar Ahmed Mirza, commended the GLOF-II project for effectively addressing climate change issues.

Three included woman killed in separate incidents

SWABI (APP): Three persons including a woman were killed in separate incidents that occurred in two different areas of the district, police said on Thursday. According to police, two persons were killed and another injured when a tri-wheeler, motorcycle, and tractor collided with each other in the Jagat area of the district. The killed were identified as Attaullah and Shahab. In another incident that occurred in Chota Lahor armed person broke into the house of Muhammad Sher and started firing. The wife of Muhammad Sher sustained injuries and later succumbed in the hospital.

Minister inaugurates e-Stamping in KP

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: In a significant move towards combating the issuance of fake stamp papers in the province, KP Caretaker Minister for Revenue, Finance, and Excise Taxation, Ahmed Rasool Bangash, announced the initiation of an e-Stamping system. This initiative aims to curb the prevalence of counterfeit stamp papers and facilitate the seamless accumulation of revenues through the Bank of Khyber into the provincial account. The e-Stamping system is a crucial step towards promoting good governance in the province, as it was undertaken as part of an agency agreement signed between the Bank of Khyber and the State Bank of Pakistan. The launching ceremony witnessed the presence of key officials, including Secretary Finance Aamer Sultana, Director Revenue, Tarin, Director Finance State Bank of Pakistan Qadir Bakhsh, and Group Head Conventional Banking Sher Muhammad, along with other relevant authorities from the Bank of Khyber. Minister Finance Ahmed Rasool Bangash, in his address during the e-Stamping launch, emphasized that the primary objective behind this initiative is to provide instant access to genuine stamp papers without any hassle and to deter fraudulent activities.



KARACHI: Passengers are suffering at Railway Station due to the delay of the trains because of fog in the different areas of the Country.

Skill-Based Education imperative for societal development: Khokhar

MULTAN (APP): Secretary of School Education South Punjab, Dr. Obaidullah Khokhar, stressed the pivotal role of skill-based education in transforming the region's youth into catalysts for societal improvement. Addressing participants at the National Conference on Life Skills-Based Education Roadmap and Advocacy Strategy for Out-of-School Children, held at the Pakistan Institute of Education Dr. Khokhar outlined the vision of instilling crucial life skills in students through training programs. Under the Life Skills-Based Education Program, students in government schools across South Punjab will receive training to become invaluable contributors to society, he remarked. The conference brought together education secretaries from the country's four provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan, South Punjab, and national and international experts, with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

International News

Russia unhappy with Japan over providing Patriot air defence systems to Ukraine

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: A move by Japan to provide Patriot air defence systems to Ukraine will have "grave consequences" for Russia-Japan ties, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Wednesday. Relations between Moscow and Tokyo, already difficult, have deteriorated sharply since Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in Feb. 2022. Japan has joined its Western allies in imposing sweeping economic sanctions on Russia. Last week, Japan said it would prepare to ship Patriot air defence missiles to the United States after revising its arms export guidelines, in Tokyo's first major overhaul of such export curbs in nine years. Although Japan's new export controls still prevent it from shipping weapons to countries that are at war, it may indirectly benefit Ukraine in its war with Russia as it gives the United States extra capacity to provide military aid to Kyiv. "The Japanese side loses control over the weapons with which Washington can now do whatever it

wants," Zakharova told a weekly briefing. "It cannot be ruled out that under an already tested scheme Patriot missiles will end up in Ukraine." Such a scenario would be "interpreted as unambiguously hostile actions against Russia and will lead to grave consequences for Japan in the context of bilateral relations", she said. Earlier this month, Japan and South Korea both scrambled jets to monitor joint flights by Chinese and Russian bombers and fighters near their territories.



South Korean soldiers take part in an anti-terror drill against North Korea's possible provocations amid mounting tensions on the Korean peninsula, in Seoul, South Korea.

South Korean capital drills to guard against surprise attack by North

Monitoring Desk
SEOUL: More than 1,000 South Korean military, police and emergency personnel joined rare defence drills on Wednesday that simulated an attack by North Korea on Seoul, to counter fears the city is in striking distance of Pyongyang's weapons and covert attack. The exercise comes amid heightened tension after the North tested an intercontinental ballistic missile and launched its first military spy satellite, with the neighbours reinstating last month some military mea-

Self-driving cars could be on UK roads by 2026 -minister

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: Self-driving cars could be on some British roads by 2026, the country's transport minister Mark Harper said on Wednesday. Cars with full self-driving technology are not currently permitted on Britain's roads but the government's Automated Vehicles (AV) legislation is going through parliament, meaning that a legal framework for them should be in place by the end of 2024, said Harper. "Probably by as early as 2026 people will start seeing some elements of these cars that have full self-driving capabilities being rolled out," Harper told BBC Radio. "It'll be gradual...so there'll be companies rolling it out to be used in certain places." Critics of the technology, which has been trialled in the United States, say that the vehicles can cause crashes, and in California, regulators ordered General Motors' driverless car unit Cruise to remove its vehicles from state roads after an accident in October.



Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov shakes hands with India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyan Jaishankar during a joint press conference following their talks in Moscow, Russia.

Iraq slams US after deadly strikes on pro-Iran forces

Monitoring Desk
BAGHDAD: US air strikes targeting pro-Iranian forces in Iraq claimed at least one life and drew an angry response from Baghdad on Tuesday amid high regional tensions over the Israeli aggression against Gaza. Iraq condemned as "a clear hostile act" the overnight US strikes, saying they had killed one member of the security forces and wounded 18 other people, including civilians. Washington has repeatedly targeted sites used by Iran and pro-Tehran forces in Iraq and Syria in response to more than 100 attacks on American and allied forces since Oct 7. Yet another rocket barrage was fired later on Tuesday morning at US and allied forces in Syria, at an American patrol base in Al-Shaddadi, but without causing casualties or damage, said a US military official. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier announced the overnight strikes, saying that "US military forces conducted necessary and proportionate strikes on three facilities used by Kataeb Hezbollah and affiliated groups in Iraq".

Iranian Guards vow revenge against Israel over general's killing

Monitoring Desk
TEHRAN: Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) warned Israel on Wednesday that it or its allied groups would take "direct" action to avenge the killing of senior commander Razi Mousavi. The general was killed on Monday in an Israeli missile strike near the Syrian capital, according to state media, at a time of heightened regional tensions around the Israel-Hamas fighting raging in Gaza. The Israeli army, which has launched hundreds of strikes on Iran-linked targets in war-torn Syria in recent years, said only that it does not comment on foreign media reports. The body of Mousavi, a commander in the Guards' foreign operations arm the Quds Force, was taken to Iraq for funeral rites in holy sites a day ahead of his burial in Iran planned for Thursday. IRGC spokesman Ramezan Sharif warned that "our response to Mousavi's assassination will be a combination of direct action.

Russia, India closer to joint military equipment production: Russian FM

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: Russia and India have made tangible progress in talks on plans to jointly produce military equipment, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday, after talks with his Indian counterpart Subrahmanyan Jaishankar in Moscow. Speaking at a news conference, Lavrov said such cooperation was of a strategic nature and was in both countries' interests and would help ensure security on the Eurasian continent. He said Moscow respected India's desire to diversify its military hardware suppliers and was ready too to support New Delhi's desire to manufacture things needed by India in India. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin would meet Jaishankar later on Wednesday. Jaishankar said he expected Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to meet next year. Jaishankar said he and Lavrov had discussed the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as bilateral trade and investment. India has become one of Russia's core economic partners since the West in 2022 imposed sweeping sanctions on Moscow over the war in Ukraine.



Police officers examine a scene where South Korean actor Lee Sun-kyun was found dead at a park in Seoul, South Korea.

US delegation heads to Mexico as nations see migrant numbers jump

Monitoring Desk
TAPACHULA: Secretary of State Antony Blinken heads Wednesday to Mexico in hopes of showing headway in tackling surging migration, which has climbed to the top of political headaches for President Joe Biden as he enters an election year. The unusual Christmas week trip by the top US diplomat was abruptly scheduled as the rival Republican Party presses Biden for a migration crackdown in return for agreeing in Congress to one of his key priorities - support for Ukraine. Around 10,000 people have been seeking to enter without authorization each day on the southern US border, nearly double the number before the pandemic, with a new caravan of hundreds if not thousands of people leaving by foot from southern Mexico on Sunday. US border authorities have been so overwhelmed that they have suspended several legal crossings to focus on processing migrants. Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador discussed migration in a telephone call Thursday with Biden.

Azerbaijan expels two French diplomats

Monitoring Desk
BAKU: Azerbaijan's foreign ministry has declared two employees of France's embassy persona non grata over "conduct that is not compatible with their diplomatic status", it said on Tuesday. The ministry said it had summoned the French ambassador to complain, without providing any details of the incident which prompted the move.

Aneeq reviews measures for convenience of pilgrims at Haji camp

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Aneeq Ahmed reviewed the necessary measures for the convenience of pilgrims here on Wednesday.

Talking to media persons, the caretaker federal minister said all necessary measures are being taken for the convenience and ease of the pilgrims.

After 50 years, the Haji camp is being painted and the renovation work

will be completed soon, Aneeq Ahmed said. He directed to make Haji more convenient and said through the "Sponsorship Hajj Scheme" not only the overseas Pakistanis get quality facilities at low cost but the country will earn dollars through it.

He said that more than 70,000 applications have been received in the regular Hajj scheme and the Hajj lottery will be held on Thursday.

Qambar Dashti says:

Highways, connecting roads essential for development, prosperity of province

Independent Report
QUETTA: The Secretary Communications and Works, Qambar Dashti has stated that the effective and strong infrastructure and communication system is guarantor of the development of Balochistan.

The Secretary directed to the concerned authorities to expedite the pace of development work on all development projects. The Secretary C&W was chairing a meeting held to review the development projects of roads sector in the province here on Wednesday.

The meeting was attended by chief engineers, officers and other con-

cerned high ups of all the circles of Quetta, Khuzdar and Sibi zones.

Addressing the meeting, Secretary said that there is an important role of highways and link roads in the development and prosperity of the province.

He said that if the roads would be solid and complete, there would be positive impacts on development of the province. It may be mentioned here that the Secretary had visited and reviewed the development projects and different roads all over the province. During the visit, he had issued certain orders for completion of the projects.



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed visiting Haji Camp.

CDWP approves seven projects worth Rs 85.24b

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan on Wednesday presided over a meeting of the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) that approved five projects worth Rs 13 billion.

Besides it recommended two development projects of Rs72.240 billion to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) for further consideration, a news release said.

Secretary Planning Awais Manzur Sumra, senior officials from the Planning Commission and Federal Ministries/Divisions, and Chairman/ACS (Dev) from Provincial Governments participated in the meeting.

Two projects namely "Upgradation of Transmission Network & Replacement of Optical Fiber Cable, AJK & Gilgit Baltistan (revised)" worth Rs. 1999 million and "Prime

Minister's Initiatives Support for IT Startups, Specialized IT Trainings and Venture Capital (revised)" worth Rs 5000 million were approved.

Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, presented a projected "Establishment of Infectious Disease Laboratory" worth Rs 8289.913 million which the forum recommended to ECNEC for approval.

The project envisages the establishment of state of the art R&D Laboratory to detect/analyze microorganisms. Upon completion of the project after PC-I, the NIH will have a better capability for the detection of novel, exotic, emerging and re-emerging pathogens and their timely control as well as R&D facility which is an absolute necessity. The CDWP also okayed two projects of the Ministry of Law & Justice namely "Construction of Litigants Facilitation center for Litigants and Lawyers in Sector G-10/1 Islamabad".



QUETTA: PPP activates lighting candle on 16th death anniversary of former Prime Minister Shaheed Benazir Bhutto at Assembly Chowk.

In affairs of domicile certificates Hamza stresses need to prepare mechanism for bringing transparency

Independent Report
QUETTA: The Commissioner Quetta Division, Muhammad Hamza Shafiqat has underlined the need to prepare such a mechanism for bringing transparency in preparation of domicile certificates so that no citizen especially youngsters and students may not face any issue and inconvenience.

The Commissioner Quetta was chairing a meeting held to review the issues related to the domicile certificates here on Wednesday.

The officials of NADRA were in attendance at the meeting.

Also present on the occasion was Deputy Commissioner Quetta Ft Lt. (Retd) Saad bin Asad.

regarding domicile certificates were discussed. Speaking on the occasion, the Commissioner said that one window operation facility is being provided to the public for domicile certificates in the Deputy Commissioner office.

The meeting decided to prepare new software by NADRA end DC office through which the complete scrutiny of the documents and biometric would be done.

Moreover, it was also declared to computerise all the domicile certificates prepared during last 40-50 years.

This would end to the bogus and fake domicile certificates as well, besides making their verification for the jobs from anywhere in the country, it was strongly believed.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar chairs the 5th meeting of the Board of Governors of Special Technology Zones Authority.

Protection of Pakistan's cyberspace under PECA Act is very important: Dr. Umar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif Wednesday said that the protection of Pakistan's cyberspace under the PECA Act is very important.

"Cybercrime, online buying and selling, cyberbullying, protection of online data, other services of our citizens, identification of threats and effective action against criminals is our core responsibility," he said in his address as chief guest at the prize distribution ceremony of Digital Pakistan Cybersecurity Hackathon.

The event was organized by the National Technology Fund (Ignite), an organization of the Ministry of IT Telecom.

Dr. Umar Saif further said that there was no specific organization to act against cybercrime, so a cybercrime wing was created in FIA to look after these issues.

"We have established a separate agency called the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency equipped with all the required equipment and skills," he said.

The minister said gradually, the authority to act against cybercrime is being transferred from the FIA Cybercrime wing to this particular organization which will be able to take

effective action against cybercrime.

He was of the view that with Pakistan's cyberspace, data of public and private institutions, business transactions, and online activities of citizens can be secured effectively.

The IT Minister said that the first National Cyber Emergency Response Team (National CERTS) has also been established in Pakistan, and Sectoral CERTS will be formed under this organization.

In other words, the government of Pakistan has created an entire infrastructure under an effective strategy against cybercrimes,

which is being rapidly implemented to make it fully functional.

Dr Umar Saif, extended his gratitude to all participants, sponsors, and organizers who played an instrumental role in making the Digital Pakistan Cybersecurity Hackathon an undeniable success.

He also lauded the efforts of Team IGNITE to hold training workshops and hackathons since October.

"The significance of events like these cannot be overstated; they are pivotal in fostering innovation and collaboration within the dynamic field of cybersecurity."

Mushtaq Ghani's nomination papers rejected

ABBOTTABAD (INP): The nomination papers of Mushtaq Ghani, the Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, have been rejected.

The decision came after the Returning Officer for PK-45 Abbottabad found that Mushtaq Ghani was absconding and had failed to return despite providing a travel guarantee.

The Returning Officer stated that due to Mushtaq Ghani's absence, his nomination papers were rejected. However, the papers submitted by Mushtaq Ghani's wife, Farzana Mushtaq, were approved.

It is important to note that objections to Mushtaq Ghani's nomination papers were raised by Fayaz, leading to the rejection of his candidacy for the election from PK-45. Mushtaq Ghani had originally submitted his papers for consideration in this constituency.

Solangi, Naqvi discuss steps for solution of journalists problems

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi met Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi.

Provincial Information Minister Aamir Mir was also present on the occasion.

They discussed issues of mutual interest, solutions of media industry problems and initiatives for welfare of the journalist community. Murtaza Solangi appreciated the steps taken by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi to execute and complete public projects at fast pace.

President displeased over delay by HEC to attest student's degree; directs inquiry

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi has expressed displeasure over the delay by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) for not attesting the degree of a former student on flimsy grounds and upheld the orders of the Wafaqi Mohtasib, directing HEC to attest her degree within seven days.

As per details, Savera Afridi (the complainant) had applied to HEC for attestation of her BA degree and DMC but she was informed that since the session of her degree was 2020, it could not be attested as HEC had phased out two-year conventional B.A./B.Sc. programme and the universities were not allowed to enroll students in

conventional B.A/B.Sc. program after the academic year 2019.

Feeling aggrieved, the complainant approached the Wafaqi Mohtasib who passed the orders in her favour. The HEC then filed a representation as well as a review petition with the Mohtasib, which were rejected.

Later, the Commission filed a representation against the orders of the Mohtasib with the President. The President held personal hearing of the case and rejected HEC's representation.



QUETTA: A delegation of labour leaders led by Muhammad Ramzan Achakzai meeting with Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Domki

BHC declares names of successful candidates on posts of Add. D&SJ

Independent Report
QUETTA: The Balochistan High Court (BHC) has announced the names of successful candidates on the posts of Additional District & Sessions Judge (D&SJ) to serve in BPS-20.

According to an official notification issued here by the High court on Wednesday, those declared successful on the posts of Additional D&SJ are included: Muhammad Yousaf son of Gulam Yasin, Gulam Mustafa s/

o Muhammad Iqbal, Atif Faizan s/o Ghous Bakhsh, Khan Muhammad s/o Taj Wali, Muhammad Ashraf s/o Abdul Habib, Nissr Hussain s/o Gulam Hussain. Similarly, Kalimullah s/o Jan Muhammad and Shahid Javed s/o Muhammad Sarwar Javed have also been declared successful on the posts of Additional D&SJ.

The notification mentioned that primarily the successful candidates would perform for one year on probation.

TLP election candidate shot dead in Kharian

KHARIAN (INP): An election candidate of Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) was shot dead in a firing incident in Kharian on Wednesday morning. As he was about to launch his campaign from PP-29, Malik Saqib Nawaz was sprayed with bullets by his rivals over a land dispute in the suburban village of Jalalpur Sotbiyan in Kharian city. The police have registered a case against seven accused on the complaint of Saqib's father Muhammad Nawaz and arrested two accused.

Govt taking steps to boost foreign investment in IT sector: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday said the government was taking steps to boost foreign investment in the Information Technology sector.

"In this regard, positive progress has already been made," the prime minister said while chairing the 5th meeting of Board of Governors of Special Technology Zones Authority.

In a bid to promote and develop IT sector in the country, he directed the authorities concerned to chalk out necessary policies to attract international IT experts in Pakistan.

PM Kakar highlighted that the Information Technology sector could play a vital role in strengthening the country's economy as Pakistan had huge potential in this sector.

During the meeting, various matters linked to the Special Technology Zones Authority, came under discussion.

The meeting endorsed the decisions, concluded during the 4th meeting of the Board of Governors of Special Technology Authority.

It approved the restructuring of the finance, audit and technical committees of the Board of Governors of the Authority.

Furthermore, the meeting also approved the presentation of drafts of the Authority's licensing framework, procedures and regulations before the technical committee.

Federal Secretaries of Cabinet, Finance, Information Technology, Science and Technology, Chief Secretaries of all the provinces and other Board members, attended the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: The CDWP meeting presided over by Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan here in Islamabad on December 27, 2023. The forum approved 5 development projects with a cost of Rs.13bn & recommended 2 projects worth Rs.72.240bn to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) for further consideration.

Ashrafi acknowledges collaborative efforts across religions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative on Religious Harmony and Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Muslim Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, on Wednesday, emphasized the spirit of unity and co-operation among all religious communities on the occasion of Christmas in the country.

Holding a press conference here, he expressed gratitude and acknowledged the leaders and representatives of various faiths across Pakistan, commending their collaborative efforts in fostering interfaith harmony.

Ashrafi, who is also the Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council specifically thanked the Christian community for actively partici-

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri says Our aim is not to become MPA or MNA but to serve people, solve their problems

Independent Report
HUB: Senior Leader of Pakistan Peoples Party and President of Hub District and Spokesperson for Balochistan and Spokesperson of former president Asif Ali Zardari, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has said that our aim is not to become MPA or MNA but our aim is to serve our people and solve their problems. He expressed these views while addressing the tribal and social leaders and workers who joined the Pakistan People's Party in a public gathering at Sarawan Colony in Hub. Khalid Khan Kakar, owner of Al

Saudia Hotel, Lala Khair Khan, Haji Iqbal and social and political figure Haji Malik Banglazi welcomed and expressing confidence in Mir Ali Hassan Zehri's people-friendly initiatives, dignitaries from Kakar community and other communities of Sarwan Colony joined the People's Party. On this occasion, Mir Hamza Kakar, Shah Mohammad Kakar, Usman Kakar, Abdul Samad Kakar, Lala Khan Kakar and hundreds of colleagues formally joined the People's Party. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri wore the party muffler and said that I am grateful to all the dignitaries.



PESHAWAR: Police officials fired tear gas and restore baton-charged to repel government teachers during their protest demonstration for the upgradation of the pay scale, at GT road.

ANP can't be defeated if rigging not done, says Asghar Khan Achakzai

Independent Report
QUETTA: The provincial president of Awami National Party (ANP) Asghar Khan Achakzai has stated that the ANP can't be defeated if there would be no rigging in the upcoming general elections.

The ANP provincial president was addressing the ceremony in which tribal and political elders announced to join the party in Chaman on Wednesday.

Malik Habibullah Adozai, Wazir Khan, Saleh Zai, Nazir Achakzai and Abdul Wali Khan along with large number of companions joined the party after resigning from different parties.

They reposed confi-

dence on the leadership of Asghar Khan Achakzai saying that we have joined the party seeing his character and services.

Meanwhile, the ANP provincial Chief welcomed those who joined the party.

He said that ANP is emerging as the only representative party of Pashtoons. He said that the people are joining the party in large number, he added.

He said that if there would be no rigging in the elections, then no party and even any alliance can defeat ANP in the upcoming elections.

He said that we would succeed in the elections once again with the support of masses.

PMIC chairman stresses upon timely completion of Kachhi Canal Project

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Inspection Commission (PMIC) Chairman Brig (Retd) Muzaffar Ali Ranjha on Wednesday, while taking cognizance of the Caretaker Prime Minister's concerns over the unwarranted delays in the completion of Kachhi Canal (PSDP) Project, stressed for its completion in true letter and spirit.

The chairman chaired a meeting over the project which was attended by

PMIC officers Engr Aamir Hasan, member Muhammad Saleh Narejo, director and the officers of Ministry of Water Resources and all other relevant stakeholders (Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, WAPDA and Irrigation Department, Government of Punjab) of the project, a press release said.

After showing dissatisfaction over the implementation status, the monitoring task was given to

Engr Aamir Hasan, member PMIC (former retired federal secretary) for ensuring effective supervision of the project, currently under Monitoring, Evolution and Inspection at the PMIC.

The progress report of the project would be submitted to the prime minister. The representatives of ministries of water resources and planning, development & special initiatives, WAPDA and irrigation department, Government of Punjab briefed the

PMIC chairman on the latest progress of the project while the project director of the Kachhi Canal gave a briefing about the issues pertaining to restoration of flood damages. After detailed deliberations, it was resolved that an immediate meeting might be called with all the relevant stakeholders of Kachhi Canal Project under the chairmanship of deputy chairman of Planning Commission to resolve the issues for its timely completion.



QUETTA: A delegation led by Chairman All Pakistan Oil Tanker Owners Association Mir Shams Shahwani meeting with Caretaker Provincial Health Minister Amir Muhammad Khan Jozgezi