

# Independent

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Vol. XIII No. 356 Reg. mails-B / ID-445 Friday Decemeber 29, 2023, Jamadi-us-Sani 15, 1445 A.H. Ph: 2158688, 2158997 Pages 4: Rs. 12



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination Dr. Nadeem Jan and Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Inter-Faith Harmony Maulana Tahir Ashrafi presenting Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar with the Islamabad Declaration Supporting Immunization and Polio Eradication at the conclusion of National Ulama Conference.

## Express full solidarity with the people of Palestine Army vows to provide necessary support to ECP for elections

Corps Commanders Conference reiterates support to initiatives for socioeconomic growth & foreign investment; CCC notes availability of latest weapons to terrorists as serious point of concern impacting Pakistan's security; Forum expresses concern over rights violations in IIOJK.

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Corps Commanders' Conference on Thursday reiterated its support for the ongoing efforts to promote socioeconomic growth and encourage foreign investment under the umbrella of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Asim Munir presided over the

concluding session of the two-day 261st Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC), an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said. The Forum also took a holistic review of the ongoing actions being taken against smuggling, money laundering, power theft and hoarding of essential items amongst other illegal economic activities. Pakistan Army will continue to provide all-out support to relevant government institutions and LEAs to curb such crimes. It also noted that requisite and necessary support will also be extended to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for forthcoming general elections. It paid rich tribute to the supreme sacrifices of Shuhada, including officers and men of the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and citizens who laid their lives for ensuring peace and stability in the country. The participants also offered Fataha, for the Shuhada, including those of Dera Ismail Khan attack.

## FO regrets 'interference' by foreign missions commenting over Baloch protests

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Foreign Office on Thursday regretted the "interference" by some foreign missions in Pakistan for commenting on the Baloch protesters, saying the country was fully capable of handling its internal matters. Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch at a weekly press briefing said the constitution of Pakistan guaranteed freedom of expression to its citizens and the laws were in place to deal with such cases internally. The spokesperson's statement came in response to a question over the recent tweets by Norway's

embassy and the European Union Ambassador in Pakistan who expressed "concerns" over the alleged mistreatment of the Baloch protesters in Islamabad. "The interference of foreign embassies in Pakistan is regrettable," she said, adding that the country was committed to protecting the rights of its people. She said the country's courts were independent and had taken decisions in this regard on several occasions. Asked if the coming year held any prospects of resumption of ties with India, the spokesperson said India needed to take steps to create an environment for

a dialogue. She, however, categorically pointed out that the dialogue with India could only take place based on "equality, respect and with discussion on Jammu and Kashmir as the priority issue". On relations with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), she said Pakistan and GCC were on the verge of concluding a Free Trade Agreement soon, the first of such kind by the GCC with any country. She said negotiations in this regard were taking place, which would culminate in the signing of agreements "shortly".

## Fake news against countering polio should end: PM Kakar

ISLAMABAD (Online): Caretaker Prime Minister (PM) Anwar Ul Kakar said fake news against countering polio must be ended. Standing against this mischiefousness is our survival; kids' murderer how can be respectable: Kakar

Addressing Qoumi Ulama Conference on polio he said healthy life is children's right for the bright future and those who think that polio drops are against shariah they are wretched. Ulama (religious leaders) must stand with us against those pitiful people. For polio eradication we have to understand that stand against this malice is our survival. Kids' murderer how can be respectful, said PM.

He said ending fake news against countering polio is compulsory, Muslims believe on reasonableness and Quran directs us to inquiring things to get truth is must.

PM also thanked all institutions for cooperation in countering polio. He maintained that Quran and Hadiths are the best source of guidance. We have to take collective decision in light of Quran and sunah. Umah's assemblage on collective issues is promising.

PM Kakar also urged Ulama to play their role in eradication of polio by giving awareness to people. Meanwhile Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday announced that in view of the shocking situation in Palestine, the Government of Pakistan had completely banned all kinds of events regarding the New Year celebrations to express solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians.

He also urged the general public to show solidarity with the oppressed people of Gaza and observe simplicity at the beginning of the New Year.

## 34 more arrested Baloch protesters released

ISLAMABAD (APP): On the recommendations of the Committee, established on the instructions of Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar, to negotiate with the Baloch protesters, 34 more arrested protesters were released after fulfilling the legal requirements. Now all the arrested protesters have been released, said the statement issued on Thursday.

The committee members Fawad Hasan Fawad, Murtaza Solangi and Jamal Shah along with Governor Balochistan, held talks with the protesters. During the negotiations, the protesters demanded immediate release of the arrested persons.

On the first day of the talks, the committee had issued orders for the immediate release of the arrested women and children.



ISLAMABAD: Chief of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) Maulana fazul Rehman addressing a press conference at his residents in Federal Capital.

## JUI-F's district leadership to decide about alliance with any party: Fazal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman said on Thursday that his party's district leadership would decide about seats adjustment or political alliance with any political party in the general elections, to be held on February 8.

Addressing a news conference, he said that the law and order and unfavourable weather would impact the turnout in elections. He said that nothing wrong was being done with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) rather it was being brought to limelight. To a question, he said that Pakistan wanted good ties with its neighbours, adding that India should give Kashmiris their rights. He said that Israel was

committing war crimes in Gaza and the world should take notice of that. "Stability in Afghanistan is in the interest of both the countries [Pakistan and Afghanistan]. Afghanistan has invited me for a visit. We want brotherly relations with it. We will strengthen our ties with Afghanistan," he added.

He said that the people of merged tribal districts were worried as whether they were a part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province or the erstwhile FATA. He regretted that even after seven years, the promise of awarding Rs 100 billion to the districts had not been fulfilled. "It will be our target to solve the problems of tribal people on priority basis," he added.



RAWALPINDI: Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir presiding over 261st Corps Commanders Conference held at General Headquarters (GHQ).

## Info Minister calls for enhancing Pak-Iran media cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan and Iran on Thursday emphasized the importance of mutual cooperation in trade and economic sectors, especially in the scope of ECO organization, corridor from East to West, bilateral cooperation on the ports and

expansion of relations between two brotherly countries. During a meeting between Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi and Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Reza Amiri Moghadam, multiple important issues, including cooperation in the fields of media, exchange of cultural delegations, bilateral trade relations, Iran Expo 2024, were discussed.

The minister and Ambassador expressed the willingness on the part of both countries to explore opportunities for promoting bilateral relations. Minister for Information Murtaza Solangi said that Pakistan valued the brotherly relations with Iran as both were bound by deep religious, cultural and linguistic relations. "Cooperation between the two countries in the fields of media is the need of the hour," Murtaza Solangi said adding

Pakistan was keen to promote cooperation with Iran in the fields of film and drama. He said a memorandum of understanding has

already been signed between the Associated Press of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA). Additionally, Pa-



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## PML-N discusses seat adjustments, new constituencies' issues

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz on Thursday discussed the issue of new constituencies and the party's affected candidates along with likely seat adjustments.

The party's session mulled to compensate the candidates deprived of party tickets with Senate seats or in by elections.

"A large part of Sardar Ayaz Sadiq's constituency has been added in the constituency of Shaikh Rohail Asghar in fresh delimitations and both of them trying to bag the party ticket for NA-121," partyThe Senate elections will take place in March immediately after general election in February.

"Ayaz Sadiq could be offered to the constitutional seat of Senate Chairman if he becomes senator," sources claimed.

Former MNA Malik Riaz could be affected in NA-117 after Aleem Khan has submitted nomination papers from NA-117. Malik has contacted to the people deemed closer to the PML-N leadership, sources said. "The PML-N can give green signal to Aleem Khan for NA-117 in seat adjustment," sources said. "In that case Malik Riaz can be offered ticket to another constituency in a by-election," party sources said.

Former speaker Ayaz Sadiq, after the PML-N parliamentary party session in a media talk said that the 2024 general election can be better for the PML-N. "I won't comment on Shaikh Rohail Asghar's contesting election," he said.

"If I can contest the PTI founder or Aleem Khan twice, the party ticket if given, I will contest the election," former speaker said.



Muslim League (PML-N) President, Shehbaz Sharif waving hand to his supporters as he reached Karachi.



SUKKUR: Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a press conference at the residence of former Member of National Assembly Sardar Muhammad Bakhsh Khan Mahar.

## Nomination papers are not being snatched in Sindh: Bilawal

SUKKUR (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto strongly opposed the act of snatching the nomination papers of the rival party's candidate and clarified that such a thing is not being done in Sindh.

Addressing a press conference in Sukkur on Thursday, Bilawal said where the act of snatching nomination papers of rival candidates is being done, they should be answerable for it. Bilawal

said the salaries of government employees would double in 5 years and the poor would get 300 units of free electricity through the solar system if his party came into power. Health and education facilities will also be provided free of cost and like Sindh, they will build 30 lakh houses across the country after getting success in the general elections. He said even after the 18th

amendment of the Constitution, 17 ministries are still under federal control on which 300 billion rupees are being spent annually. The PPP Chairman announced that they would end the hold of federal control on these 17 ministries after coming to power. He added that a subsidy of 1500 billion rupees is given annually to the elite class in the country Talking about the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI),

## PM bans New Year celebrations in solidarity with Palestinians

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday announced that in view of the shocking situation in Palestine, the Government of Pakistan had completely banned all kinds of events regarding the New Year celebrations to express solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians.

He also urged the general public to show solidarity with the oppressed people of Gaza and observe simplicity at the beginning of the New Year.

The prime minister, in a special televised message, said that the entire Pakistani nation and the Muslim Ummah were deeply saddened by the massacre of innocent children, in Gaza and the West Bank. "Since October 7, 2023, more than 21,000 innocent Palestinians have been martyred by the brutal Israeli forces, including a large number of innocent children - around 9,000," the prime minister remarked.

## Baloch protesters give govt 7-day ultimatum to meet demands

Monitoring Desk ISLAMABAD: The Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), one of the groups organising the Baloch protest march in Islamabad, on Thursday issued a seven-day ultimatum to the government to meet all its demands or the movement would put forth its case before the Baloch people.

Dr Mahrang Baloch, one of the organisers of the protest that is demanding an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of their community,

the following demands. Dr Mahrang said that a fact-finding mission headed by a UN Working Group should be sent for a detailed investigation into rights violations in Balochistan, an agreement should be signed under the auspices of the Working Group for the elimination of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, all victims of enforced disappearances should be immediately released, restrictions should be put on the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) and "state-sponsored death squads" should be eliminated as well.



said in an Islamabad press conference today that the government was being given a week for negotiations on



Daily Voice of Masses  
**Independent**

**A level pitch**

The conduct of credible elections is essential for the health of any democratic system. However, throughout our electoral history, holding timely — and free and fair polls — has always been an uphill struggle. Up until a few weeks ago, there were considerable doubts about whether elections would actually be held in February. Thanks to the Supreme Court's timely interventions those worries have subsided.

Yet an equally important question has arisen about the fairness and transparency of the electoral process. Post May 9, the PTI has claimed it is being erased as a political entity by the state, and there is sufficient evidence to support these claims.

Amongst the biggest blows the former ruling party suffered was the rejection by the ECP of the PTI's intra-party polls, and the denial of the bat election symbol. This situation has been rectified for the time being as the Peshawar High Court suspended the ECP's decision on Tuesday, effectively putting the bat back into the PTI's hands. The order will remain in the field till Jan 9.

Legal observers say the ECP can either file an intra-court appeal, or petition the apex court to vacate the PHC verdict.

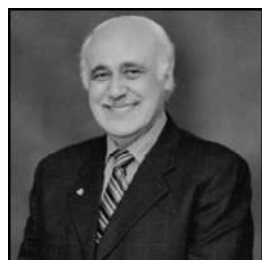
The judicial authorities should consider expediting the hearing of this case to dispel any remaining uncertainty regarding the PTI's use of its election symbol. Of course, as this paper has consistently stated, the PTI and all other contenders need to be provided a level playing field in order to freely contest the general elections. Yet the PHC's decision aside, the party still appears to be getting the rough end of the stick. For example, PTI vice chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi was manhandled and rearrested outside Adiala jail in an undisclosed case on Wednesday, despite securing bail in the cipher case. Meanwhile, the PTI has also moved a contempt petition in the SC citing alleged violation of the court's Dec 22 order by the ECP, and seeking an end to the arrests and harassment of its workers and candidates.

In violation of the Constitution, various pillars of state, through their acts of omission and commission, have abetted the delay in holding polls. Further infringement of fundamental rights by manipulating the results of the elections even before the first vote is cast should not be allowed.

In decades past, the National Awami Party, PPP and the PML-N have all had obstacles placed in their way, and now it is the PTI's turn to face the displeasure of the powers that be.

This subterfuge of the democratic process must cease, and all parties should be allowed to freely campaign for the polls. Moreover, the run-up to elections, as well as polling day, needs to be free of violence and intimidation.

**Reimaged idols**



**F.S. Aijazuddin**

Until the 1960s, no member of the British Royal Family could be portrayed on the stage or on screen. The character had to have been dead for at least 50 years.

Queen Victoria became fair game after 1951 (the 50th anniversary of her death). Even as late as 1957, when The Prince and the Showgirl was made, Marilyn Monroe could be shown shaking only the gloved hand of Queen Mary.

The television series The Crown has put paid to all that. It is the saga of a parallel royalty. The last episode brings the story up to the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022 — history in real time.

The screen reimaging of our subcontinental idols has been cautious. Hollywood began with films like Nine Hours to Rama (1963) about Mahatma Gandhi's assassination and then David Attenborough's Gandhi (1982), which depicted his fuller life. The latter film won eight Oscars, including one for best costume design (how does one design a homespun loincloth?).

Bollywood was slower off the mark. Some like Gulzar's Aandhi (1975) and Amrit Nahata's Kissa Kursi Ka (1975) were released during Mrs Gandhi's prime ministership. Too close to the knuckle, they ran foul of the censors.

Inevitably, someone felt the Quaid-i-Azam M.A. Jinnah deserved also to be elevated to the screen. The film Jinnah (1998) was conceived by two Pakistani expats — Akbar S. Ahmed and Jamil

Dehlvi. The actor chosen to play Jinnah — Christopher Lee — had made his name in horror films. Nevertheless, Lee relished the role, describing it as "the most important" he had ever played.

He gave a surprisingly credible performance of the man whose life and achievements the biographer Stanley Wolpert summarised in this pithy paragraph: "Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Muhammad Ali Jinnah did all three."

Every new nation attributes its existence to one person, a father of the nation, responsible for its paternity. Prominent amongst them, for example, were Soekarno in Indon-e-sia, Kenyatta in Kenya, Ben Bella in Algeria, and Nkrumah in Ghana. To Bangla-deshis, it is Banglabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Sheikh Mujib's life can be split into two halves — from his birth in 1920 to Pak-is-tan's independence in 1947, and the second from 1947 until his assassination in 1975.

Shyam Benegal's recently released biopic Mujib: The Making of a Nation (2023) covers both, with commendable sensitivity. Such a film, sponsored by the Bangladesh government of Prime Minister Hasina Wajed (Mujib's daughter) and the Indian government could have been clouded by bias.

(Attenborough's Gandhi reeked of Mrs Indira Gandhi's benediction.) In fact, Shyam's film is surprisingly free of sponsored prejudice. The film is playing to packed houses in Bangladesh. It could be shown safely in Pakistan, without risking a riot.

The film opens with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's return to Dhaka on Jan 10, 1972, after president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto ordered his release from jail in West Pakistan. The story then reverts to his early years, his tutelage under the Bengali leader Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy (prime minister briefly from September 1957 to October 1958 of a united Pakistan), and his demands for equitable treatment for a neglected East Pakistan.

Confrontation with Gen Ayub Khan's military government led to stints in jail. In 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced his neo-secessionist six-point plan. The general election held in 1970 gave Mujib's Awami League a majority in the National Assembly. That proved indigestible to president Yahya Khan and to Mr Bhutto who preferred to reign in a divided hell than to serve in a united heaven.

There are fleeting appearances in the film by Yahya and Bhutto, unavoidable images of the 1971 war, and a frank admission of Indira Gandhi's midwifery. How-ever, there is no reference to Mujib's dramatic appearance (at Bhutto's conciliatory invitation) at the 1974 Islamic Summit in Lahore.

On Aug 15, 1975, some Bangladeshi military officers did what their West Pakistani counterparts had threatened to do for years: they killed Mujibur Rahman. Benegal's film ends with images of the blood-soaked bodies of Mujib and all his family members, except his eldest daughter Hasina Wajed who happened to be abroad.

Benegal's film on Mujib is less about Mujib's political persona than about him as a demonstrative husband and a caring father. It is a tribute by Hasina to the father she shares with their nation. — Courtesy Dawn



**Hafsa Azam**

Artificial intelligence has the potential to revolutionise our response to the concerns of climate change and climatic disasters. The convergence of AI and climate action holds promise not only for enhancing our ability to adapt to a changing environment but also for developing sustainable solutions that may help mitigate the factors behind climate change.

Climate change is driven by anthropogenic activities, causing greenhouse gas emissions and global warming, and posing severe risks such as rising sea levels, ecosystem disruption, the endangering of species, and altered ocean currents. Frequent climatic events such as hurricanes, droughts, floods and wildfires cause biodiversity loss and pose health risks. From precision agriculture and renewable energy optimisation to disaster prediction and response, AI is driving innovation that can reshape our approach to climate-related issues.

In 2023, a surge in climate change-induced disasters occurred worldwide. Hurricane Idalia, originating in the Caribbean in 2023, attained Category 3 status and left widespread destruction in Perry, Florida in its wake.

Closer to home, in June this year, Cyclone Biparjoy threatened Pakistan's coastline and severely impacted Gujarat in India, necessitating evacuations and causing casualties. Severe floods struck Greece, Türkiye, and Bulgaria in September 2023 with heavy rains causing flooding and

landslides. Rwanda also experienced floods and landslides in May 2023.

According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, over the past two decades, rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and arid conditions have elevated wildfire risks. Climate change amplifies interconnected factors such as temperature and humidity in vegetated areas, triggering dangerous wildfires. In July 2023, Greece faced devastating wildfires, the US battled wildfires in California, and Canada struggled with over 900 active fires, 599 of them "out of control". Also, in Southeast Asia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam experienced wildfires.

Chile's Megadrought culminated in a catastrophic wildfire earlier this year. AI plays a crucial role in providing weather forecasts for anticipating natural disasters accurately. Conventional forecasting relies on intricate mathematical models, which may not be able to predict extreme events. AI's foremost contribution lies in providing early warning mechanisms and post-disaster recovery efforts.

Through the analysis of extensive data from sources like satellite imagery, weather stations, and social media, AI algorithms can discern patterns and trends indicative of impending disasters. For instance, AI-driven systems can detect hurricane formation and factors that could lead to wildfire, such as smoke plumes, rapidly changing heat signatures and the appearance of hotspots in vegetated areas in satellite images, enabling timely warnings and evacuations. The US utilises AI to enhance weather predictions, early warnings, flood monitoring, disaster-response coordination, infrastructure assessment and long-term climate modelling, which improves resilience and di-

saster management. Japan has introduced an emergency announcement system, utilising automated drones to facilitate disaster evacuations.

These drones operate on a dedicated private wireless network that remains functional during emergencies. They are equipped with infrared cameras to capture real-time images of disaster-affected areas and transmit them to disaster-response centres to urge people to evacuate. This technology enhances the speed and security of remote damage assessment, thereby improving disaster response efficiency.

Pakistan needs to integrate AI into the operations of its meteorological departments due to the severe impact of climate change. The country faces challenges such as reduced agricultural productivity, irregular water supplies, coastal erosion and increased extreme weather events, making AI-based climate disaster management crucial.

Pakistan ranks among the top 10 countries which are most affected by climate change. Severe floods in 2022, with rainfall three times higher than the national average, had caused damage to the tune of \$30 billion, with more than 1,200 fatalities. There are no AI-based measures mentioned in the National Artificial Intelligence Policy to address climate disaster mitigation. Countries, such as the US, which have invested in AI for disaster response, have witnessed notable improvements in preparedness and rapid response time, underlining the potential benefits of a dedicated climate-disaster-mitigation AI policy. Pakistan should therefore consider incorporating climate-disaster-mitigation AI technology measures into the NAIP to effectively cope with the impacts of climate change. — Courtesy Dawn

**Commerce News**

**'Aqua Business Promotion Symposium' unites experts, stakeholders**

LAHORE (APP): In a collaborative effort, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Punjab Board of Investment and Trade (PBIT), and the Fisheries Department Punjab orchestrated an impactful and insightful 'Aqua Business Promotion Symposium'.

The event, held at a local hotel, brought together key stakeholders to address pivotal aspects concerning the aquaculture industry. The symposium served as a platform for discussing crucial areas, emphasising advisory policy to offer strategic guidance for individuals and entities engaged in aqua-related enterprises. Additionally, it delved into the realm of investment,

dissecting opportunities and strategies aimed at attracting investments into the aquaculture sector, fostering its growth and sustainability.

The event started with recitation of Holy Quran verses and the national anthem, setting a respectful and patriotic tone. Secretary ICI&SDD Ehsan Bhutta extended a warm welcome, initiating the symposium with an inclusive and cordial atmosphere. Highlighting the significance of the event, he delivered an illuminating keynote address, emphasising the importance of the aquaculture sector in the province's socio-economic landscape.



FAISALABAD: A farmer spraying pesticides on the crop to protect them from insects at his field.

**Stable steel industry vital to economic growth: Meher**

LAHORE (APP): Steel industry needs to be strengthened for sustainable economic growth, a prerequisite for rapid development, progress and prosperity in the country.

This was stated by Coordinator to Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Meher Kashif Younis while talking to a delegation of industrialists led by Ahmad Waqar here Thursday.

Meher said that the iron and steel industry was the bottomline producer industry and the mother of all industries as it caters to other industries, thus contributing

towards industrial and national development.

He said that worldwide, the steel industry was considered one of the vital aspects of stable growth and economic development. "Our industrial policy needs to be revisited to prioritize steel production over sugar, cola and cigarettes production," he remarked.

There was definitely a dire need for promoting the steel sector as the demand for steel was higher than its production and the demand and supply gap was met through imports.



Federal Minister of Commerce, Industries and Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz is meeting with delegation of Business community at Governor House Karachi.

**SIFC initiatives to start new phase of industrialization in Pakistan: Gohar**

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce, Industries and Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz, Thursday, reiterating the government's commitment to economic revival said that measures envisaged by the Special Investment Facilitation Council would start a new phase of industrialization in the country.

The minister was chairing a meeting with a delegation of the business community having representation of agriculture, textile, engineering and other sectors, said a press release issued here.

The delegation was informed about the priori-

ties of the government and the role and efforts of SIFC for the economic revival of the country. Dr. Gohar Ejaz speaking at the occasion said that SIFC was working vigorously with countries of Gulf Cooperation Council and China and inflow of huge foreign investment was expected in Pakistan that would promote industry and exports and bolster employment opportunities in the country.

Pakistan possess a vast potential of trade at regional and global level but despite of population of 250 million volume of its economy is \$ 350 billion while trade volume is near

\$ 100 billion, he noted and stressed on the need of enhancing trade to strengthen the economy on sustainable basis and taking prompt and comprehensive measures for the purpose.

China is not only our iron friend but also a major trade partner and Pakistani businessmen needed to explore trade opportunities in China and further promote bilateral trade, he added.

The minister said that Karachi is the economic hub of the country that drives the national economy while China, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and many other countries expressed keen inter-

est in making investments in Karachi.

He said that the government has planned to open the Garment City and a new industrial estate and also to set up a new

Special Economic Zone and an Export Processing Zone in the metropolis with a vision of instituting innovative trends of industrialization through the promotion of small industries.

SIFC has become a continuous and progressive institution and it will work with new assemblies and government following upcoming general elections to ensure sustainability.

**ICCI asks MCI to consider affordable signboard tax rate**

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) leading a delegation, visited the Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) and held a meeting with Yasir Farhad, Director Municipal Administration MCI to discuss the issue of the signboard tax rate for the traders. Ajmal Baloch President All Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajiran, Khalid Chaudhry former Senior Vice President ICCI, and others were in the delegation. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI said that the business community is not against the payment of taxes, however, MCI should finalize all taxes in consultation.

**Pak needs improved, galvanized ties with CARs, Azerbaijan amid rising economic significance**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The experts at a roundtable discussion on Pakistan's ties with Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Azerbaijan on Thursday called for a better strategy and efforts for improved and galvanized relationship with CARs and Azerbaijan amid growing economic significance of the region. The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a roundtable discussion on "Pakistan's Relations with Central Asia and Azerbaijan: Imperatives of Regional Connectivity" to initiate discourse on workable solutions to further improve cooperation with the CARs.

ISSI Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, in his welcome remarks, said the country's

relationships with the Central Asian region were important and Pakistan was the first country to recognize CARs' states and expanded its cooperation expanded in multiple domains.

Pakistan, he said, was part of many important regional forums, including Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC). "It also has multifaceted relationships in the areas of trade, investment, security and defence, connectivity and other."

He underlined the need for deepening of hard and soft connectivity with CARs and Azerbaijan as Pakistan provided the shortest route to the landlocked Central Asian countries which was a shared agenda giving a win-win

situation for both sides.

Senior Fellow (Central Asia and Eurasia), East West Institute, Brussels, Dr. Najam Abbas, in his keynote address, said the country needed to line up its policy discourse to set priority areas for enhanced bilateral cooperation with the Central Asia region as the world after the pandemic and Ukraine-Russia Crisis was looking for alternate supply chains and trade routes to avert any blockade.

As per the global freight projections by 2050, he said, the potential of increased cooperation in the Asia region in terms of freight demanded fulfillment of certain conditions as the world was looking for alternates in the connectivity areas that were halted.

**Pak-Afghan businessmen agree over holding of an Intl Expo in Peshawar**

PESHAWAR (APP): A meeting of leading businessmen and stakeholders of Pak-Afghan trade have agreed over the holding of an international Trade Expo in Peshawar in the initial months of 2024.

The meeting organized by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) at Area Study Center Peshawar University was held as a pre-conference on Pak-Afghan International Expo.

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam was chief guest on the occasion and attended the meeting virtually.

Leading businessmen from Pakistan and Afghanistan who attended the meeting included Coordinator

Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, Coordinator FPCCI KP, Sartaj Khan, Chairman TDAP, Nauman Bashir, VP PAJCCI, Shujah Muhammad, Director PAJCCI, Intiaz Ahmad Ali, Ex. SVP SCCL, Engr Manzoor Elahi. Those who represented Afghanistan included Counsel General in Peshawar, Hafiz Mohibullah, Trade Attaché, Waheedullah Himatyar, Ex. Deputy Attaché Trade, Dr. Hameed Fazli, and others.

Participants of the meeting held threadbare discussions on issues about Pak-Afghan trade and agreed on taking measures for the promotion of commerce in the region for the benefit of thousands of people on both sides.



RAWALPINDI: A carpenter is busy in his work at Furniture shop along the Asghar Mall road in City.

**Govt urged to frame economic policies in consult with chambers**

PESHAWAR (APP): Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President Fuad Ishaq emphasized the need of holding consultation with chambers and stakeholders before framing economic policies and tax-reforms.

The SCCI chief also demanded review on IPPs agreements to overcome the rising energy crisis and control on high electricity tariffs. He sought pragmatic steps for provision of electricity and gas on subsidized rates to industries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

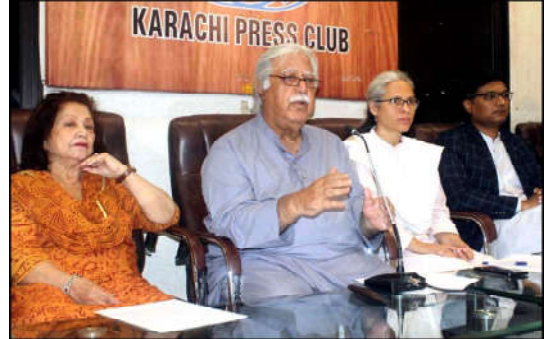
dressing a meeting during a Inland Study Tour of the 34th Senior Management Course Officers of National Institute of Management (NIM) Islamabad here at the Chamber House here Thursday.

The delegation of under training senior officers was spearheaded by Director Staff, NIM Islamabad Muhammad Imran. The meeting was attended by SCCI vice president Ijaz Khan Afridi, executive member Muhammad Ismail Safi, former president Faiz Muhammad Faizi.



## KP Minister inaugurates IT skills training center at Qadafi, Utmankhel

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for newly merged districts affairs, Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Dr. Aamer Abdullah has paid a day long visit to District Bajaur and formally inaugurated the Information Technical Skills Training Center at Qadafi, Tehsil Utmankhel. The project was established under the mega IT project of "Digital Connect" launched by the provincial government, for the youth of merged districts. During his visit, the caretaker minister also took briefings at district headquarters Khar, from the administration, police and line departments on the overall situation of administrative affairs, law and order and development process in the district.



KARACHI: Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) Chairperson, Asad Iqbal Butt addresses to media persons during press conference, at Karachi press club.

## ECP directs Punjab chief secretary, IGP to address PTI's complaints

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) wrote a letter to Punjab Chief Secretary and Inspector General Police (IG) on the request of PTI's Faisal Chaudhry directing them to redress the complaints of the party. The text of the letter, issued on Thursday, says "It should be ensured that all the candidates along with their proposers and seconders, including of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), participate in the scrutiny process. The ECP directed that no obstruction will be tolerated in the arrival of the proposers and endorsers to the RO office. No political leader or party should be deprived of their fundamental right, said the ECP's directive. Earlier, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) submitted another application in Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) demanding to change Chief Secretary and IG Punjab.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah chairing a meeting of the provincial cabinet.

## Naqvi allocates Rs300m for AED equipment in 800 ambulances

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the Emergency Services Academy Thokar Niaz Baig and attended the passing-out parade ceremony on Thursday. Observing their emergency response, Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi witnessed impeccable rescue drills, including swimming training, equipment inspections, and a symbolic descent from a fire tower with the national flag. Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi received salutes from the passing-

out rescuers. He inspected the rescuers' parade and awarded shields and prizes to those excelling in the training, emphasizing the significance of life-saving skills. Emergency Services Academy Director General Dr Rizwan Naseer, administered the oath to the rescuers. Addressing the ceremony, Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi highlighted that every fourth patient faces heart problems and announced funds of Rs 300 million for Automated External Defibrillator (AED) equipment in 800 ambulances to enhance

cardiac emergency response. Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi conducted a visit to the Al-Falah Building to inspect the newly established business facilitation center aimed at providing convenience to investors. He reviewed the one-window operation for local and foreign investors, inspected the functions of the provincial and federal government departments' counters and engaged in discussions with officials. He directed that the issuance of NOCs for investors be ensured within a specified

timeframe. Under this flagship program, 20 provincial and federal departments are providing services to the investors under one roof; he added and disclosed that business facilitation centers are also being set up in Faisalabad, Sialkot, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi and Multan, contributing to the overall ease of doing business across the region. Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has ordered Lahore Education Board to make all facilities online for students within seven days.

## Governor for carbon free architecture, town planning

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Governor Punjab Muhammad Baligh-ur-Rehman Thursday said that the historical buildings of Bahawalpur are masterpieces of architecture. He was addressing the Architects Convention and Workshop held at Noor Mahal under the auspices of the Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners. He said that zero-carbon buildings are the need of the hour. The Governor Punjab distributed certificates to the participants of the workshop. Baligh-ur-Rehman said that the training workshop has been organized for architects of South Punjab in this regard. He said that correct planners and architects play an important role in the development of a city. He said that correct



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Hon'ble Aneeq Ahmed is being presented a memento and a bouquet in a seminar on Religious Minorities and Interfaith Social Tolerance in Pakistan at NED University Karachi.

## 37 candidates from KP including PTI founder defaulters of ECP

PESHAWAR (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Election Commission released on Thursday list of candidates who failed to pay fines to the commission against violations of rules and regulations. According to a document, around 37 candidates from KP violated rules and regulations in the past while PTI founder and former Chief Minister Mehmood Khan were also included in the list. Many of the former ministers and members of PTI were also among the defaulters. It was disclosed Kameran Bangash, Taimur Jhagra, Shaouk Yousafzai and Ishtyaq Armard were also among the defaulters. PPP Information Secretary Amjad Afridi also said to be an indebted to the commission. On the other hand, the members of Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party (IPP) also failed to pay fines of Rs80,000 to the commission. Jamaat-e-Islami's Inayatullah Khan could also not pay Rs50,000 in the past.

## PHC suspends notification to end free electricity to WAPDA officers

PESHAWAR (INP): The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Thursday suspended the decision of the caretaker government to end the provision of free electricity units to the WAPDA employees. The ruling was announced during the hearing of a plea of PESCO offices for free electricity units provision. The PHC after suspending the notification of the government, issued notices to the caretaker federal government and WAPDA. The respondents have been asked to submit their responses at the next hearing of the case. It is to be noted that Pakistan ended free electricity units for the DISCOs and GENCOs.

## Caretaker CM KP emphasizes importance of upgradation of ATH to meet international standards

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice @ Syed Arshad Hussain Shah's recent visit to Ayub Medical Institute (AMI) marked a significant milestone with the inauguration of key facilities aimed at revolutionizing healthcare and education in the region. During the visit, the Chief Minister inaugurated the Ayub College of Dentistry, Patient Facilitation and Complaint Center, and the Cornea Transplant Facility at AMI. Notably, the chief minister also announced the university status for Ayub Medical College (AMC), expressing a commitment

to streamline the accreditation processes to elevate the institution's standards. Syed Arshad Shah emphasized the importance of upgrading Ayub Teaching Hospital (ATH) and AMC to meet international standards, directing the Board of Governors (BOG) and hospital executives to discuss further enhancements in a meeting scheduled in Peshawar on Friday. Following the inauguration of Ayub College of Dentistry, the Chief Minister conducted a comprehensive tour, inspecting the college's skill lab and other departments. He lauded the efforts of the college

administration and faculty for their dedication to establishing an institution that excels in dental education. The Chief Minister expressed confidence that the newly inaugurated building of Ayub College of Dentistry would significantly contribute to providing high-quality education, research, and healthcare services for the community. During the visit Chief minister also chaired a meeting where various dignitaries, including Chairman BOG Mushtaq Jadoon, BOG members Ijaz Khan, Dr. Aftab Rabbani, Javed Tariq, Fawad Saleh, and Asad Jadoon were also present.

# International News

## West to blame for world turmoil, says Russia's Lavrov

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOSCOW: The intrigues of Western countries whose dominance is ebbing away are largely responsible for pitching the world into turmoil, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview published on Thursday. Lavrov, in a year-end interview released by the official Tass news agency, warned that no one worldwide could be certain of escaping unscathed from Western machinations in 2024. "Storms continue in the world and one of the reasons is that the ruling circles in the West provoke crises thousands of kilometres from their borders in order to resolve their own issues at the expense of other peoples," Tass quoted Lavrov as saying in extracts released ahead of the full publication. "It can be said that given conditions in which the West is clinging to the domination slipping away from it, no one can be protected against its geopolitical intrigues. There is a growing understanding of this." Moscow has come to blame the West for much of the turmoil and conflict in widely separated regions. Russia describes its war in Ukraine as an existential struggle against the "collective West" resolved to expand the reach of NATO and inflict a "strategic defeat" on Moscow.



LEBANON: People gathered near debris of buildings damaged during Israeli attack on Bint Jbeil.

## N. Korea's Kim calls for 'accelerated' war preparations

**Monitoring Desk**  
SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un urged his party to "accelerate" war preparations including its nuclear programme, state media said Thursday. The comments came just a week after Kim warned Pyongyang would not hesitate to launch a nuclear attack if "provoked" with nukes. Kim made the comments at the North's ongoing year-end party meeting, where he is expected to unveil key policy decisions for 2024. Kim asked the party to "further accelerate the war preparations" across

sectors, including nuclear weapons and civil defense, Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency reported. He also stressed that the "military situation" on the Korean peninsula had become "extreme" due to "unprecedented" anti-North confrontations with Washington. Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have ramped up defence cooperation in the face of a record-breaking series of weapons tests by Pyongyang this year and recently activated a system to share real-time data on North Korean missile launches.

## Saudi cabinet approves contracting rules for firms not based there

**Monitoring Desk**  
CAIRO: Saudi Arabia's cabinet announced its approval of contracting regulations for firms that do not have regional headquarters in the Kingdom, Saudi state news agency SPA reported. The decision comes just days before Saudi Arabia's January 2024 deadline for companies to move their regional headquarters to the kingdom or risk losing hundreds of billions of dollars in lucrative government contracts. The statement on the cabinet meeting did not disclose the regulations. It is not clear if they permit the government to award contracts to foreign companies that do not have regional headquarters in Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment outside regular business hours. Finance Minister Mohammed Al Jadaan told Reuters in October that the deadline for a move would be enforced.



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken attends a meeting with Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas to discuss migration amid concern about increased crossing at the U.S.-Mexico border, in Mexico City, Mexico.

## Erdogan resembles Netanyahu with Hitler

**Monitoring Desk**  
ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was no different from Adolf Hitler and likened Israel's attacks on Gaza to the treatment of Jewish people by the Nazis. NATO member Turkey, which supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has criticised Israel's air and ground assault on Gaza, called it a "terror state" and said its leaders must be tried in international courts.

Sharpening his rhetoric, Erdogan said Turkey would welcome academics and scientists facing persecution for their views on the conflict in Gaza, adding Western countries supporting Israel were complicit in what he called war crimes. "They used to speak ill of Hitler. What difference do you have from Hitler? They are going to make us miss Hitler. Is what this Netanyahu is doing any less than what Hitler did? It is not," Erdogan said. "He is richer than Hitler, he gets the support from the West.

## South Korea sanctions 8 North Koreans over arms trade, cyberattacks

**Monitoring Desk**  
SEOUL: South Korea imposed sanctions on eight North Koreans linked to nuclear and missile development through arms trade, cyberattacks and other illicit activities, Seoul's foreign ministry said on Wednesday. The sanctions came days after North Korea fired a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which South Korea and the United States strongly condemned as a grave violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The newly blacklisted

people include Ri Chang Ho, head of the Reconnaissance General Bureau involved in overseas hacking operations, and Yun Chol, who helped supply nuclear materials while working at the North Korean Embassy in China, the ministry said. "The eight were involved in generating profits for the North Korean regime and financing nuclear weapons and missiles development by earning foreign currency through illegal cyber activities or stealing technology.

## Iran's supreme leader leads funeral prayers for senior Guards adviser

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW YORK: Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei led prayers on Thursday at the funeral of Sayyed Razi Mousavi, a senior Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) adviser killed in what Iran said was an Israeli air strike in Syria. State television said Khamenei paid tribute "to this martyr's tireless struggle and called for his companionship with the guardians of God." Mousavi was one of the most experienced and effective commanders of the resistance front.

## Four children and their mother murdered in France

**Monitoring Desk**  
PARIS: Police in France on Tuesday arrested a man suspected of murdering his wife and four children in a knife attack early on Christmas Day, a public prosecutor said. Their bodies were found on Monday night in a bloodied apartment in the town of Meaux, 40 km (25 miles) northeast of Paris. Local prosecutor Jean-Baptiste Bladier said the mother and two daughters had been stabbed so many times

## Xi vows to prevent anyone 'splitting Taiwan from China in any way'

**Monitoring Desk**  
BEIJING: President Xi Jinping vowed to resolutely prevent anyone from "splitting Taiwan from China in any way", the official Xinhua news agency reported, a little more than two weeks before Taiwan elects a new leader. China views democratically-governed Taiwan as its own territory, despite the strong objections of the government in Taipei, and has ramped up military and political pressure to assert its sovereignty claims. Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary elections on Jan. 13 and how the island handles relations with China is a major point of contention on the campaign trail. At a symposium com-

memorating the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of former Chinese leader Mao Zedong, who in 1949 defeated the Republic of China government in a civil war which then fled to Taiwan, Xi said "the complete reunification of the motherland is an irresistible trend". "The motherland must be reunified, and inevitably will be reunified," Xinhua cited Xi as telling senior officials from the Communist Party. China must deepen integration between the two sides, promote the peaceful development of relations across the Taiwan Strait, and "resolutely prevent anyone from splitting Taiwan from China in any way", he said.

## Over 40 feared dead in gasoline tanker blast in central Liberia

**Monitoring Desk**  
MONROVIA: More than 40 people were feared dead when a tanker truck exploded after crashing in central Liberia, the country's chief medical officer told local media on Wednesday. The tanker carrying gasoline crashed and tipped into a ditch along a road in Totota, about 130 kilometres (80 miles) from the capital Monrovia. Dr Francis Kateh told local broadcaster Super Bongese TV it was difficult to determine the number of victims because some had been reduced to ashes but he estimated that more than 40 people were killed in the incident. "We have our team going from home to home to check those that are missing," he told AFP. Police earlier put the death toll at 15 and said at least 30 people were injured as locals gathered at the scene. "There were lots of

people that got burned," said Prince B. Mulbah, deputy inspector general for the Liberia National Police. Another police officer, Malvin Sackor, said that after the crash, some locals had begun to take the leaking gas when the tanker exploded, killing some and wounding others. He said that the police were still gathering the total number of injured and killed. An eyewitness from Totota, Aaron Massaquoi, told AFP that "people climbed all on top of the truck taking the gas, while some of them had irons hitting the tanker for it to burst for them to get gas." "People were all around the truck and the driver of the truck told them that the gas that was spilling they could take that," Massaquoi said. "He told them not to climb on top of the tanker and that they should stop hitting the tanker... but some people were even using screwdrivers to put holes on the tank."



# ECC directs NPMC to check hoarding, ensure price stability

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet, here Thursday directed National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) to continue regular coordination with the provincial governments for measures to ensure price stability and to check hoarding and profiteering. The meeting of the cabinet committee was presided over by Caretaker Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue, and Economic Affairs, Dr. Shamsad Akhtar, according to press statement issued by finance ministry. The decision followed a briefing by Pakistan Bu-

reau of Statistics (PBS) on the inflation situation and the latest trends of prices of various essential commodities. The cabinet committee also approved the budget for Employee Old Age Institution (EOBI), the summary for which was moved by Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. ECC was informed that EOBI's contribution collection had remained stagnant during past years but had recently witnessed a substantial increase of around Rs.100 billion. ECC appreciated EOBI for its good performance and directed to strictly follow the budget calendar and prepare

a long term plan to clear the Rs.2 trillion liabilities of pension dues. Meanwhile, summary for approval of TAPI project as Qualified Investment Incentive Package under the Foreign Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act, 2022 (FIPPA) was discussed at length. The forum observed that it was a much-needed project and should be launched without delay, however observed that the proposal for inclusion of the project under the FIPPA Act required further deliberations and examination of the legal aspects, incentives and concessions. The committee also approved the principles for

settlement of capacity deduction issues of imported coal based projects and subsequent execution of side agreement with Port Qasim Electric Power Company. Meanwhile, in a meeting, the Cabinet Committee on State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) gave the approval of publication of consolidated report of the State-Owned Enterprises for FY 2019-2020, 2020-2021 & 2021-2022. Among others, the meeting was attended by the Minister of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Sami Saeed; Minister for Energy, Muhammad Ali; Minister for Communications,



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs, Dr. Shamsad Akhtar chairing a meeting of Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet.



JAMSHORO: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Navid Ashraf reviewing the cadet guards during 61st Parents Day of Cadet College Petaro.

## Naval Chief advises cadets to focus on character building

KARACHI (APP): Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naved Ashraf on Thursday attended the 61st parents' day ceremony held at Cadet College Petaro as Chief Guest and lauded the education and learning standards of the College. While addressing the gathering the Chief Guest appreciated the quality of infrastructure, facilities, faculty, and learning environment at Cadet College, a Pakistan Navy news release said. He emphasised that such efforts will surely contribute in prosperity and progress of country as education is the only way out to progress. He also commended

the collaborative efforts of Govt of Sindh, Commander Karachi, college administration and faculty for all out efforts to augment educational standards at the college. Furthermore, he advised the cadets that besides education they should also focus on character building. Principal Cadet College Petaro, Commodore @ Mushtaq Ahmed welcomed the guests and presented the annual college report. In his address, the principal highlighted the remarkable performance achieved by the cadets in academics, sports and co-curricular activities. He also mentioned

about some of the development works completed during this year and progress on undergoing works at Cadet College Petaro. Later, Chief Guest gave away the prizes to the award winners and congratulated them for their outstanding performance. Moreover, he appreciated cadets for immaculate turn out during annual parade, horse-riding, tent-pegging, gymnastic, P.T show, physical fitness and their skills displayed in exhibition. A large number of civil and military officials, parents and other dignitaries attended the ceremony.

## Aneeq says: 22-day short Hajj being introduced to facilitate pilgrims

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmad on Thursday said that all out efforts are being made to extend maximum facilities to Pakistani pilgrims. They will feel visible difference this year as first time in the history of this country, a 22-day short Hajj is being introduced, he said while talking to media on the occasion of Hajj balloting 2024 held for intending Pakistani pilgrims at Karachi Press Club. The minister said that Hajj quota for Pakistani pilgrims this year is 189210 while around 5633 surplus

applications against the Hajj quota were received, he added. He said that our endeavours to reduce the cost of Hajj package also brought results and we have succeeded to reduce Rs 100,000 from the total expense of Hajj package. Aneeq Ahmed said that mobile phone sims will also be provided to Pakistani pilgrims free of cost with 7GB data and unlimited calls facilities to enable them get in touch with their loved-ones. Besides, a 30kg suitcase with QR code and "Abaya" with Pakistani flag on its back for the female pilgrims will also be provided, he added.



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmad addressing a Hajj Balloting 2024 at Karachi Press Club.

## Nawaz facing difficulties in issuing party tickets due to differences among leadership

ISLAMABAD (Online): PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif is facing difficulties in distribution of party tickets because of difference of opinion among party senior leaders has come to open on this matter. Nawaz Sharif has shortlisted 2 candidates from every constituency of National Assembly (NA) and 3 candidates from every constituency of provincial assembly. Some senior leaders of PML-N want to give 50 percent tickets to new members. On the other hand some leaders are op-

posed to ignore old associates. Some members opposed to give tickets immediately to those who have left PTI and joined PML-N. As per sources PML-N Quaid is facing difficulties in giving tickets to candidates due to inner differences in the party. Despite warning by PML-N Quaid, the candidates who have come to give interview are continuing to level allegations against each other. Nawaz Sharif has shortlisted the candidate before issuing tickets.



## DG FIA awards letters of appreciation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Director General of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Thursday awarded appreciation letters to Deputy Director FIA Anti-corruption Islamabad Atzal Khan Niazi and Deputy Director FIA Majid Manzoor Awan. Both the officers were awarded with the appreciation letters on best performance during the year 2023.

## Closing ceremony of weapons handling training course held

ISLAMABAD: The closing ceremony of a three-day weapon handling training course held at Police Line Headquarters, in which 25 participants participated. In the weapon handling course, basic knowledge of weapons and training were provided to the participants. According to the details, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, a series of self-defense courses is being conducted for the citizens of the federal capital Islamabad, in order to ensure the safety of their lives and property and train them to deal with any emergency situation. In this regard, a closing ceremony was organized at Police Line Headquarters, in which AIG Logistics was the chief guest. He distributed the certificates among the participants who had successfully completed the training course.

## Pak condemns banning a Kashmiri Political Party

ISLAMABAD (Online): Pakistan condemns the decision of Indian occupation authorities to declare Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarrat Alam faction) [MLJK-MA], as an "unlawful association", for a period of five years. The party is led by a prominent Kashmiri leader, Mr. Masarrat Alam Bhatt, who remains imprisoned for a period exceeding 20 years. The MLJK-MA is the fifth Kashmiri party banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front, Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir, Dukhtar-e-Millat, and Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party have already been outlawed.

Ramesh Kumar claims Zardari would have leading role

ISLAMABAD (INP): Asif Ali Zardari would have leading role if elections held on February 08, former MNA Ramesh Kumar said on Thursday. Kumar, a former lawmaker in National Assembly, said that the circumstances as well as stars point out towards the People's Party as the kingmaker. "Currently Asif Ali Zardari and the PTI's founder's stars are strong," Ramesh Kumar told a private television channel. He said the People's Party talks about reconciliation and taking all together. "The PPP will be benefited from the feud between the PTI and the PML-N." "I am seeing the People's Party in Sindh and Balochistan, both provinces," Kumar sharing his insight said.

Court set Jan 4 to indict PTI founder in Toshakhana reference

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Accountability Court on Thursday decided to indict the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's founder chairman and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Toshakhana reference case on January 4. Judge Muhammad Bashir heard the Toshakhana reference case at Adiala jail. During the course of hearing, copies of the reference and relevant information were provided to the accused. Former PTI chairman and his wife have been named in the list of accused for possessing gifts received.

## AC Shalimar checks prices at different areas

ISLAMABAD (APP): On the instructions of the Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, the Assistant Commissioner Shalimar here on Thursday visited different areas of Shalimar sub-division and checked prices. The Assistant Commissioner checked DC counters in fruit/vegetable, meat/chicken shops, restaurants, general stores and bakeries etc. He imposed a fine of Rs.55 thousand on the owners/managers for high prices and arrested six persons and sent them to the police station. He also issued warning to others as per law.

## World Bank raises concerns about Pak economic policies

ISLAMABAD (INP): The World Bank has declared Pakistan's economic model ineffective, citing concerns that the country is trailing behind its counterparts due to a dysfunctional economic system that primarily benefits the elite class. Naji bin Hussain, the Country Director for Pakistan at the World Bank, emphasized that the current economic development in Pakistan is unsustainable, with the benefits of growth disproportionately favoring a select few, says in media reports. In the World Bank's report, Hussain highlighted the need for addressing deficiencies in the agricultural and energy sectors, emphasizing that the economic growth should be broadened to have a more inclusive impact. The report also expressed concerns about the environmental challenges faced by Pakistan. According to Hussain, policy changes are imperative to ensure sustainable economic development, especially in light of the growing realization that substantial past poverty reductions are stalling and poverty rates are on the rise again. The World Bank Country Director pointed out that the current system,

cost of debt, and income sources in Pakistan are not sustainable. He urged a shift towards focusing on financial stability, improving distribution, involving the private sector, and exploring alternative, cost-effective methods of electricity generation in energy reforms. Hussain emphasized the need for unity in Pakistan for a brighter future, calling for reforms in government spending, a move towards a free economy, and improved growth that enhances the overall quality of life. He highlighted the importance of creating a conducive business environment, particularly for small businesses. This is not the first time the World Bank has raised concerns about Pakistan's economic policies. The report also touched upon issues related to the privatization process in the country. The World Bank expressed apprehensions that political interference and legal complications could hinder the privatization process. Notably, the privatization program has faced setbacks since the Supreme Court's 2007 verdict in the Pakistan Steel Mills and Recodec judgments, tarnishing Pakistan's international image.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar offers condolence on demise of Former Secretary Foreign Affairs Mr. Riaz Khokhar.

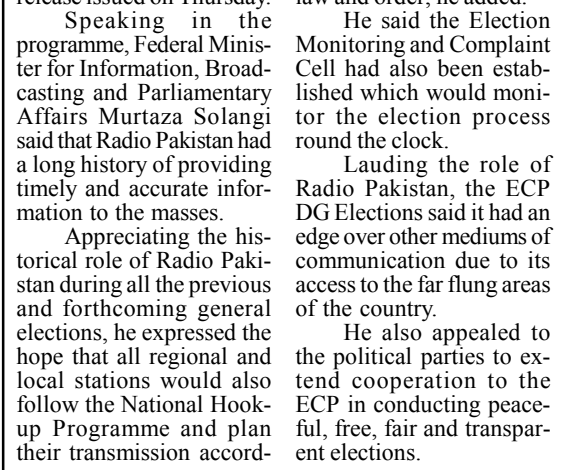


ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar offers condolence on demise of Former Secretary Foreign Affairs Mr. Riaz Khokhar.

## PBC starts special program 'Elections City 2024'

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) has launched a series of special programmes, "Elections City 2024", in connection with the forthcoming general elections 2024. The first special programme, jointly produced by the News and Current Affairs Channel and Programme Wing, was broadcast live at News and Current Affairs Channel from Islamabad, said a press release issued on Thursday. Speaking in the programme, Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said that Radio Pakistan had a long history of providing timely and accurate information to the masses. Appreciating the historical role of Radio Pakistan during all the previous and forthcoming general elections, he expressed the hope that all regional and local stations would also follow the National Hook-up Programme and plan their transmission accordingly. Director General Elections, Election Commission of Pakistan, Syed Nadeem Haider said conducting elections was a massive exercise in which about one million election staff would be deployed. About 92,000 polling stations would be set up across the country, while a special security plan would be chalked out for around 47,000 sensitive and extremely sensitive polling stations to ensure law and order, he added. He said the Election Monitoring and Complaint Cell had also been established which would monitor the election process round the clock. Lauding the role of Radio Pakistan, the ECP DG Elections said it had an edge over other mediums of communication due to its access to the far flung areas of the country. He also appealed to the political parties to extend cooperation to the ECP in conducting peaceful, free, fair and transparent elections.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Hajji Rahim, a resident of Satra Meel Islamabad addressing a press conference at NPC regarding the kidnapping of his employees.



ISLAMABAD: Hajji Rahim, a resident of Satra Meel Islamabad addressing a press conference at NPC regarding the kidnapping of his employees.



ISLAMABAD: Madad Ali Sindhi held a meeting with Advisor Planning HEC and Directory P&D QAU.

## Education Minister takes notice of delay in development of QAU sub campus in Punjab

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Madad Ali Sindhi on Thursday took strict notice of the inordinate delay in the development of campus of Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) in Punjab. During a meeting with Advisor Planning HEC and Directory P&D QAU, he ordered an immediate inquiry to be done and the report to be presented to him by January 04, 2024. Madad said that such delays are a major obstacle in the academic journey of our youth. He ordered HEC and QAU to immediately resolve all of the pending issues related to it and further coordinate with the Punjab Government to ensure speedy construction of the cam-

pus. He said that it is high time that the relevant departments are held accountable for inefficient and ineffective management. Madad Ali Sindhi also paid a surprise visit to the QAU Islamabad Campus. He visited the hostels and said that the existing condition of the hostels is deplorable. He highlighted the poor maintenance of the facilities. Students met with him and highlighted their plea about insufficient academic facilities such as the availability of the Internet. Madad took notice of the situation and ordered an immediate revamp of the hostels. He said that such problems need to be addressed on war footing and ordered the relevant authorities to resolve these issues immediately. He said that it is a sad state of affairs and that this will limit opportunities for our students to go abroad in student exchange programs. He said that such problems need to be addressed on war footing and ordered the relevant authorities to resolve these issues immediately.

they had to deal with such problems. Madad assured the students that he would order an immediate revamp of the conditions of the hostels. Madad said that we work towards student exchange programs with friendly countries but after looking at the conditions of the hostels, it is pertinent that we first fix our institutions before inviting foreign students to study here. He said that it is a sad state of affairs and that this will limit opportunities for our students to go abroad in student exchange programs. He said that such problems need to be addressed on war footing and ordered the relevant authorities to resolve these issues immediately.



ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of the illuminated digits of 2024 as illuminated by traders to welcome the new years in Federal Capital.