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Meeting with US think tanks Pak wishes to develop as hub of connectivity: COAS

Says country has made unparalleled contributions, sacrifices in fight against terrorism; Stresses Kashmir settlement as per UNSC resolutions, Kashmiris' aspirations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir, said Pakistan was a country of consequence both from a geopolitical and geoeconomic perspective and wished to develop itself as a hub of connectivity and a gateway to Central Asia and beyond. The Army Chief further said, "The country, however, eschews bloc politics and believes in maintaining balanced relationships with all friendly countries."

The COAS remarks came after he engaged in a candid discourse with the members of prominent US think tanks and media, ac-

ording to an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release issued here.

The COAS, during the interaction, put across Pakistan's perspective on regional security, transnational terrorism, and the importance of maintaining strategic stability in South Asia. General Asim Munir highlighted that Pakistan desired to broaden bilateral engagement with the U.S. through a long-term multi-domain partnership.

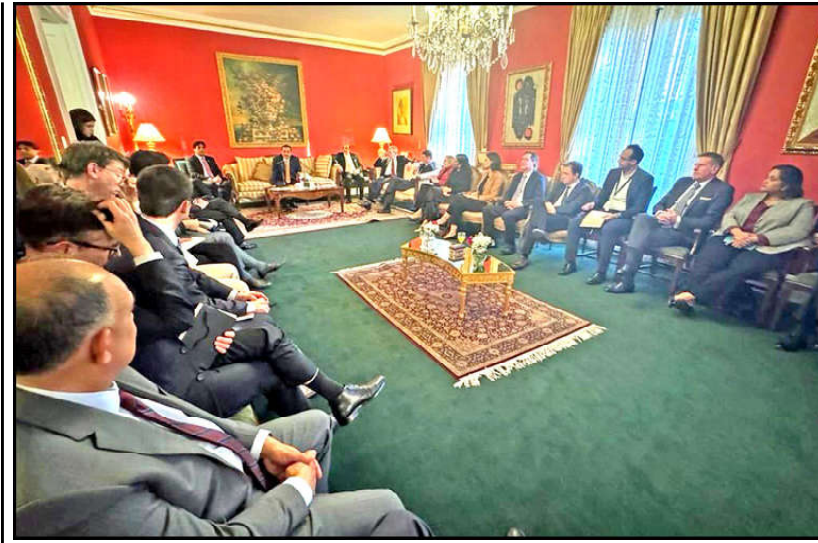
He highlighted, "His interactions during the visit to the U.S. with political and military leadership have been very positive, and he looks forward to further strengthening the

relationship."

The COAS also highlighted, "Pakistan stood as a bulwark against transnational terrorism for decades, ensuring regional stability and global peace and security."

"It has made unparalleled contributions and sacrifices in its enduring fight against terrorism and will continue to fight till the logical end, in line with the aspirations of people in Pakistan," General Syed Asim Munir said.

The COAS also stressed the need for resolution of the Kashmir issue as per the aspirations of the people of Kashmir and the UNSC Resolutions.



WASHINGTON DC: COAS General Syed Asim Munir, engaged in a candid discourse with members of prominent US think tanks and media, at Washington DC.

CM orders inquiry against contracting firm, recovery of funds released to the firm

MITHI (INP): Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Maqbool Baqar visited 2 MGD River Osmos Plant Mithi and 1.5 MGD RO Islamkot but both the plants were non-functional, therefore he ordered the completion of pending inquiries against the contracting firm, Oslo so that the firm could be prosecuted and recovery of the funds amounting to Rs380 million and Rs80million of electricity liabilities respectively could be recovered from the defaulting firm.

The CM on Wednesday morning started his visit to Tharparkar district.

He was accompanied by caretaker Information Minister Ahmad Shah. Mithi RO Plant: The Chief Minister visited the solar desalination plant complex, Mithi. The project, the RO plant, gave him an aban-

doned look. On inquiries, he was told that the plant had been non-operational for the last eight years and mostly the solar plates installed on the rooftop were missing.

The CM was told that Asia's largest solar desalination plant complex, Mithi, was run by the Energy Department and Inaugurated in January 2015. The plant had to provide drinking water in addition to producing one megawatt of electricity, benefiting the people of Mithi city besides the other 100 villages.

Later it was handed over to PHED Tharparkar in running condition, but due to negligence, the machinery rusted.

The Chief Minister was told that the contracting firm, The Oslo was given the contract to run the plant but they left the plant in unfunctional condition leaving the liability of Rs80

million electricity bill. The plant has been made functional on a generator just to test how it could be made functional.

The CM was told that the plant needed the replacement of all the membranes and replacement of some of the rusted equipment. But, on top of it, the electricity bill of Rs80 million has to be cleared before taking the task of making it functional.

The CM ordered a forensic audit of the expenditures incurred by the private firm, The Oslo on the plant. RO Plant Islamkot: The CM visited the 1.5 MGD Islamkot RO Plant inaugurated in January 2015. Sindh Coal Authority installed the plant for Rs388.6174 million.

The plant has a 650 KVA transformer, a 650 KVA generator and eight tube wells.



KARACHI: Caretaker Health Minister Balochistan Dr. Amir Muhammad Khan Jogezi talking with Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori.

ECC approves Rs 57 billion for payment of K-Electric arrears

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet on Wednesday approved the summary of the Ministry of Energy (Power Division) for technical supplementary grant (TSG) of Rs 57 billion for payment of K-Electric arrears.

The ECC meeting, chaired by Minister for Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs Dr Shamsad Akhtar, also approved another summary of the Power Division for settlement of payables to the Government-Owned Power Plants (GPPs) at par with Independent Power Producers (IPPs), and directed to release Rs 262.075 billion through a technical supplementary grant (TSG) to the GPPs. It decided to discuss the matter in next meeting also, a Finance Ministry press release said.

The committee agreed to initiate phase out of the

Export Finance Scheme of the State Bank of Pakistan a requirement of the IMF Standby Arrangement. To operationalize the requirement, it gave approval to release of Rs 3.87 billion to the EXIM Bank for the current fiscal year.

While deliberating the report on its decisions about the liabilities of Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) towards the government as discussed on September 19, the finance minister directed the Ministry of Industries to carry out a diagnostic survey to determine why the liabilities of PSM persisted even though it had not been operational since 2015 and how its land had been allocated to housing companies and served other industries without due process.

The ECC showed its displeasure on the PSM Board and recommended that the Industries Division might look into the issue for further necessary action.



KARACHI: MQM Pakistan leader Mustafa Kamal submitting nomination paper at Office of the deputy Commissioner Kemari for upcoming General Election.

Alvi, Raisi for coordinated efforts by Islamic states for an end to Gaza massacre

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi and President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran on Wednesday had a telephonic conversation wherein they underscored the need for coordinated efforts by the Islamic countries to bring an end to the ongoing massacre and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

During the conversation that lasted almost 45 minutes, President Alvi voiced deep concern over the dire situation in occupied Palestine, including Gaza as a result of ongoing Israeli aggression and occupation.

He regretted that despite the deaths of over 19,000 Palestinians, including women and children, the United Nations Security Council had failed to



impose a ceasefire and bring an end to the unspeakable Israeli atrocities.

President Alvi reiterated that a just solution to the Palestinian question based on an independent and contiguous Palestinian State with Al-Quds-Al-Sharif as capital was critical for lasting peace in the Middle East.



KARACHI: Caretaker Chief Minister Sindh Justice (retd) Maqbool Baqar during his visit to Peoples Primary Health Care Initiative Health Centre at Islam Kot.

PM calls brain drain as part of talent hunt, foresees strength for Pakistan

SWABI (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq on Wednesday, calling the brain drain, a part of talent hunt, said those leaving Pakistan for better opportunities would eventually become a strength for the country, which ought to be encouraged.

The prime minister, in an interactive session with the students of Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering, Science and Technology, exemplified the Indian nationals who had left their country and returned as an asset to contribute to their country.

Responding to a question about the measures taken by the government to stop the brain drain, he said those leaving the country were not going to vanish, rather they would seize better economic opportunities and skills, which should be encouraged.

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To a question about the arrest of Imran Khan, he said the state had an inherent right to apprehend those who violated the laws. He was arrested under certain laws, not by the PML-N, PPP or JUI, he added.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Secretary for Interior Aftab Durrani in a meeting with the Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al-Malki.

Mayor Karachi joins pre-Christmas celebrations in St. Anthony Church

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab on Wednesday met Cardinal Joseph Coutts at his residence adjacent to St. Anthony's Church and discussed Christmas programs with him.

The Mayor Karachi also presented him a cake on behalf of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) and cut the cake with him as pre-Christmas celebrations.

The Mayor Karachi visited St. Anthony and Holy Trinity Church, where he met with Cardinal Joseph Coutts and Bishop Frederick Jhon.

On the occasion, Barrister Murtaza Wahab said that the people and KMC are with the Christian community on this important occasion, and all possible municipal facilities will be provided around the places of worship of the Christian community.

Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab said that the Christian community has done wonderful services for the development and stability of Pakistan. Christmas is one of the major festivals of the world, this festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm by the Christian community all over the world, he said.



SWABI: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar inaugurates new building of Girls Hostel at Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology.

Murtaza Solangi says CPEC transformed Pakistan's socio-economic landscape

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday said the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), formally launched in 2013, had substantially transformed the socio-economic scenario of Pakistan by addressing the dire energy crisis and crumbling infrastructure.

"The CPEC has infused hope, trust and confidence in 'Pakistan people'," Solangi said while delivering a keynote address at the 8th China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Media Forum.

Prior to the CPEC, Pakistan had been facing daunting challenges in 2013, that included 10-hour blackouts, a 2500 MW electricity deficit, and a \$250 billion economic loss, he said, and added later the CPEC projects had profound positive effects on the lives of local people with provision employment opportunities.

He said the CPEC eventually expedited Pakistan's economic development process and so far multiple projects had been completed in the energy sector alone. "CPEC significantly boosted Pakistan's economic growth," he noted.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Murtaza Solangi addressing at 8th CPEC Media Forum on "Next Decade of CPEC Opportunities & Learning from Past Decade" at COMSTECH.

SC seeks candidates' stance in lifetime disqualification issue of lawmakers

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Supreme Court (SC) through an advertisement on Wednesday has sought the candidates' stance in issue of lifetime disqualification of lawmakers.

The apex court ad was aimed to resolve the discrepancy between the judicial decision on lifetime disqualification under Article 62 (1) (f) and section 232 of the amended Elections Act, 2017.

The advertisement released by SC further stated that the decision on the pleas can affect the candidates willing to contest the general elections 2024. In the last hearing on the pleas on December 11, SC issued notices to Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan, advocate generals of all the provinces and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to assist the court.

The ad read, "A seven-member bench of SC will take up pleas to resolve the discrepancy between the judicial decision on lifetime disqualification under Article 62 (1) (f) and section 232 of the amended Elections Act, 2017.

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Bilawal Bhutto Zardari received nomination papers from NA-194 Larkana

LARKANA (Online): Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has received nomination papers for NA-194 Larkana.

According to sources, Bilawal Bhutto's political Secretary Jameel Soomro has received nomination papers in his place.

On the other hand, a meeting of Parliamentary Board of PPP Punjab was held in Lahore under Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in which names of suitable candidates for general elections were discussed.

Parliamentary Board has submitted the names of possible candidates from Punjab to Party Chairman.

Govt all set to drop another electric bombshell

ISLAMABAD (Online): Preparations have been made to drop another electricity bombshell on people.

Electricity tariff is likely to increase by RS 4.66 per unit.

Central Power Purchasing Agency has submitted the application to NEPRA.

According to NEPRA, this increase has been sought in November Fuel price adjustment.

PTI founder to contest elections from three constituencies: Gohar

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's founder will contest election from three constituencies, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali and Barrister Ali Zafar announced in a news conference. PTI founder will contest elections from the National Assembly constituencies of Mianwali, Lahore and Islamabad, party chairman Gohar Ali Khan said. Barrister Ali Zafar said that the PTI wants general election on February 08, at any cost. "Restraining from submitting nomination papers is against the spirit of democratic process," he said.

Govt trying its best to improve Children's Hospital: Minister

Independent Report
LAHORE: Caretaker Punjab Health Minister Prof Dr. Javed Akram has said that the government is trying its best to improve Children's Hospital Lahore.

He was chairing the 9th syndicate meeting of the University of Child Health Sciences (UCHS) here on Wednesday. He said that basic steps are being taken to make the UCHS a paperless university.

Earlier the minister approved all the minutes of the 8th Syndicate meeting. Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Masood Sadiq also presented a report on the implementation of the

decisions of the 7th Syndicate meeting. During the Syndicate meeting, 100 per cent implementation on the Lahore High Court's orders about quality and performance SOPs was emphasized.

It was decided to approve the statutes of the UCHS and send them to the chancellor for final approval through the department. All the decisions of the finance and planning committee of the 8th syndicate meeting were approved.

During the meeting, the ongoing progress on the complex under construction of the UCHS was also reviewed in detail.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar in a group photo with senior member doctors of the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America (APPNA) at the 46th Winter Khyber Medical College Convention organized in collaboration with APPNA on 20 Dec 2023.

Naqvi orders land allocation for smart police stations

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has issued directives for the allocation of land dedicated to Smart Police Stations.

During a specially convened meeting presided over by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi here on Wednesday, it was disclosed that the construction of 40 smart police stations is slated to be completed within the stipulated time frame. The initial phase will witness the establishment of 23

smart police stations in Lahore, while an additional 17 will be strategically located in other districts.

Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, in setting a stringent deadline for the Smart Police Station project, emphasized the phased conversion of conventional police stations into smart ones throughout the province. The meeting scrutinized the construction, repair, and rehabilitation initiatives encompassing a total of 737 police stations.

A comprehensive review of the progress on the Smart Police Station project and an evaluation of the facilities integrated into these stations took place during the briefing.

Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi directed the expeditious allocation of land to every landless police station across the province, stressing the swift completion of the land transfer process.

The meeting also addressed the project involving the construction of 313 houses for police officers and employees.

All parties have expressed confidence in ECP: PML-N

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Deputy Secretary General Attaullah Tarar has said all political parties have expressed confidence in the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), as there is no doubt about its credibility and transparency.

Talking to the media, along with PML-N leader Malik Ahmad Khan at Model Town on Wednesday, he said some elements had pointed fingers at the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the ECP just for free and fair elections

should be conducted in the country on the given time and his party wanted to take forward the matter smoothly toward the elections. Attaullah Tarar said the individual imprisoned in Adiala Jail is enjoying every facility and comfort in the jail, adding that walk, exercise and all recreational activities are going on in Adiala Jail. He said that everyone gets Toshakhana gifts, but no one had sold out those gifts in the black market to gain 'black profit'.

He said that those gifts were the pride of the country and not meant for sale or gaining profit.



GILGIT: Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Haji Gulbar Khan being briefed by Minister Social Welfare Dilshad Bano and Secretary Social Welfare, Fida Hussain about the department at CM Secretariat.

Minister inaugurates newly constructed 'Business Centre'

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and Merged Districts Affairs, Dr. Aamer Abdullah inaugurated the newly constructed Business Centre at Small Industries Estate here on Wednesday.

The construction of the centre has cost about Rs.45 million. The commercial operation of the facility could earn millions of rupees for the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB) every month.

Industrial Estate is comprised of display halls and showrooms for the exhibition of the products manufactured by the manufacturers of the estate. Besides, the Managing Director (MD) SIDB, Ghazanfar Ali, Deputy Managing Directors Sahibzada Zulfiqar and Noman Fayyaz and other officers, officials and employees were also present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the caretaker minister termed the project as of high importance and directed amendments to the business model of the board for its financial stability.

Two drugs convicts sentenced to different terms

ATTOCK (Online): Two drugs peddlers were sentenced to different terms by two different courts in Attock on Wednesday. In the first case, a special court for the Control of Narcotic Substances (CNS) in Attock sentenced a convict identified as Najeeb Ullah - a native of Waziristan to 9 years' imprisonment besides imposing fine over him for smuggling two kilogram of hashish from KP to Punjab.

Ban on airing Imran speeches: LHC seeks affidavit from chairman PEMRA

LAHORE (Online): Lahore High Court (LHC) has sought affidavit from chairman PEMRA to the effect that he has not imposed restriction on TV channels from airing former chairman PTI statements and interview. The court remarked chairman PEMRA should file this reply too that who has imposed ban.

The petitions filed against ban on airing the speeches of former chairman PTI Imran Khan by T V channels despite court's orders

came up for hearing before single bench of LHC led by Justice Shams Mehmood Mirza Wednesday.

Lawyer Ahmed Pansota appeared in the court on behalf of former chairman PTI. The court sought affidavit from chairman PEMRA. The court remarked chairman PEMRA should file affidavit that he had not imposed ban on airing statements and interviews of former chairman PTI by TV channels.

LHC seeks report on cases against Omar

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Wednesday sought a report from Punjab police and other departments on a petition filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Secretary General Omar Ayub Khan seeking details of cases registered against him. The single bench comparing Justice Ali Baqar Najafi heard the petition filed by the PTI secretary general for provision of details of cases. The petitioner's counsel argued before the court that his client wanted to participate in upcoming general elections.



KARACHI: Members of Christian Community are performing tableau on stage during celebration ceremony in connection of Christmas Day Celebrations coming ahead, at St. Anthony's Church in Karachi.

Environmental shifts Seminar to tackle health challenges in KP held

PESHAWAR (APP): Addressing the growing impact of climate change on public health, Evidence for Health in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa organized a comprehensive one-day seminar for health managers here on Wednesday.

This event brought together key stakeholders, including Director General of Health Services, Dr. Shaukat Ali, and Director of Public Health, Dr. Arshad Roghani, along with participation from district health offices and regulatory bodies across the province. Dr. Shaukat Ali underscored the

vulnerability of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to climatic variations, emphasizing the adverse effects on public health. The seminar shed light on the surge in influenza-like diseases, waterborne infections, and pneumonia, all attributed to the changing climate.

Dr. Shaukat Ali commended the successful control of dengue this year, highlighting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the pioneer in developing a robust health security action plan, marking a significant stride toward building a climate-resilient healthcare system.

International News

Putin claims Russia's military has the momentum in Ukraine and is poised to meet Moscow's goals

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Tuesday that his country's military has seized the initiative in Ukraine after repelling a monthslong counteroffensive and is well positioned to achieve Moscow's goals.

Putin spoke at a meeting with top military brass a day after he presented documents to Russia's Central Election Commission to seek reelection in the March presidential vote that he's all but certain to win.

"Our troops are holding the initiative," the Russian leader said. "We are effectively doing what we think is needed, doing what we want. Where our commanders consider it necessary to stick to active defenses they are doing so, and we are improving our positions where it's needed."

The Russian leader praised Russia's troops for beating back Ukrainian attacks during the counteroffensive that started in June. "The enemy has suffered heavy casualties and to a large extent wasted its reserves while trying to show at least some results of its so-called counteroffensive to its masters," Putin said, adding that "the myth about invulnerability of Western weapons also has collapsed."

"All attempts by the West to deliver us a military defeat, a strategic defeat, were shattered by the courage and fortitude of our soldiers, the growing might

of our armed forces and the potential of our military industries," Putin said.

During the counteroffensive that began in early June, Ukrainian forces have failed to make any significant gains as they faced multicheloned Russian defensive lines, including sprawling minefields. Speaking at the same meeting, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that the Russian minefields spread for 7,000 kilometers (more than 4,300 miles).

Shoigu said that 650,000 Russian soldiers have received combat experience in Ukraine, turning the Russian army into "the best prepared and capable army in the world, armed with advanced weapons that have been tested in combat."



U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin speaks with service members stationed at Al Udeid Air Base, Doha, Qatar.

West accuses Iran of illegally testing missiles, transferring drones to Russia, enriching uranium

Monitoring Desk
UNITED NATIONS: The Western powers in the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran accused Tehran on Monday of developing and testing ballistic missiles, transferring hundreds of drones to Russia, and enriching uranium to an unprecedented 60% level for a country without a nuclear weapons program — all in violation of a U.N. resolution endorsing the deal.

Iran and its ally, Russia, dismissed the charges by Britain, France and Germany, strongly supported by the United States, which pulled out of the agreement

known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2018.

The six-party agreement was aimed at ensuring that Iran could not develop atomic weapons. Under the accord, Tehran agreed to limit enrichment of uranium to levels necessary for the peaceful use of nuclear power in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

The sharp exchanges came at the Security Council's semi-annual meeting on the implementation of its resolution endorsing the 2015 nuclear deal.

India's Modi willing to 'look into' US assassination plot claim

Monitoring Desk
NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said he will investigate any evidence provided regarding an alleged plot to kill a Sikh separatist in the United States, the Financial Times reported on Wednesday.

The US Justice Department last month charged an Indian citizen with plotting to assassinate a Sikh separatist leader on US soil, alleging an Indian government official was also involved in the planning.

"If someone gives us any information, we would definitely look into it," Modi said in his first comments on the issue.

"If a citizen of ours has done anything good or bad, we are ready to look into it. Our commitment is to the rule of law," he added. India's foreign ministry had earlier said it set up a "high-level" inquiry committee "to look into all the relevant aspects of the matter".

US may yet back 'mild ceasefire' for Gaza

Monitoring Desk
UNITED NATIONS: The emergency UN Security Council meeting on the Gaza situation was adjourned on Tuesday, with discussions entering into informal consultations as hopes rise of a slight flexibility in Washington's otherwise staunch support for Israel. The council's meeting, which started on Monday for a vote on UAE's resolution calling for a sustainable cessation of hostilities in Gaza, was postponed due to US concerns over the draft's phrasing.

While the US administration was still hesitant to endorse a "cessation of hostilities," it has shown openness to a milder "suspension of hostilities."

This shift in stance reflects deepening divisions within the US government, with growing discontent, particularly from the global South. In a departure from its previous stance, the White House's willingness to consider alternative wording suggests frustration with Israel's approach.

Despite diplomatic efforts, Israel's approach has faced criticism, and pressure has been mounting on the US following a UN General Assembly vote on December 12, where 153 countries called for an urgent cessation of hostilities.

UAE Ambassador Mohamed Issa Abushahab underscored the urgency of the situation, declaring 2023 as the deadliest year in the history of Occupied Palestinian Territory.



Rescuers work amid the rubble at Shiyuan village following the earthquake in Jishishan county, Gansu province, China.

France's Macron faces cracks in his government over migration law

Monitoring Desk
PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron faced cracks within his ruling alliance on Wednesday after parliament passed a toughened immigration bill, leaving him needing to find ways to appease left-leaning members.

The bill, a compromise between the centrist president's party and the conservative opposition, illustrates a rightward shift in politics in much of Europe as governments try to curb the rise of the far-right

by being tougher on immigration.

It also showed the difficulties for Macron of governing without a parliamentary majority, which he lost in the June 2022 election after winning a second presidential mandate.

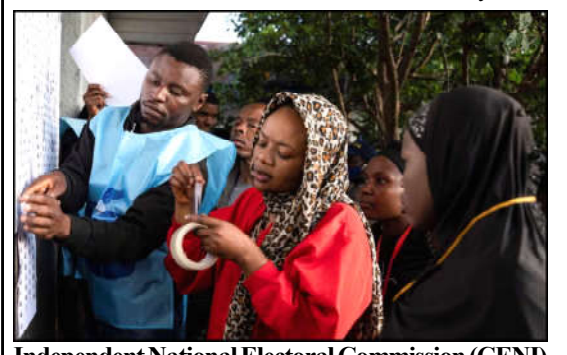
Health Minister Aurelien Rousseau told Le Monde daily he would resign in protest against the new law. "It's not possible for me to defend this text," Le Monde quoted Rousseau, a former communist, as saying.

EU agrees new rules on hosting migrants, seeks to cut numbers

Monitoring Desk
BRUSSELS: The European Union reached agreement early on Wednesday on new rules designed to share out the cost and work of hosting migrants more evenly and to limit the numbers of people coming in.

Representatives of the European Parliament and of EU governments reached an accord after all-night talks on EU laws collectively called the New Pact on Migration and Asylum that should take effect next year.

The laws cover screening irregular migrants when they arrive in the European Union, procedures for handling asylum applications, rules on determining which EU country is responsible for handling applications and ways to handle crises. Migrant arrivals in the European Union are way down from the 2015 peak of more than 1 million, but have steadily crept up from a 2020 low to 255,000 in the year to November.



Independent National Electoral Commission (CEN) agent displays the list of voters at the Mavuno polling centre on the day of the presidential election in Goma, North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Philippines rebukes China over South China Sea claims

Monitoring Desk
MANILA: The Philippine defense minister rebuked China on Wednesday for accusing his country of provoking tension and stirring trouble in the South China Sea, saying only Beijing believed what it was saying.

"Truth and in fact, no country in the world, none, supports unequivocally their claim to the whole of South China Sea," Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro said as both nations have exchanged accusations over recent collisions in the waterway. China claims almost the

entire South China Sea, a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of commercial shipping annually, including parts claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 said China's claims had no legal basis, a ruling the United States supports but Beijing rejects. There was no immediate comment from the Chinese Embassy in Manila. More than a week ago, Manila and Beijing traded accusations over a collision of their vessels in the South China Sea.

PM announces upgradation of KMC, AMC to medical universities

PESHAWAR (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister, Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar here on Wednesday announced upgradation of Khyber Medical College (KMC) Peshawar and Ayub Medical College (AMC), Abbottabad as public sector medical universities.

The prime minister made the important announcement while addressing the 46th annual meeting of Association of Physicians of Pakistan Descent of North America (APPNA) organized by the alumni of Khyber Medical College Peshawar at Governor House.

On the request of members of APPNA and its President Dr Arshad Rehman, Prime Minister Kakar said that practical work on upgradation of KMC and AMC as public sector medical universities should be initiated within 35 hours by the respective au-

thorities.

Commenting APPNA's rich services for ailing humanity and continued long connection with people of their home country, the prime minister directed the Governor and Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to give practical shape to upgradation of KMC and AMC to a full fledged medical universities keeping in view of people and APPNA demands.

While lauding services of students of both these medical colleges in healthcare services in the country as well as abroad, the prime minister said that Pakistani doctors serving in United States and others foreign countries were like an ambassador of Pakistan and their medical and surgical services besides philanthropy contribution during earthquake, floods and other natural calamities in

Pakistan was highly praised worthy.

Prime Minister Kakar said that he was very pleased that Pakistani doctors, settled in America have established strong roots and bonds with their countrymen and helped Pakistan in every difficult situation.

He said that Pakistani doctors have proved their abilities and professionalism all over the world including USA and being a role of a bridge between Pakistani communities and American citizens while dedication towards duties and treating patients with friendly attitude and warmth was their hallmark.

"Pakistani doctors are the best in the world and graduates of KMC doctors were known internationally for their hard work, professionalism and devotion in healthcare services," he said.



JORDAN: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza called by King of Jordan King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussain at Jordan.

Jordan's King Abdullah-II confers Order of Star of Jordan upon CJCS

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS), General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, who is on an official visit to Jordan, called on King Abdullah II, Ibn Al Hussain.

Jordanian King Abdullah Ibn Al Hussain conferred the medal 'Order of the Star of Jordan' on CJCS General Sahir Shamshad Mirza in recognition of his meritorious services.

During the meeting, both dignitaries discussed various areas of interest,

including bilateral politico-diplomatic and military co-operation and the prevailing regional security situation, according to an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release issued here Wednesday.

The CJCS also held separate meetings with Major General Yousef Ahmed Al-Hnaity, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and Brigadier General Muhammad Hyasat, Commander of the Royal Jordan Air Force.

JUI, MQM-P demand extension in deadline for nomination papers filing

ISLAMABAD (INP): Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) on Wednesday has demanded the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to amend the election schedule, requesting an extension to the deadline for receiving nomination papers. Senator Kamran Murtaza, a JUI representative, wrote a letter to Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, expressing concerns about the limited time allotted for submitting nomination papers. The current schedule allows only three days for this crucial step.

Murtaza argued that political parties need more time to distribute tickets to candidates at both the national and provincial levels. He proposed adding three days to the nomination paper receipt period to facilitate this process.

To compensate for the extended nomination window, Murtaza suggested reducing the time for scrutiny of nomination papers from seven days to four days. He

believes this adjustment would still allow elections to be held on the scheduled date of February 8th. Meanwhile the Muttahida Quami Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) has demanded the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Raja Sultan to extend the deadline for filing of nomination papers for the general elections to be held on February 08, 2024.

According to the election schedule issued by Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), nomination papers could be filed with respective returning officers by the candidates from December 20 to 22, while names of all nominated candidates would be published on December 23.

In a letter to CEC Sikandar Raja Sultan, the MQM-P expressed concern over duration - three days - of filing nomination papers, saying that the process is a "tedious job, and has a long list of formalities requiring time and a lot of paperwork".



HYDERABAD: Leader of PPP Jam Khan Shoro filed his nomination papers for the seat of Provincial Assembly for General Election.

Food System Dashboard to help improving nutrition, health outcomes: DG SFA

KARACHI (APP): Director General Sindh Food Authority Agha Fakhur Hussain, Wednesday, said that Food System Dashboard will help identifying challenges of food security and finding out ways to improve nutrition, health and environmental outcomes.

He was addressing a workshop held here to discuss matters relating to creation of the first food system dashboard in the country.

The workshop was jointly organized by Gain Pakistan, Food and Agriculture Organization, Columbia Climate School and Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Agha Fakhur Hussain said that the dashboard encompasses the entire food system by collecting data from multiple sources.

It enables relevant

stakeholders to compare the results of their food systems, identify challenges, and devise interventions for improving nutrition, health and environmental outcomes, he added.

Food Systems Dashboard (FSD) is the first initiative for collecting country-level data from all components of the food system and provide in-depth analysis and guidance on result oriented utilization of the data, he stated.

Agha Fakhur said that malnutrition and food insecurity were major challenges encountered by less developed countries and establishing a relevant dashboard can be of great help to policy makers.

The DG also highlighted various measures taken by Sindh Food Authority to deal with the issues and informed that such steps have yielded positive results.



KARACHI: View of site after traffic accident due to over speeding and break failed, located near Bagh-e-Korangi area in Karachi.

IT ministry develops mobile app to digitize Hajj operation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Hajj operations for pilgrims have been digitalized as Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications has developed a mobile app in record time to facilitate Hajj Pilgrims.

Highlighting the key features of the application Dr. Umar Saif said that the Application will enable pilgrims to register using the OTP received via SMS. Users will be provided with a unique ID, that is their CNIC and application number, he said.

He said pilgrims can view and update their personal information, including contact details and identification information. The application will enable Pilgrims to view their Hajj application status i.e. submitted, successful, unsuccessful, refunded) real time updates, he said.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunications Dr. Umar Saif said that the pro-



KARACHI: Council General of UAE Bakheet Ateeq Al Remethi cut the Christmas cake along with others during ceremony at UAE Consulate in Provincial Capital.

Best of CPEC is yet to come: Mushahid

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairman, the Senate Defense Committee and Pakistan-China Institute, Mushahid Hussain Sayed while speaking at the 8th CPEC Media Forum on Wednesday said, "When we talk of the next round, I think the best of CPEC is yet to come".

The Forum, themed "Next decade of CPEC: Opportunities & learning from past decade", was hosted by the Embassy of China in Pakistan, and co-organized by China Economic Net and Pakistan-China Institute on Dec 20 in Beijing, Islamabad and Gwadar both online and offline, Gwadar Pro reported.

In the forum, Mushahid Hussain Sayed reviewed the achievements of CPEC in the past decade and clarified the smears of the West against CPEC.

He noted the achievements of CPEC by referring to the \$25.4 billion of direct investment in Pakistan, 236,000 jobs generated, 8,000 megawatts of electricity, and 510 kilometers of highways by the end of 2022. "28,000 Pakistani students are studying in China and 8,000 of them are doing their doctorate in China."

So this is, I think, a very important aspect of the whole development," he added.

Imran, Bushra summoned in NAB Toshakhana reference

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi have been summoned on December 23, in connection with NAB Toshakhana reference.

The NAB filed Toshakhana reference against the former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Accountability Court which was accepted for hearing.

The accused had obtained 108 items from the Toshakhana and kept 58 with them, the reference stated.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Tuesday filed a reference with the Accountability Court against PTI founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi pertaining to Toshakhana case.

The NAB Rawalpindi has named two accused in the graft reference and after scrutiny of the case, the Registrar Office of the accountability court would take further action.

NAB prosecutor Sohail Arif and Investigation Officer Mohsin Haroon submitted the reference to Registrar's Office.

The reference is under way.

The arrested accused are identified as Asad, Farman and Jalil Shah, said police sources on Wednesday.

Two illegal pistols with rounds, a mobile phone and a motorcycle were recovered from the possession of the accused.

The cases have been registered against the accused and further investigation is underway.

Police arrest accused in injured condition

HYDERABAD (APP): The Pinyari police on Tuesday arrested a suspect in injured condition with a weapon during an alleged encounter.

According to a spokesperson, Pinyari police last night, signalled two suspicious persons to stop while patrolling, the two motorcycle-riding suspects tried to escape and started firing at the police.

In retaliation, the police apprehended one suspect Ahmed Khaskheli in injured condition along with a weapon. However, his accomplice took advantage of the darkness and successfully fled on the motorcycle.

The arrested suspect was immediately transferred to the hospital for medical treatment, while efforts were underway to arrest the fleeing accomplice.



Judicial Assistants of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in a group photo with Mr. Justice Athar Minallah at the Federal Judicial Academy Islamabad.

Pakistan, Brunei hold inaugural round of bilateral consultation

ISLAMABAD (APP): The inaugural round of Pakistan-Brunei Bilateral Consultation and Cooperation (BC) was held virtually on Wednesday wherein the two sides engaged in extensive discussion on bilateral relations, regional developments and multilateral issues of mutual interest.

The inaugural round was co-chaired by Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Ambassador Muhammad Syrus Sajjad Qazi and Permanent Secretary, Ministry

of Foreign Affairs of Brunei, Pengiran Norhashimah Binti Pg Mohd Hassan, a Foreign Office press release said.

The foreign secretary noted that Pakistan and Brunei enjoyed a longstanding, warm and fraternal relationship.

He underscored that Pakistan was committed to developing a broad and multifaceted partnership with Brunei with a focus on trade, investment and close cultural cooperation.

Former chairman DRAP arrested in corruption fake degree case

ISLAMABAD (Online): Former chairman Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) Sheikh Akhtar has been arrested by FIA in fake degree and corruption case.

FIA has arrested Sheikh Akhtar former chairman DRAP following the cancellation of his bail.

Judge Shahrukh Arjmand of FIA Court central has cancelled the bail before arrest.

According to FIA, former chairman DRAP Sheikh Akhtar was facing Rs 2.5 billion corruption charges.

As per FIA spokesperson Sheikh Akhtar had secured his appointment on post of CEO of Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) on fake degree.

SBP announces public holiday on Dec 25

KARACHI (APP): The State Bank of Pakistan, Wednesday, announced public holiday on December 25 on the occasion of Quaid-e-Azam Day and Christmas.

The State Bank of Pakistan will remain closed on December 25, 2023 (Monday) being public holiday on the occasions of Quaid-e-Azam Day and Christmas, as declared by the Government of Pakistan," said a statement issued here.

Christmas preparations in full swing

SUKKUR (APP): The Christian community has started thronging shopping malls to buy new clothes and gifts for their relatives, as Christmas approaches.

The community is also busy decorating their houses with Christmas trees and flowers.

Christmas preparations in several churches of the Sukkur division have been completed. These include Catholic, Protestant and other missionary churches.

The biggest ceremony for the Catholic school of thought will be held at Saint Mary Church. Meanwhile, the largest event for Protestants will be organised at the Cathedral Church Quence Road where Christian leaders will hold prayers for the country's prosperity and safety.

Talking to APP here on Wednesday, Christian leader Father Yaqoob Masih said that this day strengthens the resolve to encourage peace, fraternity, love, and interfaith harmony. "We need to end hatred, differences and unite for prosperity, peace, safety, and development of Pakistan," he added.



KARACHI: Students of Medical and Dental Colleges Admission Test (MDCAT) are holding protest demonstration for acceptance of their demands, held at Karachi press club.

Married woman committed suicide

By Tanveer Soomro MIRPUR MATHELO: A married woman committed suicide by consuming a large amount of narcotic pills after a young man held her hand in a crowded market. According to the details, a married woman, Sadia Soomro, committed suicide by taking a large amount of narcotic pills in Imam bargah Mohalla of Daharki city.

An influential young man, Abdul Hameed Chachar, held hands in the crowded market and pressured the woman and her husband to be friends, which scared the woman and her husband.

Later, the accused used his influence to send the po-

licemen to her house and pressured and harassed her.

Two days ago, Sadia Soomro appealed to the higher authorities to provide protection along with her mother on the social media website, but they did not provide her protection. Narcotic pills were taken which made her condition worse, which was immediately shifted to the hospital but she could not survive. On the other hand, the relatives kept the body of Sadia Soomro in front of Daharki Police Station, SSP Ghotki Muhammad Anwar Khetran immediately took notice of the incident and ordered the arrest of the influential accused Hameed Chachadar and an FIR was filed.