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Chief Editor: Syed Farooq Shah

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Negotiations underway with Baloch protesters

Government striving to go towards solution of Balochistan protestors' problem: Solangi

Baloch protesters granted bail, set to be released: Islamabad Police; Govt establishes special Police Help Center to facilitate release of protestors

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Sunday that it was an effort of the government to go towards the solution of the problem of protestors from Balochistan through negotiations. Talking in a programme

on "GTV" the minister said that it was desire of the interim set-up that the protestors should go back to their homes with dignity, honour and safety. "We want to solve the problems of the protestors and talks should be held in Balochistan or Quetta instead of Islamabad," Solangi said.

The minister for information said that most of the protestors from Balochistan were women and at this time, they were present in front of the National Press Club. Security, ambulance and medical facilities were available for the protestors, Murtaza Solangi informed. The minister said that

it was the preference of the protestors to sit in front of the NPC and register their protest peacefully. "Everyone is allowed to protest peacefully and our effort is to ensure that the protestors do not face any kind of inconvenience", Murtaza Solangi remarked.

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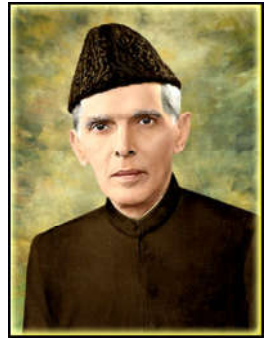
ISLAMABAD: Baloch protesters stage sit-in outside National Press Club



ISLAMABAD: Governor Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali meeting with Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar in Balochistan House

Quaid-e-Azam's 147th birthday to be celebrated today

ISLAMABAD (Online): 147th birth anniversary of the founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah will be celebrated



on December 25. Events will be held across the country on the birthday of Quaid-e-Azam. Various events and seminars will be organized

by Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), NAZriya Pakistan Foundation and public and private social organizations, during which speakers will pay tribute to the valuable services of the founder of Pakistan for the country and nation.

Radio and TV channels will present special programs while national newspapers will publish special editions in which tributes will be paid to the great leader of South Asia. PMLN Lawyers Forums will also organize a special event in which the father of the nation's birthday cake will be cut.

Inauguration ceremony of restoration: Karachi-bound Bolan Mail due to be restored today

Independent Report QUETTA: All is set to restore the Bolan Mail for Karachi from Quetta. (Monday).

The inauguration ceremony of the restoration of the Karachi-bound Bolan Mail is scheduled to be held at the Quetta railway station. The Federal Minister for Railways and Communications, Shahid Ashraf Tarar would be the chief guest at the inauguration ceremony of the train.

Needless to mention here is that the Bolan Mail, which was suspended due to the floods and heavy rains in August last year, is being restored after one year and four months because of the special interest of the caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki. All the necessary arrangements have been made by the Pakistan Railways.

As per the schedule, Bolan Mail would depart for Karachi from Quetta. It may be mentioned here that the caretaker Chief Minister had announced to restore the Bolan Mail on occasion of the Sibi-Harnai railway section on October 29, 2023.

Meanwhile, the caretaker Federal Minister Railways had fixed December 25 the day for restoration of the train service between Quetta-Karachi after completing the necessary arrangements in this regard. The Pakistan Railways took steps on emergent basis for restoration of the train.

Thus, the train is going to be restored today now. Undoubtedly, the people of Balochistan would have comfortable and cheaper traveling facilities with restoration Bolan Mail.

Governor for following Quaid principles to strengthen Pak

QUETTA (APP): Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar on Sunday urged to follow the principles of the father of the Nation Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in its true spirit.

"For the real development and prosperity of the country, we have to follow the principles of unity, faith and discipline, he said in his message on the eve of Quaid's birthday.

He said "The best way to pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah is to not only stick to the principles he gave but also to make honest and conscious efforts for the uplift of the country and the nation to pave the way for the formation of a successful welfare state.

Pakistan condemns custodial killing of three civilians in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan strongly condemned the barbaric custodial killing of three Kashmiri civilians in Baffiaz, Poonch district of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

The slain civilians were tortured to death at a camp of the Indian occupation Army. A purported video clip of the Indian personnel stripping three men and sprinkling chilli powder on them is viral on social media.

The incident, once again, exposes India's relentless state-terrorism in IIOJK, the Foreign Office (FO) spokesperson said in a statement. The perpetrators of these custodial killings must be held accountable.

Religions, cultures diversity is a source of stability for Pakistan: Dr. Arif Alvi

ISLAMABAD (Online): President Dr. Arif Alvi has said that Christmas has a special place in the hearts of our Christian brothers and is an opportunity to celebrate joy, contemplation and joy.

He went on that the teachings of love, compassion and peace of Jesus (PBUH) are a beacon for us and guide us.

The diversity of religions and cultures is a source of stability for Pakistan. Our Christian community has played a significant role in the social and economic development of the country.

President also acknowledge the commendable services rendered by the Christian community

for the promotion of peace, tolerance and harmony in the country.

On this festive occasion, let us celebrate the spirit of Christmas, promote unity, understanding and goodwill among all communities. Alvi continued that may the Christmas message of love, mercy and hope resonate in our hearts and guide us to a future filled with peace, joy, harmony and prosperity.

He said that I am proud to say that minorities have all political, economic and social rights in Pakistan according to the Constitution of Pakistan. Our religion Islam fully recognizes and protects the rights of minorities.

Govt to thoroughly investigate complaints about hurdles in electoral process: PM

ISLAMABAD (INP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has assured that the government would thoroughly investigate the complaints regarding hurdles to stop some people from taking part in the electoral process.

While speaking during an interview with a private TV channel, he rule out the policy of ousting anyone from political process and said that voters were free to elect candidates of their choice.

Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar said in his opinion those who showed disruptive behavior and were involved in the incidents of May 9 should not be allowed to hold public office.

However, the Election

Caretaker PM stresses upon forging of unity under Quaid's guiding principles

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has stressed the need to forge unity for the continuity of democracy, peaceful coexistence and rule of law and the elimination of extremist forces.

In a message on the observance of the 147th birthday of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of the nation, on Monday, the prime minister said that on this day, they should reaffirm their commitment to national unity and prosperous and progressive Pakistan.

Quaid's principles of 'unity, faith and discipline' should be the guiding principles for all as a nation to realize the democratic state as conceived by their founder," he emphasized.

Commission will decide about qualification and disqualification of candidates, he added.

The Prime Minister

Jan Achakzai says Baloch marchers tabled unconstitutional demands

QUETTA (INP): Caretaker Balochistan Information Minister Jan Achakzai Sunday termed the demands tabled by the Baloch marchers 'unconstitutional' and also rejected any kind of torture on women or use of water cannon in Islamabad.

While addressing a press conference, Jan Achakzai claimed that women were neither tortured in Islamabad nor anyone targeted with water cannon. He said that Baloch marchers tabled unconstitutional demands.

He said that the state could not unarm its institutions to leave the terrorists freehanded. Achakzai claimed that some elements were attempting to create chaos ahead of the general elections.

The caretaker informa-

tion minister said that the surrender of disgruntled Baloch leaders shocked India.

He added that every Baloch is loyal to Pakistan like a Punjabi, Pathan and Sindh. He vowed to make Balochistan a peaceful place.

He alleged that a small group of people marched towards Islamabad from Turbat with an agenda. He added that the marchers were demanding to free terrorists.

Jan Achakzai said that hundreds of non-Balochs were brutally killed in Balochistan but no commission was formed to hold a thorough investigation. He added mostly missing persons were BLA members who were residing in India or hiding in the mountains.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi calls on caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

To cope with challenges facing country CM calls for following golden principles of Quaid-e-Azam

Independent Report QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki has underlined the need to follow the golden principles of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah to cope with the challenges facing the country.

He also stressed the need to forge unity among our ranks.

In a message issued here on the eve of birth anniversary of the father of nation Muhammad Ali Jinnah being observed today (Monday), the Chief Minister said that the golden principles of Quaid-e-Azam I.e., Unity, Faith and discipline provide base to make

the country stronger.

He said that we need to follow and truly implement these principles more than ever.

He said that we can pay tributes to the Quaid by promoting harmony, enlightenment and democracy in the country.

The Chief Minister said that the enemy of Pakistan has bent upon destabilizing the country, however, we are determined to foil their nefarious designs through unity.

The caretaker Chief Minister said our forefathers got the country after great sacrifices and thus the people of the country and province would not let waste these sacrifices.

Bilawal demands judicial investigation of cipher case

LARKANA (INP): Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has demanded judicial investigation of cipher case.

Speaking to media in Larkana on Sunday, Bilawal said the cipher case is a serious matter and a judicial investigation must be carried out in this matter.

He said that relief has been given in the cipher case however the Bhutto family went through political victimization that why "we want proper investigation of the cipher case". The former foreign

minister stated that the Ex-president of US Donald Trump was tried in court and classified documents were recovered from his residence hereby the cipher case also requires investigation and the people of Pakistan should know the truth behind cipher case as it was security breach.

APP adds: The Chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari filed a nomination paper for the National Assembly seat of Larkana-Ratodero NA-194 (Larkana-I) for General Elections 2024 on Sunday.

Nawaz Sharif files nomination papers for NA-130

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Muhammad Nawaz Sharif on Sunday filed nomination papers to contest general elections from Lahore's National Assembly constituency NA-130.

Nawaz Sharif's nomination papers were submitted to the returning officer concerned by former MPA and provincial minister Bilal Yasin. The returning officer had fixed December 26 for the scrutiny of the nomination papers.

At least, 24 candidates have submitted their papers to contest elections from the constituency. The other candidates include PTI's Dr Yasmin Rashid, PPP's Ahmad Khan, PML-N's Bilal Yasin and Waheed Alam Khan.

Three killed, over 10 injured in bus-trailer collision

HUB (INP): At least three people including a woman were killed and more than 10 others injured in collision between passenger bus and a trailer on Sunday.

According to details, an over speeding passenger bus collided with a trailer on National Highway in Windar area of district Hub. As a result of accident, three people including a woman were killed on the spot while over 10 including women and children were injured.

The bodies and injured were shifted to Windar Hospital.

Nine family members die as house catches fire

ABBOTTABAD (APP): At least 9 persons of the same family were killed as their house engulfed in flames due to an electricity short circuit in Qalandarabad here Sunday. The local emergency response team, Rescue 1122, swiftly mobilized its teams and recovered 8 bodies.

The Rescue 1122, along with three ambulances and locals made concerted efforts to extinguish the fire and rescue the residents. Unfortunately, the wood and clay house quickly caught fire, impeding rescue activities. Consequently, nine family members were trapped within the collapsing structure and lost their lives.

After hours of intense efforts, Rescue 1122 successfully recovered all the bodies buried in the debris, marking the completion of the search operation. Emergency Officer Hafeez ur Rahman is overseeing the operation, ensuring a coordinated and efficient response.

The deceased persons were identified as the wife of Zakir, four daughters and four sons, including Hashim, Qasim, Hasan, and Sufyan.

The community mourns the loss as authorities work to investigate the cause of the tragic incident and ensure the safety of other residents in the area.



LARKANA: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari submitted his nomination papers for NA 194 (Larkana-1) to returning officer for upcoming General Election 2024.

PTI to file application in IHC today for return of bat symbol

ISLAMABAD (Online): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has prepared an appeal for the return of the election symbol "Bat" which will be filed in Islamabad High Court today (Monday).

A constitutional petition along with that also been prepared against Election Commission of Pakistan's verdict, which will be filed in Supreme Court.

An early hearing is also being requested in the application.

The application has been prepared on the direction of Chairman Barrister Gohar, who himself will appear in the High Court and request the court to return the bat symbol.

Sources said that PTI has also prepared an application under Article 184(3) of the Constitution to approach the Supreme Court, which will be followed by Sardar Latif Khan Khosa

Advocate.

It should be noted that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Barrister Gohar had said that he will approach the court to take back the symbol of the bat and it is hoped that the Supreme Court will intervene and our symbol will be restored.

Speaking to the media outside Adiala Jail, Chairman PTI Barrister Gohar said that he does not consider CIPHER case as an open trial, it is a violation of the orders of the IHC, every human being has basic rights, the courts should take it seriously.

Efforts are being made in the cipher case to ensure that no one gets out of jail. We have not been provided with any certified copies yet.

He said that everything is happening in a hurry, the Supreme Court clearly said to do everything, the criminal trial cannot be done in a

hurry, except for none of us, the criminal trial is being done in a hurry.

Barrister Gohar said that he will approach the court to take back the symbol of the bat, I hope the court will do justice, God willing, the apex court will intervene and our symbol will be restored.

He said the bat is the symbol of 70% of the people of Pakistan. No one can take away any symbol allotted to you.

He said that Supreme Court is also an option to approach.

Chairman PTI further said that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) did not mention in the order whether those who submitted the applications were part of PTI or not, the Election Commission did not mention that we violated any law or regulation. Yes, there can be no objection to our intra-party election.

6 of same family submit nomination papers in Kharian

KHARIAN (INP): The process of submitting nomination papers for February 8 election is continuing in Kharian as six members of the same family including a woman have filed their nomination papers from the NA-62 and PP-28 constituencies.

Five brothers, Abid Raza, Naeem Raza, Shahid Raza, Shabbir Ahmad and Muhammad Ali Tanveer, and one sister in-law filed the nomination papers and they will contest elections against each other from the NA-62 constituency. The woman, Saadia Shahid is the wife of Shahid Raza.

Abid Raza is former MNA, Naeem Raza is ex-Advisor to Punjab CM while Shabbir Ahmad is former MPA, Muhammad Ali Tanveer is former district chairman while Shahid Raza is former UC Nazim.



ISLAMABAD: Police personals stands alert outside ST Thomas Church ahead of Christmas ceremony celebration on 25th December, in the Federal Capital.

Government striving to go...

Continued from page 1

He said that yesterday also, the negotiation committee held talks with the protesters.

The minister pointed out that the demands of the protesters were decades old. When the protesters reached Islamabad, some people were already in the NPC, Murtaza Solangi added that protesters who came from Balochistan blocked the road near Chaungi No. 26 (Motorway Chowk).

He said that the local administration offered the protesters space for protest in F-9 Park and H-9 ground but they refused to go there.

Elaborating further, the minister said that late night these protesters were joined by some locals.

"When the protesters in Islamabad started moving towards the red zone, the police tried to stop them," Murtaza Solangi said.

He said some protesters were arrested who were involved in stone pelting on the law enforcement agencies.

The minister said that arrested women were released two days ago whereas releasing 163 arrested men was in progress.

When the protesters left Balochistan, they were not stopped anywhere, Murtaza Solangi added that no ill-treatment was done to the protesters.

Meanwhile after negotiations between the prime minister's committee and the protesters from Balochistan, the process of releasing arrested persons was underway and a special Police Help Center had also been established in that respect.

Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar had constituted a committee comprising Federal Ministers Murtaza Solangi, Fawad Hassan Fawad and Jamal Shah to hold negotiations with Balochistan protesters.

Following the negotiations, process of the release of arrested people was underway as per law, a government statement issued here on Sunday said.

According to the statement, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Abdul Haq Imrani has been appointed as the focal person in that regard.

As the special Police Help Center will continue to work for two days, Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Operations and SSP Operations will supervise the whole process.

If any person faces any difficulty can contact Islamabad Capital Police (ICT) through telephone numbers: 051-9001534, mobile: 0345-9600622 or e-mail: assistanceictp@gmail.com, the statement concluded.

INP adds: The caretaker government on Sunday said negotiations were underway with Baloch protesters, who are staging a sit-in outside the National Press Club in Islamabad against enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

"A cabinet committee formed by the prime minister is holding talks with the protesters," Interior Secretary Aftab Akbar Durrani said, emphasising that staging peaceful protests was every Pakistani's right.

The statement comes a day after the Baloch Yakjehti Committee — organiser of the Baloch long march in the federal capital — gave the authorities a three-day ultimatum to quash cases registered against students and activists and release all protesters.

The long march led by Baloch women — which started in Turbat on December 6 after the alleged "extrajudicial killing" of a Baloch youth by the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) officials — had reached the federal capital on Wednesday.

Islamabad police announced on Sunday that the bail for all detained Baloch protesters, apprehended during a recent demonstration, has been approved, and they are in the process of being released.

According to a statement released today by Islamabad police, the detained protesters had demanded the release of their fellows during meetings with a committee formed by the Prime Minister and the Governor of Balochistan.

"In compliance with legal requirements, the bail for the arrested protesters has been approved. The detained protesters are being released," stated the police.

Pakistan condoles martyrdom of 12 Turkish soldiers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Sunday condole the martyrdom of 12 Turkish soldiers during counter-terrorism operations.

In a statement, the Foreign Office Spokesperson said, "We are deeply saddened to learn that 12 Turkish soldiers have been martyred during counter-terrorism operations on 22-23 December 2023."

"We express deepest condolences to the bereaved families and wish speedy recovery to the injured. Pakistan stands in firm solidarity with Turkiye in this moment of grief."

BTTN commemorates Quaid's 147th birth anniversary

QUETTA (APP) Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN) conducted an in-house parliamentary style debate at its Conference Hall to commemorate the 147th Birth Anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. A press release issued here on Sunday, the debate, held in honour of the visionary leader, focused on the topic, "Is today's Pakistan a Depiction of Jinnah's Vision?" The event was chaired by Mr. Aadersh Hamza, Associate Director of BTTN.

The two debating teams comprised of BTTN's Research Officers and Research Assistants. The proposition and opposition teams presented their perspectives on the current state of Pakistan in relation to Quaid's vision.

The jury panel consisted of Executive Director Dr. Zafar Khan, Research Director Dr. Maria Malik, and Associate Director Ms. Hananah Zarrar. The Chair outlined the

characteristics and rules of the debate, introducing both teams as the proposition and opposition, respectively.

The first member of the proposition team Mr. Ajmal Khan initiated the arguments by emphasizing the economic advancements Pakistan has achieved. Mr. Asadullah Raisani highlighted the role of nuclear security as a crucial component of Jinnah's vision for Pakistan's sovereignty. Mr. Ali discussed Pakistan's resilience despite challenging geographical and political conditions.

Mr. Shah Meer concluded by analyzing how negative portrayals of Pakistan are often based on emotional statements rather than empirical evidence. On the opposition side, the team argued that contemporary Pakistan does not align with Jinnah's vision. Ms. Nazana Mustafa focused on lack of democratic values. Ms. Sadia Zahra highlighted the struggles of religious minorities.

Caretaker PM stresses...

Continued from page 1

Extending facilitation to the nation on Quaid's birthday, the caretaker prime minister said that the entire nation was celebrating the occasion with zeal, fervour and reverence.

He said that they were blessed with a great leader who had led the Muslims of the sub-continent and at last achieved a separate homeland. Quaid-e-Azam had gathered the Muslims under one banner to wage a struggle for the realization of a separate new Muslim state on the global map.

Prime Minister Kakar said that the personality of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was still a beacon of guidance owing to his unmatched character and extraordinary leadership qualities.

His resolve and undeterred will had infused the Muslims with firm determination and courage to face all the ordeals in the continuation of their struggle and in way of achievement of their great goal. Prime Minister Office Media Wing, in a press re-

lease, quoted the prime minister as saying.

The prime minister further observed that by following the message of unity, faith and discipline, and by rendering huge sacrifices, the Muslims of the sub-continent achieved the collective objective. Quaid's quality of impeccable character led the Muslims to their destination. Due to his adherence to principles, integrity and strong faith, even his foes also respected him, the prime minister opined.

He said Quaid's life was a reflection of constitutional struggle and political acumen. The caretaker prime minister said that being a nation, it was apt to act upon the principles of Quaid which would be the best way to pay him tribute.

On August 11, 1947, in his speech, Quaid made it clear that every individual would have the complete freedom of practicing faith and religion in Pakistan, he said and underlined the need to reiterate Quaid's message of interfaith harmony.

Civilian deaths in custody fuel anger and questions in Kashmir, says NYT

WASHINGTON (INP): Kashmiris are calling for an investigation into the deaths of three civilians who were among several people detained by Indian soldiers, who are accused by human rights groups of getting away with their actions because of laws granting them broad impunity, reported a US newspaper.

The US newspaper, New York Times, in its report quoted Mohammad Iqbal, a local businessman and an uncle of one of the victims, to have said that soldiers arrived on Friday morning in the village of Topa Peer in the Poonch District and detained at least eight people. His nephew

and two others were found dead on a roadside that evening. Their bodies showed signs of torture, he said.

"They were innocent civilians," Mr. Iqbal said. "This is a grave injustice."

The local police took custody of the bodies and contacted the families. Several other people detained on Friday were released and have been hospitalized, according to local officials. A video that purported to show the torture of the detained civilians spread online, fueling widespread anger.

To prevent protest in the districts of Poonch and Rajouri, the authorities shut down internet service and

deployed more forces on roads leading to native villages of the victims.

"Although the residents of Kashmir Valley have long accused Indian forces of disappearances and extrajudicial killings, relatively remote areas like Rajouri and Poonch had historically been spared the worst of such misdeeds," the newspaper wrote.

"But in recent years, after India stripped Kashmir of its semi-autonomous status, these areas have become the scene of deadly attacks against Indian troops by Muslim militants ... At least three dozen soldiers have been killed in such attacks," the paper added.

Modi-led regime has waged full-fledged war against IIOJK people: APHC

SRINAGAR (INP): The All Parties Hurriyat Conference has deplored that RSS-backed Narendra Modi-led Hindutva Indian regime has waged a full-fledged war against the people of Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir to suppress their just struggle for securing their internationally-recognized right to self-determination.

According to Kashmir Media Service, APHC spokesman in a statement issued in Srinagar said that besides over one million trigger-happy troops, India is using its Hindutva RSS/BJP administration, parliament, probe bodies, intelligence agencies, communal media and biased judiciary for victimizing the Kashmiris.

He said Indian Hindutva establishment is committing heinous crimes like killing innocent people, terminating employees, seizing properties and infamous Indian National Investigation Agency (NIA) and New Delhi-controlled State Investigation Agency (SIA) conduct raids on the houses of freedom-loving people to punish the Kashmiris for demanding their right to self-determination.

Cipher case hearing in special court to resume on Tuesday

ISLAMABAD (Online): The hearing of Cipher Case in the special court will start again tomorrow, December 26 (Tuesday).

In the meantime, there is a possibility that the witnesses presented by the prosecution will be cross-examined by the lawyer.

The hearing will be conducted by Judge Abul Hasnat Zulfqarnain of the Special Court.

It should be noted that the statements of 13 more prosecution witnesses were recorded in the cipher case.

The hearing of the case was adjourned till Tuesday, December 26.

Cipher case hearing was conducted by the special court judge Abul Hasnat

Zulfqarnain in Adiala Jail. During the hearing, the families of former prime minister Imran Khan and former foreign minister shah Mehmood Qureshi were present in the court. During the hearing, 12 witnesses of the prosecution recorded their testimony. Among them were former Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Azam Khan, then Pakistan's Ambassador in US Asad Majeed.

The hearing continued for about 8 hours, which ended at 4:30 p.m. In the cipher case, the statements of 25 witnesses have been recorded so far, while the prosecution abandoned 3 witnesses as unnecessary.



ISLAMABAD: Senator Farhatullah Babar addressing to the closing ceremony of Benazir Bhutto Shaheed National Tennis Championship organised by Sindh Government at Islamabad Tennis Complex.

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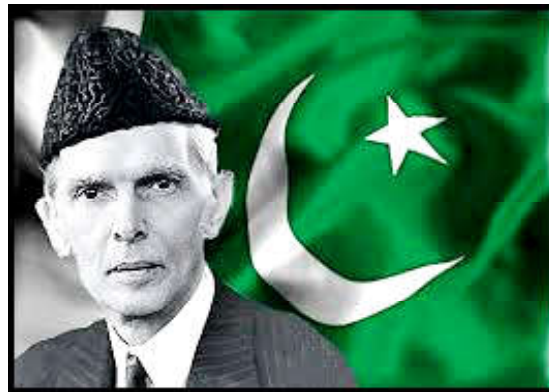


Nation salutes Quaid on his birthday

The nation celebrates the 146th birthday of Pakistan's founder and sub-continent's most prominent leader Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah today (December 25).

Since its creation in 1947 and the un-timely death of the Quaid about a year later, Pakistan has looked for someone to become his successor and take the country towards the heights which the Quaid thought was the destiny of the newly formed country.

Quaid remains the uniting factor for the country 72 years after his death. His words are still sacred for all the parties and groups in the country which was formed to



grant full rights to the Muslims of the sub-continent.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah was born on December 25, 1876 in Karachi, then part of Brit-ish-controlled India. His father was a prosperous Muslim merchant.

Jinnah studied at Bombay Uni-versity and at Lin-coln's Inn in London. He then ran a success-ful legal practice in Bombay. He was already a member of the Indian National Congress, which was working for au-

tonomy from Brit-ish rule, when he joined the Muslim League in 1913.

The league had formed a few years earlier to represent the interests of Indian Muslims in a predominantly Hindu country, and by 1916 he was elected its president.

In the early years, the Quaid advocated Hin-du-Muslim unity, helping to shape the 1916 Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the All-India Muslim League.

Later he became a key leader in the All India Home Rule League, and proposed a fourteen-point constitutional reform plan to safeguard the political rights of Muslims. In 1920, however, he resigned from the Con-gress when it agreed to follow a campaign of satyagraha, which he regarded as political anarchy.

By 1940, Jinnah had come to believe that Muslims of the Indian subcontinent should have their own state to avoid the possible marginalised status they may gain in a Hin-du-Muslim state. In that year, the Muslim League, led by the Quaid-e-Azam, passed the Lahore Resolution, demanding a sepa-rate nation.

During the Second World War, the League gained strength while leaders of the Congress were imprisoned, and in the elections held shortly after the war, it won most of the seats reserved for Muslims.

Ultimately, the Congress and the Muslim League could not reach a power-sharing for-mula for the subcontinent to be united as a single state, leading all parties to agree to the independence of a predominantly Hindu In-dia, and for a Muslim-majority state of Paki-stan.

As the first Governor-General of Pakistan, the Quaid-e-Azam worked to establish the new nation's govern-ment and policies, and to aid the millions of Muslim migrants who had emigrated from the new nation of India to Pakistan after independence, personally supervising the establishment of refugee camps. The Quaid died at age 71 in Sep-tember 1948, just over a year after Paki-stan gained independence from the United Kingdom.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah

The Greatest Leader of the Century

By Muhammad Zahid Khan Lodhi

No single individual had a greater role for the liberation of Indian Muslims and the creation of a sovereign and independent state for them, than the Quaid-i-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah. His achievement lies in the fact that the single-handedly fought two rival nations i.e. the Hindus and the British. Within a short span of seven years after the Lahore Resolution was passed in March 1940, he successfully steered the ship of his nation to an independent state.

The year 1940 is considered as a landmark in the history of Indo-Pakistan subcontinent as it proved a turning point in the Hind-Muslim relationship. The Muslim League categorically declared that the Hindu-Muslim unity was "neither possible nor practicable" because Hinduism and Islam were not only two different religions but also two paradoxical, different and distinct social orders. The working of Congress ministries in the Hindu dominated provinces had also given the Muslim a bitter experience. So the Lahore resolution was passed on 23rd march, 1940 under the charismatic leadership of the Quaid-i-Azam. The Muslim League declared that nothing short of the demand of Pakistan shall be acceptable to the League.

In order to counter the determination of a separate homeland for the Muslims, the Indian National Congress and its Hindu leaders restored to negative secret overtures with the British government. Lord Wavell, the British Viceroy in India, had still to complete his tenure of office. An impartial and neutral Viceroy amongst the two nations was unsuited to the Hindus. They wanted a new viceroy who could possibly yield to their wishes.

With the change of government in London i.e. overthrow of Churchill's Conservative ministry and installation of Attlee's Labour government the Congress leaders thought that it was high time for them to avail of the opportunity. In order to gain their ulterior motives, the Hindus started a high level propaganda against Lord Wavell. The services of pro-Congress ministers, like Sir Stafford Cripps and Lord Pethick Lawrence were also fully utilised. Consequently, Wavell was recalled and Mountbatten appointed for a brief period of 143 days as the last Viceroy of the British government in the history of British India.

It was almost a mission with Mountbatten and the

British government to leave behind a United India after their departure from the subcontinent. The Hindu leaders urged Mountbatten to play a "historic" role in this connection. Mountbatten himself confessed:

"Nothing I have seen or heard in the past few weeks has shaken my firm opinion that with a reasonable measure of goodwill between the communities a United India would be by far the best solution of the problem."

To quote him again: "My own feeling was that a united India was, of course, the right answer..."

He "argued endlessly the case of a unified India." A unified India with a strong Centre was his best



choice, while a United India with a weak centre was his second best.

The Quaid was most distressed at the way Mountbatten's mind was working for a united India because it meant permanent and complete subjugation of the Muslims by the Hindus i.e. freedom not for the Muslims but for the Hindus only. Mountbatten considered it as a "very great tragedy" if the Quaid would force him to give up the idea of a united India.

It was on account of the unshakable stand taken by the Quaid-i-Azam that the "reluctant" Mountbatten, the British government and the Congress leaders had to bow and agree upon the division of India.

Mountbatten called the Quaid as "a psychopathic case" who was "intent on his Pakistan".

Like the Hindus, Mountbatten never wanted to divide the subcontinent. In other words, he wanted to give freedom to the Hindus but not to the Muslims of Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. In his ideal state for India (united India with a strong centre) the Muslims would have been ruined forever. In fact, the Indian National Congress and the Hindu leaders had always worked for a strong Centre prior to independence. Even, in Mountbatten's sub-ideal Indian State (united India with a weak centre) the Muslims would have been at the mercy of the Hindus. The Quaid-i-

Azam wanted that after the departure of the British the Muslims should also have real freedom like the Hindus. Mountbatten acted upon the wishes of the Hindu leaders and considered it as a "very great tragedy" if the Quaid would force him to give up the idea of a united India.

However, due to the firm stand of the Quaid, Mountbatten and the Hindus had to yield the partition to India.

By 1947, there existed no practicable alternative to some kind of division of the British Raj between Muslims and non-Muslims, though this might have been achieved in practice in a number of ways. In the event, by May 1947 the type of Partition proposed

sected subcontinent a "stepping-stone" to a united India and Mountbatten acted accordingly. Their object was to pressurise the Quaid-i-Azam and the Muslim leaders not to manage the affairs of Pakistan in a haste.

In order to implement the Hindu scheme of making Pakistan an inherently weak state, the newly emerged state was deprived of its military and financial assets. Mountbatten not only announced the premature closure of Supreme Headquarters but also failed in the performance of his legal and moral duties to hand over to Pakistan its just share of assets. He deliberately manipulated indefensible and vulnerable boundaries between Pakistan and Bharat in order to make defence an uphill task for them, particularly for the new state of Pakistan.

The early period after the independence was very crucial for the survival of Pakistan. Those were the days of great turmoil in its history. Pakistan's enemies were out and out determined to wipe out its existence; and openly declared that it would not survive. Pakistan's financial assets were not released, and its 36% share of military assets was also withheld by India. The withholding of cash balances and military assets could practically jam the working of its administrative machinery and render its defence weak and vulnerable. The country had yet to coin its money and establish its State Bank. Pakistan was almost penniless. Its borders with India were indefensible. Pakistan had to start everything from a "scratch". The refugee problem and the Muslim genocide in India were threatening issues for the independence of Pakistan which the newly born country was "unprepared to stand". Even our friends said that Pakistan would not survive the refugee problem.¹⁴ One million Muslims lost their lives in the communal riots while 7 million refugees came to Pakistan from across the border.

The man who faced and solved all these problems with courage and determination was the Quaid-i-Azam. With his failing health, weak and feeble physique, he roared like a lion: "Pakistan has come to stay and play its great role for which it is destined.... Nothing on earth no can undo Pakistan."¹⁵ Being undaunted he could not be subdued by anybody and stood firm like a rock in angry seas. He had to accomplish his mission of a separate homeland for the Indian Muslims and look after the management and consolidation of Pakistan.

Before Mountbatten left for India in March 1947, he gave no indication in London of the necessity for the hurricane speed for the transfer of power. The British government had declared to grant independence to India in June 1948. Mountbatten wanted to shift the date of independence ten months earlier. The question arises why did he precipitate the date of independence? Was he too eager for the independence of India than the Indians themselves? Nehru saw in the hurriedly vivi-

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Quaid-e-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was born on 25th December 1876 at Vazeer Mansion Karachi, was the first of seven children of Jinnahbhai, a prosperous merchant. After being taught at home, Jinnah was sent to the Sindh Madrasah High School in 1887. Later he attended the Mission High School, where, at the age of 16, he passed the matriculation examination of the University of Bombay. On the advice of an English friend, his father decided to send him to England to acquire business experience. Jinnah, however, had made up his mind to become a barrister. In keeping with the custom of the time, his parents arranged for an early marriage for him before he left for England.

In London he joined Lincoln's Inn, one of the legal societies that prepared students for the bar. In 1895, at the age of 19, he was called to the bar. While in London Jinnah suffered two severe bereavements—the deaths of his wife and his mother. Nevertheless, he completed his formal studies and also made a study of the British political system, frequently visiting the House of Commons. He was greatly influenced by the liberalism of William E. Gladstone, who had become prime minister for the fourth time in 1892, the year of Jinnah's arrival in London. Jinnah also took a keen interest in the affairs of India and in Indian students. When the Parsi leader Dadabhai Naoroji, a leading Indian nationalist, ran for the English Parliament, Jinnah and other Indian students worked day and night for him. Their efforts were crowned with success, and Naoroji became the first Indian to sit in the House of Commons. When Jinnah returned to Karachi in 1896, he found that his father's business had suffered losses and that he now had to depend on himself. He decided to start his legal practice in Bombay, but it took him years of work to establish himself as a lawyer.

It was nearly 10 years later that he turned toward active politics. A man with

out hobbies, his interest became divided between law and politics. Nor was he a religious zealot: he was a Muslim in a broad sense and had little to do with sects. His interest in women was also limited to Ruttenbhai—the daughter of Sir Dinshaw Petit, a Bombay Parsi millionaire—whom he married over tremendous opposition from her parents and others. The marriage proved an unhappy one. It was his sister Fatima who gave him solace and company.

Jinnah first entered politics by participating in the 1906 Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress, the party that called for dominion status and later for independence for India. Four years later he was elected to the Imperial Legislative Council—the beginning of a long and distinguished parliamentary ca-

reer. In Bombay he came to know, among other important Congress personalities, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the eminent Maratha leader. Greatly influenced by these nationalist politicians, Jinnah aspired during the early part of his political life to become "a Muslim Gokhale." Admiration for British political institutions and an eagerness to raise the status of India in the international community and to develop a sense of Indian nationhood among the peoples of India were the chief elements of his politics. At that time, he still looked upon Muslim interests in the context of Indian nationalism.

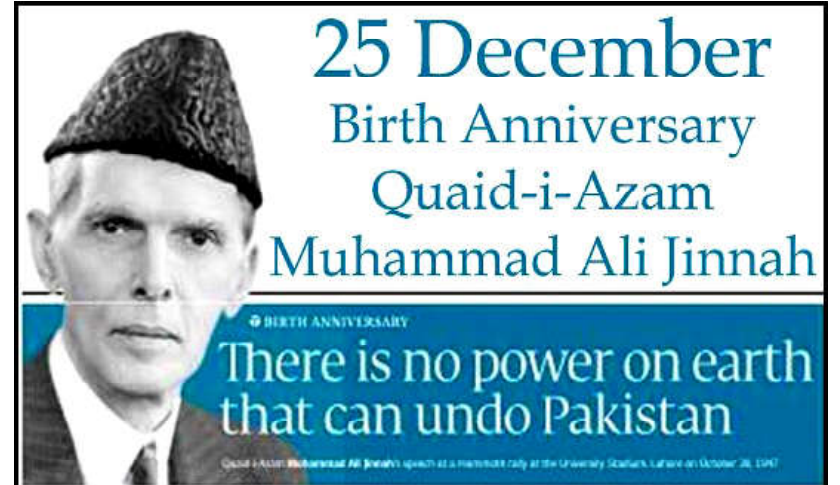
But, by the beginning of the 20th century, the conviction had been growing among the Muslims that

their interests demanded the preservation of their separate identity rather than amalgamation in the Indian nation that would for all practical purposes be Hindu. Largely to safeguard Muslim interests, the All-India Muslim League was founded in 1906. But Jinnah remained aloof from it. Only in 1913, when authoritatively assured that the league was as devoted as the Congress to the political emancipation of India, did Jinnah join the league. When the Indian Home Rule League was formed, he became its chief organiser in Bombay and was elected president of the Bombay branch.

"Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity." Jinnah's endeavours to bring about the political union of Hindus and Muslims earned him the title of "the best ambassa-

1909 but hitherto resisted by the Congress.

Meanwhile, a new force in Indian politics had appeared in the person of Mohandas K. Gandhi. Both the Home Rule League and the Indian National Congress had come under his sway. Opposed to Gandhi's Non-co-operation Movement and his essentially Hindu approach to politics, Jinnah left both the League and the Congress in 1920. For a few years he kept himself aloof from the main political movements. He continued to be a firm believer in Hindu-Muslim unity and constitutional methods for the achievement of political ends. After his withdrawal from the Congress, he used the Muslim League platform for the propagation of his views. But during the 1920s the Muslim



Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah speaking at a memorial rally at the University of Karachi, Lahore on October 14, 1947

League, and with it Jinnah, had been overshadowed by the Congress and the religiously oriented Muslim Khilafat committee.

When the failure of the Non-co-operation Movement and the emergence of Hindu revivalist movements led to antagonism and riots between the Hindus and Muslims, the league gradually began to come into its own. Jinnah's problem during the following years was to convert the league into an enlightened political body prepared to co-operate with other organisations working for the good of India. In addition, he had to convince the Congress, as a prerequisite for political progress, of the necessity of settling the Hindu-Muslim conflict.

Jinnah as a role model

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah is the founding father of Pakistan. But to Pakistanis, he was something more: he is their role model. A role model if only because of the principles he had owned up and practised during his long political career, and, moreover, because of the congruence of his behaviour pattern and politics with his professed principles throughout his public life.

While Jinnah's own public life and political behaviour provide a role model for the rulers, administrators and politicians, he showed a remarkable perspicacity in identifying the problems that would be encountered in building up Pakistan as he envisaged it — as a welfare state.

The most critical problems confronting Pakistan today are, above all, those of law and order, corruption, nepotism and jobbery, and of greed, ineptitude, hypocrisy, and the insensitivities of those in power, whether in the government at various levels or in the opposition. On these problems Jinnah dwelt repeatedly during his tenure as governor-general, beginning with his August 11, 1947, address to the Constituent Assembly. Now, consider how relevant are the following guidelines he had set out in that memorable address.

a government is to maintain law and order, so that the life, property and religious beliefs of its subjects are fully protected by the state."

ii) "... everyone... no matter to what community he belongs, ... no matter what his colour, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this state with equal rights, privileges and obligations... we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state." (This dictum in the present context should logically be extended to include various sects and ethnic groups.)

iii) "... always be guided by the principles of justice and fair play, without any... prejudice or ill-will... partiality... or favouritism."

iv) "... the evil of nepotism and jobbery... must be crushed relentlessly... Never tolerate any kind of jobbery, nepotism or any influence directly or indirectly..."

v) "One of the biggest curses... is bribery and corruption. We must put that down with an iron hand..." This includes political bribery and corruption and saleable loyalty as well, which have corroded our entire political system and institutional structures, and have spawned the present political crisis.)

In these precepts the one relating to united nationhood, being "equal citizens of



one state", with equal rights, privileges and obligations is the most important. Therein, he laid down the doctrine of a united, indivisible Pakistani nationhood, without any distinction of language, culture or ethnicity.

During the struggle for Pakistan period, it is true, he had pronounced Hindus and Muslims as two major nations in the subcontinent and, on that basis, demanded a separate homeland for Muslims. But with both the nations having attained statehood, there was a paradigm shift, and the two nations in the post-partition context were and are India and Pakistan. Jinnah was the first statesman to recognize this basic shift. Hence he declared Pakistan, which was and is multi-racial, multi-linguistic and multi-religious, to be a pluralist state, with equal rights, privileges and obligations for all its citizens, whatever their race, religion or creed.

He had invoked the Madinitic model of statehood in his reply to Lord Mountbatten on August 14, 1947, and that model was based on the Misaq-i-Madina, which Dr. Hamidullah describes as the first written constitution in the world. The Misaq-i-Madina, promulgated by the Prophet (PBUH), had envisaged a pluralist state (articles 1, 2, 25-35, and 46), bearing in mind the multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious character of Madina, and its defence was made the collective responsibility of all its citizens (articles 24, 44, 45a, and 45b). Hence Jinnah's pluralist doctrine for Pakistan is, by no means, in conflict with his declaration of Pakistan being an "Islamic democracy". And his pluralist doctrine continues to be extremely relevant in the context of the divisive forces and voices that have for long plagued Pakistan.

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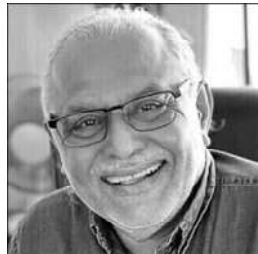
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Pakistani politics has been marred by the spectre of political engineering, a strategy employed to manipulate poll outcomes. This phenomenon is particularly prominent just before elections. Our political history unveils a short-sighted pattern of power dynamics being shifted to favour certain parties or individuals, at the cost of democratic principles.

Gen Ayub Khan is known to have first manipulated the polls in his electoral contest against Fatima Jinnah in 1965. Another instance dates back to 1977, when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, allegedly attempted to get elected unopposed with the abduction of a rival candidate. Such tactics, including election day rigging to ensure a landslide, were responsible for the movement that led to his downfall. The 1990s marked an escalation in political engineering. The year 1997 witnessed Nawaz Sharif's ascent to power with a two-thirds majority, a victory tainted by allegations of state-sponsored manipulation. The PPP, a dominant force, was reduced to a mere 18 seats. These events raised serious questions about the integrity of the electoral process. Karachi's political landscape during this period was dominated by the MQM, which stands accused of using intimidation to stifle opposition. Smaller towns weren't immune either, with feudal lords resorting to ballot stuffing. Over time, various methods were utilised by the state to influence electoral outcomes. These include gerrymandering, the use of state resources for campaigning, politically motivated accountability drives against certain leaders, and control over media narratives. These tactics not only skew electoral results but also undermine the essence of democracy. They also don't stand the test of time. But that doesn't stop the 'puppeteers' from trying. Now a new campaign seems to be under way — this time against the PTI.

Party members are facing obstacles in filing nomination papers, police raids are targeting their families, and there is an atmosphere of intimidation. Such actions suggest a deliberate effort to exclude a major political force, undermining the democratic process. This tactic has broader implications: it potentially alienates voters, leading to a lower turnout on polling day.

Further, if key parties are forced out of the contest, their members will resort to contesting as independents. Post-election, these independents could be coerced into joining other political parties, complicating the political tapestry. The crux of the matter lies in the erosion of democratic norms. When poll processes are compromised, the legitimacy of the next government becomes questionable. As Pakistan navigates turbulent political waters, it must reflect on the long-term consequences of such manoeuvring. A collective effort is required to ensure fair, transparent, and credible elections, which are the cornerstone of any functioning democracy. Only through such measures can the faith of the populace in the democratic process be restored, paving the way for a more stable Pakistan.

**Abbas Nasir**

The caretaker government has made a hash of dealing with the Baloch protesters, led by the passionate advocate Mahrang Baloch who is emulating Sammi Baloch. It allowed the police to ride roughshod over the demonstrators who came to the federal capital to agitate against the enforced disappearance and killing of their kith and kin. The police action ordered by the government or, perhaps more accurately, its powerful backers, underlined the irony for those who, though termed separatists, still seemed to display faith in the federation and came to the capital, the seat of the federal government, to press for their political rights and freedoms.

How else would you interpret the motives of the

careless, dozens of women among them, other than as an expression of faith in the federation, despite their broken hearts at having seen the tormented bodies of their loved ones? Or worse — having no clue about their disappeared family and friends?

I know my words will add up to nought but I still feel duty-bound to say that the guardians of our security need to look at the experience of how countries much more prosperous and powerful than us have dealt with the 'separatist' challenge.

It isn't within the scope of this piece to delve into the details of such accords but those dealing with the security challenges posed by the Baloch 'separatists' need only look into peace agreements concluded between the ETA and Spain on the one hand and the UK and IRA on the other.

Both groups waged bloody campaigns over decades before sitting down for negotiations and agreeing to abandon violence as a means of achieving their goals. They were convinced through dialogue that armed resistance had only brought

blood, gore and misery, and the cause of their political and economic rights had not been furthered.

Needless to say, it takes a visionary leadership to reach out to groups responsible for inflicting pain on the state. Even with both sides having drawn blood over and over again, it isn't always possible to see that continuing to be caught up in the vortex of violence can deliver nothing in the end to either side.

Tragically, as we speak, the state and the separatists are both pursuing a single-dimensional strategy that has only brought pain and anguish to both. Surely, at some point they will have to sit down to negotiate, because endless violence and pain can't be a long-term goal.

The caretaker cabinet committee set up to address Baloch grievances will be able to deliver nothing because it could not even protect the protesters from police brutality, including beatings, and water cannons deployed in freezing temperatures.

The members may be well-meaning but that's about it. It is clear that this cabinet and its 'middle-

class' boy wonders have no leeway beyond being their master's voice. In any case, the caretaker cabinet is in place to ensure the conduct of elections and that is their entire mandate.

Look at the role of 'democratic' parties, which have long been in electoral politics. They seem to have been indifferent at best towards the plight of the Baloch, in all probability out of fear of upsetting their benefactors who have promised them a 'reset to 2016' scenario.

There can be no doubt that when in power, PTI leader Imran Khan shunned any dialogue with other political parties, including those represented in parliament, and called them names ad nauseam and ordered their persecution.

However, now that the shoe is on the other foot, and the PTI is at the receiving end of the state's wrath, the so-called democrats, pretty much without exception, are looking the other way and pretending all is well.

With incredibly robust backers, many of these 'democrats' must be self-assured about their prospects in next February's

election, but having become a party to undermining, even demeaning, the democratic process, will they have the credibility or moral authority to bring in change?

Meaningful change that can address the concerns of the multitudes of the shirtless Pakistanis and the country's federating units and guarantee them their rights? I, for one, seriously doubt it. They will have to come into government within tight confines and won't be able to do much.

Because having won a fight where their opponent had one of his hands, if not both, tied behind his back isn't the most credible of victories. They will know and, I bet, be reminded if they forget, who paved their path to power.

It is important for big political leaders who were wronged and unjustly dislodged from power and incarcerated to understand that their biggest strength in any election and most significantly beyond the election is popular will. That is what delivers longevity in politics.

Therefore, they can't become a party to under-

mining whatever segment/chunk of popular will is being undermined by the denial of a level playing field to their arch-rival. They will argue that things are no different than they were in the run-up to the 2018 elections, the only difference being who benefits from the 'fix'.

All you and I can say in response is to look at what happened to the system that was handcrafted with such care by the most powerful players in the establishment and judiciary. It fell by the wayside a little over halfway into its supposed tenure.

But realistically speaking, we aren't made of the stuff that enables us to learn from our own follies, let alone from the disastrous experience of others. The 2024 elections will be no different than the 2018 elections.

Some argue things will be worse this time round as those out of favour will face a much tougher challenge than those in similar circumstances the last time. Are we headed back to square one yet again? -- Courtesy Dawn

Waiting for democracy**Ghazi Salahuddin**

While we wait for elections to be held — with bated breath, perhaps — there are matters of greater significance that trouble the minds of people who genuinely care about the future and the well-being of this country.

No one knows where it is headed, given the moves that are being made on the political chessboard. And the use of force against Baloch protesters by the federal capital police has greatly added to the prevailing sense of anxiety and distress.

Though the electoral process is still in its initial phase, it is becoming evident that it is not fair and transparent. Pakistan has had a sad history of electoral calamities in the context of how the elections were conducted and what their consequences have been. The will of the people

has almost never prevailed, mainly because the supreme power exists elsewhere.

Against this perspective, the present situation is exceptionally critical. Essentially, the kind of political activity that paves the way for free and fair elections is not in evidence. Ideally, an electoral process would be a political festival, allowing the people to rejoice in the power they hold as the arbiters of power that their rulers would exercise. As it is, this opportunity is presented to the electorate only once in five years.

This time, there are no signs yet of any popular mobilisation and because of the tensions that have darkened the political horizon, there is no clarity about the ideological and policy leanings of particular parties. Real issues that relate to the needs and aspirations of the people have not attracted the attention of the media and the parties.

A number of perceptive observers of Pakistan's politics seem convinced that the February 8 elections will not lead to political stability. This impression is created by the administration's concerted

efforts to keep the PTI out of the race. A lot of dust has been raised in post-May 9 developments, resulting in the fragmentation of the original party. But the cult following of the leader is said to have been energised as a response to the suppression of the party. What this means is not very clear, though the commotion caused in the social media is formidable.

Many issues have landed in the superior courts and there are judgments that appear to have only a partial impact on proceedings that are conducted in the political domain. Some developments are seen to be in the PTI's favour while others clearly constitute setbacks.

On Friday, the Supreme Court approved the post-arrest bail of former prime minister Imran Khan and ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the cipher case. Both are incarcerated in Adiala Jail. However, Imran Khan was not expected to be released because he has also been arrested in other cases.

Also on Friday, the Election Commission of Pakistan announced its judgment to deny the PTI the election symbol of 'bat

for its members to contest the forthcoming elections. This judgment came just a few hours after the PTI met the ECP, following the Supreme Court order, with its concerns regarding the lack of a level playing field for the party in the run up to the elections.

Meanwhile, an event that took place on the outskirts of Islamabad late on Wednesday is seen as a measure of the present rulers' disdain for rule of law, due process, and democratic values. It has stunned civil society. Obviously, there is no excuse for the kind of violence that the Islamabad police used against Baloch protesters, mainly women and children, who had marched from Turbat, suffering considerable hardships in their long journey. In Islamabad's winter, water cannons were also used against the protesters.

The long march to Islamabad was in protest against the alleged extrajudicial killing of Baloch Baloch and others in Turbat. They are also protesting against enforced disappearances.

Condemning the violent state crackdown on Baloch citizens who had led

the long march, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) said that the "obdurate state" had shed its constitutional and moral responsibility for protecting and fulfilling the rights of all citizens.

In response to the shock and grief that the use of unwarranted force against the Baloch protesters has caused, there has been some damage control on the part of the government. On Friday, President Arif Alvi and caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar held a telephonic conversation to express their concern over Wednesday night's police action.

When you try to grasp the entire picture, the dominant impression you get is that Pakistan is not about to move into a phase in its history that may be described as democracy. That immortal yearning of the people for a just society that ensures democratic freedoms for all its citizens remains unrealised.

Are we then, simply, 'Waiting for Godot'? I am resorting to this allusion because we do need parables to illustrate our state of affairs when the reality that exists on the

ground becomes hard to describe or interpret. Hence, I am leaning on this classic play by Samuel Beckett that is considered to be the most significant English language play of the 20th century.

Actually, it left critics bewildered as to what it says because we just have two characters on the stage who are constantly and desperately waiting for 'Godot'. The identity of 'Godot' remains a mystery. But he never arrives. For some critics, it is a 'tragicomedy'. Mostly, it is believed to be about the meaning of life and the absurdity of existence. Some critics have identified its themes as the passing of time and suffering.

There may not be all that mystery in our waiting for democracy. But will democracy come? And when? Besides, will it deliver in the context of what it is supposed to be?

Be that as it may, we are condemned to play the waiting game. That this wait seems endless would not bring our expectations — or apprehensions — to an end. There is little that we can do, except waiting. -- Courtesy TheNews

Equal citizens**Muna Khan**

Many of us are likely to know someone who travelled to another country to give birth and secure that country's citizenship for their child. It's easy if you have the money, though some countries have made acquiring citizenship through birth harder. You can also buy citizenship in exchange for investment in, for example, Dominica in the Caribbean or Montenegro in Europe or Vanuatu in Oceania. (I had to look up Vanuatu after hearing about its 'citizen' of Pakistani descent, Farah Gogi.)

However, citizenship by birth or investment doesn't define what it means to be a citizen. There are a lot of ethical questions around whether citizenship should be conditional like the case of Shamima Begum, the 'IS bride' who had her UK citizenship revoked and is stuck in a refugee camp, a victim of trafficking. The UK says Shamima is Bangladeshi by way of her parents but Bangladesh disagrees and refuses her entry so she remains one of the 4.4 million stateless people in the world.

It's become easier to deprive people of their citizenship in the name of security. This happened in March in Nicaragua which stripped the citizenship of 300 people, mainly opponents of President Daniel Ortega. Earlier this year, Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky revoked citizenship of four lawmakers he accused of treason or supporting Russia — the same thing I sup-

posed. You can be stripped of citizenship in 15 EU countries on some grounds of disloyalty or treason. Just last month, an Israeli lawmaker proposed a bill that would revoke citizenship of those who showed support for 'terrorists'.

This is a strange return to ancient practices when people were banished from kingdoms for 'disloyalty'. When it was created in 1945, the UN defined citizenship as a basic human right. There are international laws that disallow revoking of citizenship on political, racial or ethnic grounds. Yet, as reported in the Washington Post this year, one in five countries had expanded provisions to revoke nationalities for reasons "related to disloyalty". About 70 per cent of the 190 countries had some law that could revoke citizenship.

Pakistan's concept of citizenship is equally centred around security and loyalty to a militarised state. Many have pointed to the example of thousands of Afghans who have only known Pakistan as their home but were forced to move to Afghanistan. The media cheered their 'return' because they were depicted as criminals, though crime has not disappeared because the refugees have. Shortly after assuming office, Imran Khan pledged citizenship to 1.5m Afghan refugees but had to renege a mere few days later, the first of many U-turns that showed he was not steering the policymaking ship.

This country bears witness to a tiered system of citizenship where good and bad citizens are defined by a revolving door of leaders. Today's good citizens will be tomorrow's bad citizens etc. We see this play out most with political leaders who weasel themselves back into favour by ceding space in exchange for power. But the most vulnerable and marginalised stay at the bottom as we've seen most recently with the treatment

meted out to Baloch women protesters in Islamabad.

Those managing Pakistan's affairs use their force against the most vulnerable. They are aided by political parties, lawyers, judges, celebrities and the media — all too happy to question people's patriotism for ratings, approval, deals, etc.

It's worth reminding who gets to protest and face no consequence and who gets water-cannoned in the middle of winter, detained and carted in buses as if they're being expelled. Today PTI — whose disco dharna was ultimately rewarded — is expressing solidarity with Baloch protesters much like the Sharif family did when they were on the outside.

This revolving door of bad policies is exhausting.

Citizenship cannot be conditional on loyalty to the establishment, the prime minister of the day, or anyone's definition of virtue. Steps like blocking 'suspicious' CNICs of 70,000 people in Balochistan a few months ago, or of 18 PTI leaders a few days ago, does not make a state safer. It is farcical to continue to think so, especially for countries that pride themselves on being liberal.

I'm not here to lecture on citizenship but questioning the motives of one of the organisers of the Baloch long march, Dr Mahrang Baloch, and framing her as duplicitous is a disservice to audiences who deserve fair news coverage. Journalists who show allegiance to the powerful and not to their profession will ultimately pay a heavy price.

Marginalised communities bear a heavy price for being portrayed as bad citizens when they are merely asking for an end to enforced disappearances. It is grossly demeaning and requires a rethink, preferably by people elected to make policies grounded in fair principles of justice. -- Courtesy Dawn

**Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry**

Managing the troubled relationship with India has been Pakistan's most arduous foreign policy challenge. The mutual hostility has its roots in the bitterness of the manner in which the partition of British India occurred in 1947. Millions had to move across the newly created border. India's hesitation on giving Pakistan its share of finance, defence stores, and even canal waters added to the acrimony. However, all these issues were eventually settled one way or another.

One major issue that could not be settled was the dispute over the State of Jammu and Kashmir, which was forcibly occupied by India, in direct contravention of the terms for partition of British India. The state had a Muslim majority (78 per cent, with 93pc in the Valley), and was contiguous to the territories that were to become Pakistan. India has also violated every resolution of the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted from 1948 to 1957, which stipulated that the state's political status should be decided by a plebiscite to be held under UN auspices.

Neither the wars between India and Pakistan in 1948, 1965 and 1999, nor the numerous bilateral peace initiatives, have resolved the matter. Complicating the matters further, four years ago, the Modi government abolished the 'statehood', announced Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh as two separate Union territories, and took

Ties with India

away the special autonomy of Indian-occupied Kashmir. This was another blatant violation of international law as codified in a series of UNSC resolutions.

Earlier this month, the Indian supreme court upheld the Aug 5, 2019, actions of the Modi government, but directed it to revert statehood to J&K, and hold elections there by September 2024. The decision came as a reality check to those Kashmiri leaders who had cooperated with the BJP government in the vain hope that they would retain their autonomy. In the past four years, the Modi government has indulged in demographic engineering by issuing domiciles to millions of non-state persons. It has also engaged in electoral engineering to ensure that whenever polls are held, BJP would have a dominant position.

Clearly, India is seeking to dissolve the dispute by changing the basic parameters of the disputed territory. The main motivation for this comes from the RSS philosophy of making India a Hindu state. The Modi government has further been emboldened by the fact that the US has selected India as a partner of choice and invested in its military and economic prowess. Regrettably, the international community has failed to condemn India for its illegal actions in J&K, ostensibly to protect their economic and commercial interests in the large Indian market.

These developments have been resented in Pakistan, where for centuries, the people of Pakistan, especially northern Punjab, and the people of Kashmir have lived together, bound by ties of faith and culture. Pakistan had, therefore, reacted to the Aug 5 action by lowering the level of diplomatic representation and stopping bilateral trade.

Where do we go from here? The issue of J&K is

connected to the state of bilateral ties between India and Pakistan. Both countries have been estranged neighbours for the past seven decades. Since 2016, there have been no formal contacts between the two countries, often described as 'no-contact warfare' by India against Pakistan.

Despite Pakistan's consistent desire for good-neighbourly ties, India continues to exhibit animosity. It has discouraged even sporting contacts, when it obliged its cricket team not to visit Pakistan for the Asian Cup, whereas the Pakistani team visited India for the World Cup. India has also paralysed Saare, probably because it thinks this forum might be used by South Asian countries to join hands to counter-balance India.

This state of affairs does not augur well for peace in South Asia. Many scholars and former diplomats argue that India can neither isolate Pakistan nor make it irrelevant. It would be in the interest of both countries to shun mutual hostility and embrace a peaceful coexistence. An opening might arise after elections in both countries in 2024. The two countries could start with small steps to enhance mutual confidence, such as making the visa regime easier, promoting religious tourism, encouraging people-to-people contact, and restarting bilateral trade.

There have been suggestions that the two governments find an equivalent of the four-point formula of 2007 to help resolve this long-standing conflict. Meanwhile, Pakistan should maintain its support for the right of the people of J&K to self-determination. Subject to the final settlement of the dispute, Pakistan should also grant Gilgit-Baltistan the status of a provisional province in response to the desire of GB's elected assembly. -- Courtesy Dawn

Punjab Governor says: Islam laid great emphasis on peace, love, and brotherhood

Congratulated the Christian community on the occasion of Christmas

Independent Report
LAHORE: Governor of Punjab, Muhammad Balighur Rehman, cut Christmas cake along with Begum Governor Punjab, former Provincial Minister for Human Rights, Ijaz Alam Augustine, Archbishop of Lahore Sebastian Francis Shaw, Advocate Raja Nathaniel Gill and the employees belonging to the Christian community at Governor House here today. Reverend Dr. Majeed Abel, Head of Youth Development Foundation

Shahid Rehmat, General Manager TDCP, Wajid Arjamand Zia, Director TDCP Ashfaq Dogar, lawyers community and people belonging to Christian community were present on this occasion. Governor Punjab congratulated the Christian community on the occasion of Christmas. He further said that we should share love and happiness with each other. He said that our religion Islam has also laid great emphasis on peace, love, and brotherhood. There is great stress on the

rights of minorities in Islam, he added. Governor Punjab said that the persecution of Palestinians and atrocities on women, children, and innocent citizens in Palestine are painful. Wherever there is oppression of humanity in the world, we should raise our voice against it and stand with the oppressed, he added. On this occasion, a special prayer was offered for the prosperity and stability of the country. At the end of the ceremony, Governor Punjab and Begum

Governor also distributed gifts among the children belonging to the Christian community. Meanwhile, Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman, in his message on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, said that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a great leader. He always did constructive politics. He paved the way for the establishment of Pakistan with his political acumen.



LAHORE: Punjab Governor Balighur Rahman is cutting a cake during the Christmas celebrations event at Governor House.



GILGIT: Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Haji Gulbar Khan addressing a press conference at CM Secretariat.

CM Punjab orders early completion of important projects

Independent Report
LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday ordered for completion of all roads around Shahdara and the Metro station as soon as possible. He was speaking to the media during his visit to Shahdara Chowk here. He expressed displeasure over slow pace of work. He said despite completion of the flyover project several days ago, there were concerns over non-completion of work on Shahdara Chowk, adding the entire work was stopped which was completely wrong. The CM directed the authorities concerned to fix a date and complete 100 per cent of work. The CM ordered to complete the track of Metro bus service

including the roads and park around Shahdara Chowk as soon as possible and said that the tracks and other works around Shahdara Chowk should be completed by January 5. The chief minister also ordered for best arrangements for traffic management during the work on Shahdara Chowk. Earlier, CM Mohsin Naqvi also visited the under-construction new Ravi Bridge and inspected the construction activities. He reviewed the piling work and ordered to complete it by January 15, after observing the ongoing development works. Mohsin Naqvi said that work should be done day and night on the Ravi Bridge project, adding efforts should be made to complete the project.

Bahawalpur police recover liquor, narcotics

BAHAWALPUR (APP): On the directions of District Police Officer Bahawalpur, the district police have conducted raids at dens and recovered liquor and narcotics. The spokesman for Bahawalpur police told on Sunday that the teams of police stations including PS Derawar, PS Dera Nawab, PS Uch Sharif, PS Dhorkot, PS Noshahra Jadid, PS Ahmadpur East, PS Khairpur Tamewali, PS Sama Satta, PS Musafir Khana, PS Abbasnagar, PS Baghdadul Jadid and PS Civil Lines conducted raids at dens within their jurisdiction and took 22 suspects into custody. The police recovered 2,940 liters liquor from the possession of the suspects. Meanwhile, the police parties arrested three suspects in the jurisdictions of Civil Lines and Cantt police stations and recovered over two kilograms hashish and 30 grams crystal ice. The police have registered cases against the suspects. Further probe was in progress.



KARACHI: National Labour Federation Pakistan Karachi Zone organizes Gaza Labour March in support of Palestinians at Karachi Press Club.

Minister says: Youth to be equipped with different skills

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker minister for sports, youth affairs, science, and technology, Dr Najeeb Ullah, said on Sunday that the provision of different skills to youth is the need of the hour, saying a skill development program will not only strengthen the country but will also help to get rid of the unemployment giant. Appreciating the Caretaker Chief Minister's initiative of the "Skilling Youth" program, he added that through the said program, 0.5 million youth will be trained for skills in various sectors. He said these while chairing a meeting regarding skilling youth programs. Director General Science and Information Technology KP Sajid Hussain Shah, Director

China Study Center University of Peshawar, Dr Kausar Takreem, and other officers attended the meeting. Dr Kausar gave a detailed presentation on the courses and programs offered by the Zhenghe College of China. She said that the educational concept of Zhenghe College is production, study, and industry, adding that the college is more focused on the practice knowledge of students and more on the employment of talents. "Students of the last educational semester of the Zhenghe College System will be sent to China through student exchange, while jobs will be offered in all the countries that have joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on completion of their training," Dr Kausar said.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (r) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah chairing a meeting regarding technical and vocational training programme for youth.

CM KP reviews financial problems of public universities

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice Retired Syed Arshad Hussain Shah Sunday chaired a high-level meeting wherein a detailed review of the financial problems of public universities and other matters were discussed. The meeting was also attended by the concerned provincial ministers and administrative secretaries; the chairman of the Higher Education Commission and other officials were also present. The decision was also taken to complete the process for the appointment of vice-chancellors in the government universities of the province as soon as possible. The government has agreed to make grants given to universities subject to the better financial discipline of these universities. The meeting also agreed to merge university campuses with low enrollment with each other. The meeting also agreed to replace the traditional courses of colleges and universities with courses in line with modern market requirements. The financial crisis facing universities is a serious matter, the Chief Minister told the meeting. Universities need a comprehensive and full-time strategy to pull them out of this crisis, Arshad Hussain Shah said. The provincial government is moving forward in this regard in consultation with all stakeholders, the caretaker chief minister said. He said workable financial plans should be prepared to make universities financially stable and self-reliant.

Christian community all set to celebrate Christmas on Monday 5000 policemen to be deployed for security

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Christian community is all set to celebrate the grand festival of Christmas across Rawalpindi division and other parts of the country on Monday, December 25, in a befitting manner, while 5000 policemen will be deployed to ensure security. In churches, special services would take place where prayers would be offered for peace, progress, and the prosperity of the country. The Christian community has finalized all the preparations to mark this festivity, and they were just giving last-minute touches to their shopping and decorating Christmas trees. The festival of the Christian community would be marked through different activities ranging from big official gatherings to cake-cutting ceremonies, illuminating houses, and observing prayers in churches. Special cake-cutting ceremonies are being arranged at different departments to share the happiness of the festival with the Christian staff members. The cake-cutting ceremonies were held here at Police Lines, WASA, FJWU, and in other departments in connection with Christmas celebrations. The participants congratulated the Christian community and felt pleasure in sharing their joy and cheerfulness. The main attractions of the Christmas festival include traditions like Christmas trees, Santa Claus, Christmas carols, and Christmas gifts, which add charm to the festivity. All young and old have finalized shopping for themselves and their loved ones, while children and youngsters were more inclined towards decorating.



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab Mohsin Naqvi talking to people during his visit to driving License center at Police Khidmat Larkaz Liberty.

Promoting e-vehicles to reduce pollution, oil import bill

LAHORE (APP): In view of the global energy problems and the fluctuating oil prices, often costing much to consumers, many countries are shifting their vehicles to electric power to reduce oil import expenditures. Economic giants like United States and China are already leading in race to manufacturing or altering existing vehicles to electric power for saving foreign exchange and ensuring cleaner environment. However, the developing countries that are already overburdened

due to oil import bill are yet to embark on this journey commonly due to lack of technology and awareness among masses. Pakistan also entered the race two years back by manufacturing and assembling electric bikes with number of companies still struggling for a potential market for e-bikes. Despite being a potential sector of our economy, this sector could not click generally due to consumers' aptitude and market acceptance to complete replacement of

the conventional motor bikes. Therefore, efforts were required to boost this sector to cut down oil import bill and address issues like trade deficit and balance of payments. "Jolta Electric had launched indigenously developed e-bike at very affordable price two years back but it could not penetrate the local market," said Rehan Zaffar, Electrical Engineer at an e-bike company. "This bike could not get desired acceptance commonly due to lack of awareness," he said. "Same

happened with a locally manufactured three-wheeler auto rickshaw due to price variation." Rehan Zaffar mentioned that promotion of e-vehicles was directly linked to manufacturing of batteries especially the lithium ion type. "Lithium batteries assembling or manufacturing in our country is insufficient to cater the needs of switching over vehicles to electricity," he commented. "Therefore, we need to increase number of companies manufacturing lithium ion type batteries

as battery is a major component of e-bike/EVs (electric vehicles). The public response to e-vehicles previously gauged through pricing, aftermarket sales and maintenance is now changing due to another important component - the oil prices. As most of cities in Punjab are badly hit by smog every year, shifting to e-vehicles would also help tackle this nuisance by reducing vehicular emission across the country despite that some people have concerns about safety.

Trader killed over resistance during dacoity

MULTAN (APP): Armed dacoits opened fire and killed a trader over resistance during dacoity bid in Rewari town near Rasheedabad on early Sunday morning. According to details, the armed outlaws entered into the Saeed Rewari sweets shop in Rewari town. The dacoits opened fires on the nephew of the shopkeeper named Muhammad Kamran and killed him over putting resistance. The dacoits fled away from there. The people gathered there and staged demonstration protest for early arrest of the accused. The police concerned was busy in investigating the incident.

Distillery unearthed, liquor seized

SIALKOT (APP): The district police have unearthed a distillery, seized 40-litre liquor, and arrested a man with weapon. According to police spokesperson, Ugoki police conducted a raid at a distillery, arrested Usman Ali, who was preparing liquor and recovered liquor with illicit weapon. Police have registered a case against him and started investigations.

426 forms for reserved, minorities seats submitted

KARACHI (APP): The Provincial Election Commissioner Sindh and Returning Officer for reserved seats (women and minorities) Shari fullah received 426 forms so far at the office of the Provincial Election Commissioner Sindh for the upcoming general elections on Sunday. Today is the last day to receive and submit forms for reserved seats for women and minorities. So far, a total of 426 forms have been submitted to ECP Sindh, out of which 243 forms of women have been received for 92 national assembly seats in Sindh and 243 forms.

Hawkins shares joy with orphan children at SOS village

LAHORE (APP): United States Consul General to Lahore Kristin Hawkins brought joy and happiness to the disadvantaged orphan children when she visited the charity SOS Children's Village under 'Marines Toys for Tots' programme here on Sunday. The US marines distributed gifts of books and toys among little boys and girls of the SOS Village and held a 'story-telling session' besides taking part in different sports a day before the Christmas. Talking to APP Kristin Hawkins said the Marines Toys for Tots programme works beyond

religious ties, adding that all religions teach love for children and US Marines have been visiting these orphan SOS Village children for the past two years. Consul General Hawkins intermingled with little boys and girls and played different sport including badminton. Later, she shared table for lunch with the children and exchanged pleasantries during a four-hour stay at the orphanage. Marine Toys for Tots distributed an unprecedented 24.4 million toys, books, and games to 9.9 million disadvantaged children with the help of 50,000+ volunteers in the year 2022.

All set to celebrate Christmas in AJK today

MIRPUR (AJK): (APP): Elaborated programs have been given final touches by the AJK-based Christian community to celebrate the Christmas on Monday (tomorrow) with traditional and religious zeal and fervor, Christian Pastor of Azad Kashmir and Chairman Azad Jammu Kashmir Christian Welfare Society Younis Bhatti said. Addressing a gathering of local Christian community held at Mangla here Sunday, he said that the religious festival would be celebrated by the Christian community with full traditional religious enthusiasm in AJK including Mirpur district. He said that there was

complete freedom to the minorities including the Christian community following traditional communal harmony between minorities and majority community in Azad Jammu and Kashmir to perform their religious rights and other traditional and cultural obligations like other parts of the country. He said that because of the liberal approach of the government and the people of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the soil of motherland Pakistan and AJK was enriched with conducive environment for the minority communities where there was complete sovereignty and freedom.



SUKKUR: Peoples Party (PPP) Senior Central Leader, Syed Khursheed Shah exchanges views with notable citizens during meeting held at his residency in Sukkur.

Education guarantee of development for any nation: Mayor Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): Mayor Peshawar Zubair Ali has said that education is the basic need of every human being, which is also a guarantee of development for any nation or society. The mayor of Peshawar, Haji Zubair Ali, was the chief guest at the annual day ceremony of the University Model School. Professor Dr Saleem, former Provincial Minister Amanullah Haqqani, Principal, and other members of various faculties were also present

with him. Addressing the ceremony, Mayor Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali said that the need for education is very important in today's era. No matter how much time has progressed, the importance of education has its destiny, he added. A good society can be formed due to moral education. Teachers are indispensable for the achievement of education and help children achieve higher education, he said.

Pak economic landscape undergoing transformation due to SIFC: coordinator

LAHORE (APP): Coordinator for Minister of State and Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis said on Sunday Pakistan's economic landscape had undergone a remarkable transformation, largely because of establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), which had successfully attracted foreign direct investment.

Speaking as the keynote speaker at a seminar on "The Impact of SIFC on Pakistan Economy", held under the aegis of Gold Ring

Economic Forum, a strategic think tank, he said the initiative holds immense significance, particularly in the realm of FDI as the SIFC effectively engages with various countries and was fully committed to ensuring investment flows into country. He said its manifesto included foreign investment with a long-term goal of touching \$60bn in five years and eventually achieving the target of \$100bn.

He said: "We need consistency in economic, fiscal, trade policies and close collaboration with

local and foreign stakeholders for attracting investments." He said it was good omen that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar had signed multi-billion dollar agreements for the foreign direct investment (FDI), depicting tremendous response to the SIFC, which was likely to increase substantially from January next. He said these agreements encompass investment cooperation across diverse sectors such as energy, port operations, waste water treatment, food security, logistics, mining and aviation

sectors. Meher said the International Finance Corporation (IFC), in collaboration with the Board of Investment (BoI), had also introduced an ambitious investment plan to inject more than \$1.5bn in Pakistan's economy through both short- and long-term planning. He said economic partnership between China and Pakistan had also been reinforced by inking 20 agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation.



RAWALPINDI: A large numbers of people are busy is buying vegetables in Sunday weekly Bazar at Committee Chowk area in the city.



ISLAMABAD: An elderly labourer cutting wood into pieces for selling purpose at his workplace.

Pakistan Railways to expand 96 trains network till Dec 25

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a bid to accommodate passengers, Pakistan Railways would expand the network of its express trains to 96 till December 25, running all over the country to better facilitate the commuters.

"Before completing the network of 96 trains over the entire railway network, the last year the figure of trains is 86 which will be improved after the concentrated efforts of the department," an official in the Ministry told APP.

He said the facilities being provided to the passengers at railway stations include waiting rooms, vending stalls, station restaurants, wheelchairs, an information desk, computer reservation facilities, a public address system to inform the public about the arrival/departure of trains, provision of paramedics and 1st aid facility, online

reservation facility, passenger insurance service and revival of help desks at stations facilities in trains.

To a question, he said the overall punctuality ratio of trains has improved from 76 to 93 per cent in three months owing to close monitoring and stern measures taken by Pakistan Railways at the divisional and ministry levels.

"With the punctuality of trains and concrete measures taken by the department in the last three months, the number of passengers has increased by over 20 million, which is ample proof of the department's achievement," he added.

He said, "Pakistan Railways is also set to introduce the 'Train Driver Assistant System' (TDAS) to help train drivers a clear view of the railway tracks up to an impressive distance of 700 meters."



HYDERABAD: Customers selecting and purchasing second hand warm clothes from the roadside vendors.

PFC to attend London expo, boosting trade opportunities

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Chief Executive Officer of the Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC), Mian Kashif Ashfaq, announced on Sunday that a PFC delegation would participate in the three-day London Expo starting on March 25 to explore new markets and promote bilateral trade.

Talking to a visiting delegation of the UK-based Pak origin business community led by Muhammad Arbab Khan, President of the Pak-British Friendship Council North West Chapter UK, he said that the primary purpose of this visit was to explore and enhance the possibilities of expanding trade relations, fostering

collaboration, and identifying potential investment avenues between our two countries.

He said during the visit that the delegation aims to engage in meaningful discussions with key stakeholders, government officials, and business leaders in the UK. The Tourism Ambassador and Investment Consul of Pakistan to Milan, Italy, Shaharyar Khan, was also present on the occasion.

He said we are enthusiastic about the prospect of building lasting partnerships that will not only boost the furniture industry but also contribute to the overall economic development of both countries.



SARGODHA: Vendors selling and displaying second hand warm clothes at their roadside setup.

Iftikhar Ali praises FTO for outstanding services

ISLAMABAD (APP): Former President of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Iftikhar Ali Malik on Sunday praised the commendable services provided by Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Dr. Asif Mahmood Jah.

He said Dr. Asif has efficiently addressed genuine tax-related grievances of taxpayers, notably the business community nationwide, accomplishing this within a record-short time of 34 days, said a news release here.

Talking to delegation of industrialists led by Muslim Khan Buner, he said since he assumed the responsibility on 29th September 2021, an extensive public awareness campaign reached every corner of the country.

As a result first time in the history, thousands of aggrieved tax payers approached the regional offices nationwide through email, FTO portal, WhatsApp, Mobile App, Fax and written complaints. Remarkably, these issues were resolved within a record time of 34 days from the date of complaint, he said.

Malik said Dr. Jah's commitment to resolving issues in such a timely manner reflects a proactive approach that fosters a business-friendly environment.

He appreciated the principled bold stance of Federal Tax Ombudsman's advocacy for timely payment of taxes and the expansion of the tax base.

China's non-cash payments report growth in Q3

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): Non-cash payments handled by Chinese banks continued steady growth in the third quarter of 2023, data from the central bank showed.

Non-cash payments via bank cards, electronic payment vehicles, commercial papers, credit transfers, and other settlements hit 1326.19 trillion yuan (about 186.91 trillion U.S. dollars) during the period, up 3.92 percent year on year, according to a report from the People's Bank of China.

Electronic payments took the lion's share of non-cash payments, with a total transaction value of 858.34 trillion yuan, said the report.

A closer look at data for electronic payment vehicles showed that mobile payments expanded 10.1 percent compared with the same period last year to 137.71 trillion yuan. Bank card transactions also went up in the third quarter, increasing by 1.74 percent year on year to 260.77 trillion yuan, the data revealed.

PCMEA terms launching of EXIM bank inevitable to boost exports

LAHORE (INP): The Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PCMEA) has welcomed the establishment of the country's first Export-Import EXIM Bank and expressed the hope that the establishment of a special bank will increase exports and also help to get access to new international markets.

Senior Vice Chairman of the Association Usman Ashraf, Chairman of Carpet Training Institute (CTI) Ijazur Rehman, Senior Central Leader Abdul Latif Malik, Senior Member Riaz Ahmed, Shahid Hasan Sheikh, Major (Rtd) Akhtar Nazir and Saeed Khan said in their joint statement said that the availability of credit insurance and guarantee services will solve a major problem faced by exporters.

They further said that extraordinary measures are inevitable to increase Pakistan's exports and the establishment of a special bank related to export and import is an important development in this direction. "First of all, we have to compete with the rival countries of the region for which the patronage of the government is indispensable and the governments of the

countries of the region are giving concessions and reliefs to their exporters in various terms and this is the reason why there is a continuation in the growth of their exports," they added.

They further said that the government's establishment of a special bank for export and import is a commendable initiative and it is a milestone for the country's economy, trade and investment. This will increase the exports and give facilities to the exporters, along with providing a favorable and level playing field to the exporters besides this; they will also be able to access the global markets.

They said that it is gratifying that it will be possible to obtain insured exports from the bank and the risks of non-payment by commercial banks will also be reduced for the exporters. They said that there is a demand that EXIM Bank should issue a finance scheme for exporters without delay, which will reduce the burden on the State Bank.

They proposed that special counters should be established in the banks spread across the country and affiliated to EXIM Bank so that the exporters across the country can get the facility in their nearest banks.



LAHORE: Customers selecting and purchasing second hand shoes from the roadside vendors.

Christians flock to markets ahead of Christmas

FAISALABAD (APP): Preparations have been completed by the Christian community to celebrate Christmas here on Monday.

Activities regarding Christmas in the city have gained momentum to celebrate the most important religious festival of the Christian community in a most befitting manner on December 25.

Christian families including elders, boys and girls were seen in a large number at city's shopping centers in Katchry Bazaar, Anarkali, main bazaars of Madina Chowk, Mansoorabad, Jhal

Khannoana on Sitiana Road, D-Type Colony, D-ground, Jameelabad, Ghulistan Colony and other spots of readymade garments etc.

Churches in the city have been decorated with colorful lights, posters and traditional Christmas trees besides beautifying the areas where Christians live in a large number.

The police have made tight security arrangements by deputing more than 4,000 security personnel near Christian localities, churches in addition to setting up 214 pickets at entry and exit points of the district, a spokesman said.

Wheat cultivation in Balochistan completed over 0.94 million acres

ISLAMABAD (APP): The wheat crop has been sown across more than 22.14 million acres of land in various crop-growing regions during the current Rabi season in order to meet staple food requirements as well as to maintain strategic reserves throughout the year. The crop sowing targets for the current season (2023-24) were fixed at 22.23 million acres as the cultivation targets achieved by 99.63 per cent, said Food Security Commissioner Imtiaz Ali Gopang on Friday.

The crop sowing was in full swing across the wheat-producing areas in the country as Punjab Province has surpassed its wheat sowing targets and

completed cultivation of over 103.08 per cent of areas against the set targets, he added.

The Punjab, which is the largest wheat-producing province of the country, has completed crop sowing over 16.48 million acres as compared to the fixed targets of 16.00 million acres during the current season, he said adding that more areas to come under crop cultivation during the days to come.

Meanwhile, Sindh Province has achieved 94.76 per cent of its targets as wheat cultivation in different divisions of the province was completed over 2.82 million acres as against the set targets of 2.97 million acres, he added. So far the Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa has achieved over 98.72 per cent of its set targets and crop cultivation was completed over 1.90 million acres as compared to the set targets of 1.93 million acres during the current sowing season, he added. He informed that according to the Provincial Crop Reporting Services, the wheat cultivation in Balochistan Province was completed over 0.94 million acres, adding that the province was assigned a task to grow wheat over 1.33 million acres during the current season.

The Food Security Commissioner further informed that approximately 729,000 metric tons of high-quality certified wheat seeds.

Means of production prices mostly rise in China

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): Most of the capital goods monitored by China's statistical authorities registered higher prices in mid-December compared with early December, official data showed Sunday.

Of the 50 major goods classified in nine categories, including seamless steel tubes, gasoline, coal, fertilizer, and some chemicals, 29 reported higher prices in the period, 19 saw price declines, while the prices of two remained unchanged, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

During the period, hog prices went up 3.6 percent, according to the NBS data.

The figures, released every 10 days, are based on a survey of nearly 2,000 wholesalers and distributors in 31 provincial-level regions across the country.

Railways increase ROW charges for five years

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways has significantly raised the Right of Way (ROW) charges for a single-track crossing to Rs. 3.8 million for five years which would help the department to generate more revenue.

Historically, Pakistan Railways charged Rs. 100,000 per track crossing for 10 years when telecom operators installed fibre broadband, sources in the Ministry told APP.

In 2007, they said the charges were increased to Rs. 2.7 million for five years, as the use of fibre broadband expanded. However, in 2022, the PTI-led government reduced the crossing charges to Rs. 600,000 per crossing for a lifetime to promote fibre broadband.

They said that in contrast, cable TV operators continue to pay only Rs. 100 per year. It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan Railways has offered to lay fibre optics

cables along the railway tracks across the country, in a joint venture with private sector investors to generate revenue for the department.

Pakistan Railways has around 7,791 kilometres of railway network across the country which will not only help the department to improve its financial condition but also attract investors to invest. The matter also came under discussion during a meeting of the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC), in which the Ministry of Railways pointed out that the department was offering an excellent opportunity for laying fibre optics cables along its track for digital connectivity across the country. During the meeting, Pakistan Railways informed that it has a network of 7,791 km, which passes through high-density population areas and connects major cities in the four provinces.



RAWALPINDI: Vendors pack the coals into jute bags for customers at their warehouse in the city

Expanding tax base – A panacea to overcome budget deficit

ISLAMABAD (APP): At a time when country's economy is facing multifaceted challenges, the caretaker government has embarked upon an ambitious plan for restructuring and reforming the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR).

With its special focus on broadening the tax base, boosting tax to GDP ratio and augmenting revenues to overcome persistent fiscal challenges, the caretakers are exploring all avenues to expand tax base.

The government's strategy involves a comprehensive approach, intending to bridge fiscal gaps by enhancing revenue collection - simultaneously

trimming the expenditures.

Notably, the reform plan includes separating tax policy and revenue divisions within the FBR - a move aimed at mitigating conflicts of interest in tax collection.

Caretaker Minister for Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs, Shamsad Akhtar recently highlighted the significance of proposed division, emphasizing that while the FBR concentrated on collection, a separate tax policy division should be there to formulate policies.

She also expressed optimism that the FBR is expected to surpass the targeted revenue collection of Rs. 9.4 trillion, with

plans for additional measures in case of any revenue shortfall.

To broaden the tax base, the government is introducing a new Documentation Law mandating various agencies to provide data to FBR through an automated transmission system. Collaboration with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) has been sought to facilitate this process.

Furthermore, a key facet of the reform plan entails segregating customs from revenue collection mechanisms. The customs sector will pivot towards trade facilitation and

border controls while revenue collection responsibilities will rest with the FBR.

Stakeholders, such as the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), have advocated leveraging modern Information Technology (IT) systems to enhance tax collection efficiency.

They emphasize replacing outdated tax collection systems with automation and increased machine utilization for streamlined processes.

"The Board must take advantage of Information Technology (IT) systems for enhancing tax collection efficiency," remarked President Islamabad

Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari. "This transformative initiative must not only fortify the FBR's ability to enforce tax laws but also simplify tax filing for taxpayers through dedicated offices," he stated. Meanwhile, the FBR has taken proactive steps to promote a tax culture by establishing 145 District Tax Offices nationwide, with the goal of bringing 1.5 to two million new taxpayers into the system by June 2024.

With the FBR already surpassing the five-month tax collection target and demonstrating robust growth in revenue collection, the customs

Israel strikes 2 homes, killing more than 90 Palestinians. Biden says he didn't request a cease-fire

Monitoring Desk
RAFAH: More than 90 Palestinians, including dozens from an extended family, were killed in Israeli airstrikes on two homes in Gaza, rescuers and hospital officials said Saturday, a day after the U.N. chief warned that nowhere is safe in the territory and that Israel's offensive creates "massive obstacles" to distribution of humanitarian aid.

U.S. President Joe Biden spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday, calling it a long and private conversation a day after the Biden administration again shielded Israel in the diplomatic arena. On Friday, the U.N. Security Council adopted a watered-down resolution that calls for im-

mediately speeding up aid deliveries to desperate civilians in Gaza, but not for a cease-fire.

"I did not ask for a cease-fire," Biden said of the call. Netanyahu's office said the prime minister "made clear that Israel would continue the war until achieving all its goals."

Also Saturday, the Israeli military said troops arrested hundreds of alleged militants in Gaza over the past week and transferred more than 200 to Israel for further interrogation, providing rare details on a controversial policy of mass roundup of Palestinian men. The army said more than 700 people with alleged ties to the militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad have so far been sent to Is-

raeli lockups.

Israel declared war after Hamas gunmen stormed across the border on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people and taking some 240 hostages. More than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's war to destroy Hamas and more than 53,000 have been wounded, according to health officials in Gaza, a besieged territory ruled by the Islamic militant group for the past 16 years. The Health Ministry in Gaza on Saturday evening said 201 people had been killed over the past 24 hours.

Airstrikes on Friday flattened two homes, including one in Gaza City, where 76 people from the al-Mughrabi family were killed, making the attack one of the deadliest of the war.



Palestinians collect food at a donation point in a refugee camp at Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

Yemen's warring parties agree to ceasefire

Monitoring Desk

DUBAI: Yemen's warring parties have committed to a new ceasefire and agreed to engage in a UN-led peace process to end the war, the UN envoy for Yemen said on Saturday. The announcement by UN special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, marks the latest step to end the deadly nine-year war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

It follows recent meetings by Grundberg in Saudi Arabia and Oman with Rashad Al Alimi, head of Yemen's Saudi-backed presidential council and Mohammed Abdul Salam,

the chief negotiator for Houthi rebels.

Grundberg said he "welcomes the parties' commitment to a set of measures to implement a nation-wide ceasefire... and (to) engage in preparations for the resumption of an inclusive political process", according to a statement by his office.

The envoy "will now engage with the parties to establish a road map under UN auspices that includes these commitments and supports their implementation", the statement added. Yemen has been gripped by conflict since Houthi rebels took control of the capital Sanaa in 2014.

12 Turkish soldiers killed in clashes with PKK

Monitoring Desk

ANKARA: Twelve Turkish soldiers were killed in the past two days in clashes with Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants in northern Iraq, the defence ministry said on Saturday.

The Turkish military carried out air strikes on PKK targets, neutralising 13 PKK militants on Saturday in on-going clashes, the ministry said in a statement on social messaging platform X.

The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, took up arms against the Turkish state in 1984.

US SC declines to fast-track Trump's immunity case

Monitoring Desk

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court has declined to immediately hear former president Donald Trump's claim that he is immune from prosecution, potentially delaying his 2020 election interference trial.

Special Counsel Jack Smith had asked the nation's highest court to take up the immunity case on an expedited basis, bypassing the federal court of appeals.

The Supreme Court, which has a 6-3 conservative majority, including three justices nominated by

Trump, denied the request in a one-line order that did not provide any reason for the decision.

Trump, the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, is currently scheduled to go on trial on March 4, 2024 on charges of conspiring to overturn the 2020 election won by Biden.

US District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is to preside over Trump's March trial, rejected the immunity claim on Dec 1, saying an ex-president does not have a lifelong "get-out-of-jail-free" pass.

Ukraine says it shoots down 14 of 15 Russian drones

Monitoring Desk

KYIV: Russia launched 15 drones at Ukraine, mostly in the south of the country, overnight with air defences destroying 14 of them, Ukrainian military said on Sunday.

"As a result of air combat, Ukraine's Air Force and defence forces destroyed 14 shaheds in Mykolaiv, Kirovohrad, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro and Khmelnytskyi regions," the Ukrainian Air Force said on the Telegram messaging app.

13 dead, 38 injured in explosion at nickel plant in Indonesia

Monitoring Desk

JAKARTA: At least 13 people were killed and 38 injured in eastern Indonesia on Sunday in an explosion at a Chinese-funded nickel-processing plant, the owner of the industrial park that hosts the facility said.

The island of Sulawesi is a hub for the mineral-rich country's production of nickel, a base metal used for electric vehicle batteries and stainless steel, and Beijing's growing investment has stoked unrest over working conditions at its facilities.

The accident occurred around 5:30 am (2130 GMT Saturday) at a plant owned by PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel (ITSS) in the Morowali Industrial Park in Central Sulawesi province, a

spokesperson for the complex said in a statement.

"(The death toll) increased by one person, from 12 to 13," he told AFP, also revising the number of injured down one to 38.

He identified the dead as eight Indonesians and five Chinese workers. An initial investigation showed the explosion happened during repair work on a furnace when a flammable liquid ignited and the subsequent blast caused nearby oxygen tanks to explode as well, the official said. The fire was extinguished Sunday morning, according to the statement. Tsingshan Holding Group, the world's biggest nickel producer and China's biggest stainless steelmaker, holds a majority stake in ITSS.

Eight Chinese fighter jets crossed strait's median line: Taiwan

Monitoring Desk

TAIPEI: Taiwan's defence ministry said on Sunday that over the previous 24 hours, it had detected eight Chinese fighter jets crossing over the median line of the Taiwan Strait, as well as one Chinese balloon.

Taiwan, which China claims as its territory, has repeatedly complained of Chinese military activity around the island over the past four years.

China has been stepping up its missions near Taiwan as the Jan. 13 presidential and parliamentary elections on the island approach.

Taiwan's defence ministry said the Chinese J-10, J-11 and J-16 fighter jets had crossed the median line at points to the north and centre of the strait.

The median line once served as an unofficial barrier between the two sides, but Chinese planes now regularly fly over it.

Taiwan sent its forces

to monitor, the ministry said.

The ministry also reported another Chinese balloon in the strait, the latest in a spate of what Taiwan says is most likely for monitoring the weather, driven by prevailing winds at this time of year.

It said the balloon was spotted after crossing the median line late on Saturday morning 97 nautical miles (180 km) northwest of the northern Taiwanese port city of Keelung at an altitude of approximately 20,000 feet (6,100 metres).

The balloon headed east and disappeared around one hour later, the ministry added.

The potential for China to use balloons for spying became a global issue in February when the United States shot down what it said was a Chinese surveillance balloon. China said the balloon was a civilian craft that accidentally drifted astray.

A pro-peace Russian presidential hopeful is blocked by the election commission

Monitoring Desk

MOSCOW: A Russian politician calling for peace in Ukraine hit a roadblock in her campaign Saturday, when Russia's Central Election Commission refused to accept her initial nomination by a group of supporters, citing errors in the documents submitted.

Former legislator Yekaterina Duntsova is calling for peace in Ukraine and hopes to challenge President Vladimir Putin, promoting her vision of a "humane" Russia "that's peaceful, friendly and ready to cooperate with everyone on the principle of respect."

"On Dec. 23, the Central Election Commission refused to register my initiative group," Duntsova wrote on the Telegram messaging app. According to Telegram channel close to Duntsova's campaign, the commission found 100 errors in her nomination papers, including mistakes in the spelling of names.

"You are a young woman, you still have everything ahead of you. Any minus can always be turned into a plus," the head of Russia's

Central Election Commission, Ella Pamfilova, said at the commission meeting, addressing Duntsova.

Duntsova said that she would appeal the decision in Russia's Supreme Court, and appealed to the leaders of the Yabloko (Apple) political party to nominate her as a candidate, as she said she would be unable to convene a second meeting of supporters.

Also on Saturday, Russian state media said that Yabloko party founder and leader Grigory Yavlinsky would not run for the presidency, citing the party's press service. Speaking in a live interview on YouTube, once Duntsova's appeal to Yabloko became known, Yavlinsky said that he "didn't know" whether the party would consider her application. Duntsova took her first steps toward candidate status Sunday, when her run was endorsed by 500 supporters as required by Russian election law, and presented documents Wednesday to Russia's Central Election Commission to register her nomination.

303 Indians on grounded flight lodged at airport in France

Monitoring Desk

PARIS: Around 300 Indian nationals who were on board a plane grounded in France on suspicion of human trafficking were being cared for on Saturday in the hall of an airport in the eastern region of Marne while an investigation was ongoing, a local official said.

Emergency services had installed makeshift beds for the 303 stranded passengers, gave them access to toilets and showers and provided meals and hot drinks at Vetry airport, a spokeswoman for the Marne prefect's office said.

The civilian protection unit of the Marne prefecture said the Airbus jet was carrying 13 unaccompanied minors as well as accompanied minors with ages ranging from 21 months to 17 years.

The Indian embassy in Paris said on Saturday that it was working for "a rapid resolution of the situation", posting on X that "consular officials are on site".

The flight, which was

operated by Romanian charter company Legend Airlines, landed at Vetry on Thursday for a technical stopover en route from Dubai when French police intervened, the prefect's office said on Friday.

It said a judicial investigation into the conditions and purpose of the trip had been launched, with a unit specialising in organised crime investigating suspected human trafficking.

The passengers on the grounded plane, which was bound for Nicaragua, included 13 unaccompanied minors.

The Paris public prosecution office said on Friday that two people were held for questioning, adding that authorities had been tipped off by an anonymous informant. A lawyer representing Legend Airlines said on Saturday the plane's crew had been released after questioning. "The members of the crew have been questioned, the questioning has ended and they are all free to move.



Yemen's warring parties have committed to a new ceasefire and agreed to engage in a UN-led peace process to end the war, the UN special envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg.

Iran summons Russian envoy over statement on Persian Gulf disputed islands

Monitoring Desk

DUBAI: Iran summoned Russia's charge d'affaires after Moscow and Arab countries released a joint statement earlier this week challenging Iran's claim to disputed islands in the Persian Gulf, state media reported Sunday.

Iran's official IRNA news agency said the Russian envoy was summoned on Saturday and handed a note to deliver to Moscow in which Tehran protested the statement the 6th Arab-

Russian Cooperation Forum issued in Morocco that called for a peaceful solution to resolve the conflict between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the islands. Earlier on Saturday, Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian told his Russian counterpart over the phone that "respecting countries' sovereignty and integrity is among basic principles in the ties between nations," IRNA said in a separate report.

Iran's navy adds sophisticated cruise missiles to its armory

Monitoring Desk

DUBAI: Iran's navy on Sunday added domestically produced sophisticated cruise missiles to its arsenal, state TV reported.

The TV said both Talaeieh and Nasir cruise missiles have arrived at a naval base near the Indian Ocean in the southern Iranian port of Konarak, some 1,400 kilometers (850 miles) southeast of the capital, Tehran.

Navy chief Adm. Shahram Irani said the Talaeieh has a range of more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) and called it "fully smart." Irani said the cruise missile is capable of changing targets during travel. He said the Nasir has a range of 100 kilometers (62 miles) and can be installed on warships.

Last month, a container ship owned by an Israeli billionaire came under attack from a suspected Iranian drone in the Indian Ocean, as Israel wages war on Iran-backed Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Russia short of around 4.8 million workers in 2023

Monitoring Desk

MOSCOW: Russia was short of around 4.8 million workers in 2023 and the problem will remain acute in 2024, the Izvestia newspaper reported on Sunday, citing experts and research from the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of Economics.

Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina said last month that Russia's depleted labour force was causing acute labour shortages and threatening economic growth as Moscow pumps fiscal and physical resources into the military.

Hundreds of thousands of Russians left the country following what the Kremlin calls its special military operation in Ukraine which began in February 2022, including highly-qualified IT specialists.

Those who took flight either disagreed with the war or feared being called up to fight in it.



Workers conduct repair work at the site where a thermal pipeline that supplies heating leaked, during winter solstice in Beijing, China.

Canada announces temporary visas for people in Gaza with Canadian relatives

Monitoring Desk

OTTAWA: People in the Gaza Strip who have Canadian relatives may apply for temporary visas to Canada, the country's immigration minister said Thursday. However, the federal government cannot guarantee safe passage out of the besieged Palestinian territory. Immigration Minister Marc Miller expects the program to be up and running by Jan. 9. Until now, the government has focused on getting 660 Canadians, permanent resi-

dents and their spouses and children out of Gaza.

Miller said the government will start accepting applications for people with extended family connections to Canada, including parents, grandparents, siblings and grandchildren.

He said people will be offered three-year visas if they meet eligibility and admissibility criteria. Miller said he's not sure how many people will be able to come to Canada under the program, but he expects the number will be in the hundreds.

Beijing records most hours of sub-zero temperatures

Monitoring Desk

BEIJING: China's capital Beijing has broken its record for hours of sub-zero temperatures in December dating back to 1951, after a cold wave swept swathes of the country and brought blizzards in its wake, sending temperatures toward historic lows.

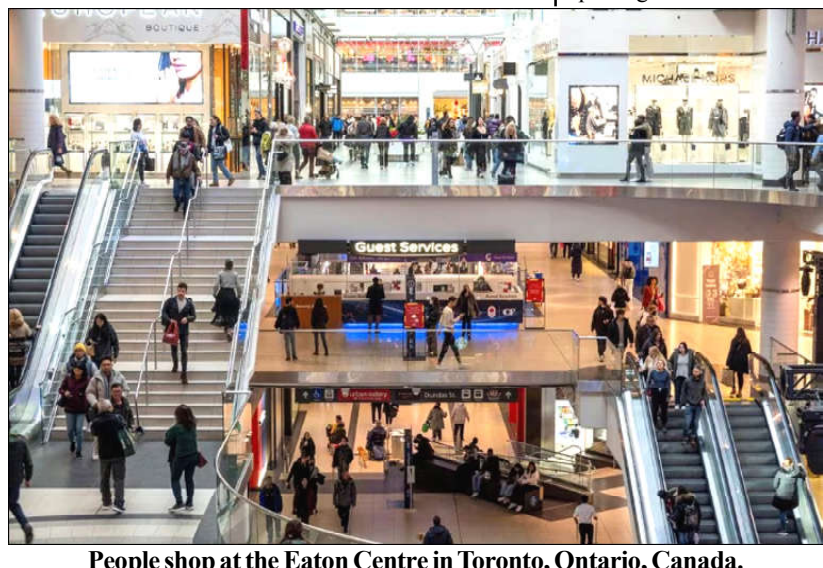
Northern and north-eastern parts of the country have experienced a record-breaking chill since last week, with some areas in the northeast hitting minus 40 Celsius (minus 40 Fahrenheit) and below as biting cold air flowed down from the Arctic.

As of Sunday, a weather observatory in Beijing had recorded more

than 300 hours of below-freezing temperatures since Dec. 11, the most for the month since records began in 1951, according to state-backed Beijing Daily.

The capital has also endured nine consecutive days of temperatures below minus 10 C (14 F) in this period, the Beijing Daily added. Several cities in the central Chinese province of Henan, southwest of Beijing, are in the grip of a winter heating supply crunch, with thermal power suppliers in the city of Jiaozuo under pressure to ensure supplies.

Heating boilers at Jiaozuo WanFang Aluminum Manufacturing (000612.SZ), one of the major suppliers in the city,



People shop at the Eaton Centre in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.



Caretaker Federal Minister for religion Affairs and interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmad addressing the Tazeem Al Harmain Shareef conference at Karachi.

Bilateral naval exercise Thamar Al Tayyib 2023 culminates in Arabian Sea

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Navy and the Royal Navy of Oman Bilateral Exercise Thamar Al Tayyib 2023 (TAT-23) was conducted in the Gulf of Oman. This was 11th edition of the series of Thamar Al Tayyib exercises being conducted between Pakistan Navy and Royal Navy of Oman since 2002, a news release said on Sunday.

The Pakistan Navy Flotilla comprising of Pakistan Navy Ship ASLAT with embarked helicopter, Fast Attack Craft PNS QUWWAT and PN Maritime Patrol Aircraft along with Special Operations Forces participated in the exercise.

The bilateral exercise was conducted in two phases. Harbour phase included operational and tactical level table top discussions and exercise planning conferences.

During the Sea Phase of the exercise, both the navies conducted range of advanced operational exercises encompassing major facets of maritime operations related to Anti-Air, Anti-Surface Warfare and Counter Terrorism exercises.

The exercise also involved Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) by ships of both Navies with an aim to

curb illicit activities at sea. Ex TAT- 23 provided an avenue to enhance mutual learning, improve inter-operability and opportunity for both navies to further hone their professional skills.

Pakistan and Oman share a common maritime area and both the navies closely cooperate with each other to maintain good order at sea. Regular conduct of bilateral Exercise Thamar Al Tayyib 2023 is a clear manifestation of strong fraternal and brotherly relations between Pakistan and Oman in general and Pakistan Navy and Royal Navy of Oman in particular.

ECP defers delimitation grievance hearing, prioritizing elections

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) postponed the delimitation grievances hearing until after the General Elections 2024, prioritizing the election schedule in line with the Supreme Court's directive to avoid disruptions.

Referring to recent Supreme Court orders on the delimitation issue, the Election Commission of Pakistan in its orders emphasized that challenges to delimitation by the ECP will no longer lead to election delays. In a specific case, the Supreme Court underscored the importance of General Elections as a fundamental democratic principle, diminishing the procedural significance of delimitation.

The notification, endorsed by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja and four members of the Election Commission, conveyed that the Supreme Court of Pakistan, in the proceedings related to the delimitation of District Zhob, Sherani (Civil Petition No 4305/2023 - Gul Khan and Others Vs. Saeed-ur-Rehman and Others), underscored that the execution of General Elections is not merely a procedural necessity but a fundamental principle upholding democratic ethos.

PM felicitates Christian community on Christmas, lauds their role in progress of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar felicitated the Christian community on the occasion of Christmas and said the nation on this day should pledge to make Pakistan a model of religious tolerance and inter-faith harmony.

In a message on the occasion of Christmas, he said, "The Christian community is celebrating Christmas in Pakistan and across the world and I and the whole nation felicitate the Christian brothers and sisters on the happy occasion of Christmas. Christmas is the name of love, brotherhood, patience and sacrifice."

These values were critical in putting a society on the path of development, he added.

The PM said the Prophet of Allah, Hazrat Essa (AS) healed the pain of humanity and took the message of God to the whole humanity.

Hazrat Essa (AS) reformed humanity with teachings of peace, brotherhood, tolerance and forbearance which led to the success of humans.

The moral teachings and the guidance of the Prophet were a beacon for humanity for all times to come, he continued.

He said in the present age there was an acute need to follow Hazrat Essa's message of human compassion, affection, tolerance and fraternity.

In the last few years at the international level, human society had been facing an adverse situation due to a wave of religious intolerance, he observed.

"To reverse this negative trend we have to spread Hazrat Essa's message of brotherhood and religious tolerance and follow his teachings to make the world a cradle of peace. In this way we can forever end hatred from the world," he remarked.

He said the white colour in Pakistan's green flag represented the minorities including the Christian community which played a vital role in the progress and development of the country, and in all fields including defence, judiciary, arts, sports and education made their countrymen proud.

The prime minister said the Christian community laid down their lives for strengthening the foundation of the country and for its integrity and solidarity. He said in the Quaid of Pakistan every person had complete religious freedom and the constitution of Pakistan provided special protection to minorities, adding every citizen was given equal rights and they had complete freedom of worship and had liberty to perform religious rituals and celebrate religious occasions. "The State and every citizen have the responsibility to protect their places of worship," he asserted.

He said, "The issues faced by Pakistan can only be resolved when we rise above the distinctions of colour, ethnicity, and religion and work day and night as a united nation for the progress of the country."

"Pakistan is our home and on this occasion of Christmas we should pledge that together we will make Pakistan a model of religious tolerance and brotherhood."



QUETTA: Chairman Senate Mir Sadiq Sanjrani giving away ticket of PB-45 to Ziaur Rehman Ishaqzai

Political party's accounts involved in smear campaign against judges

ISLAMABAD (Online): Social media accounts linked to political parties were involved in the recent social media smear campaign against Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa and Supreme Court judges.

An old letter exempting the wives of judges from checking at airports was used with regular planning, the matter was thrown out without investigation and a smear campaign was launched on social media against the judiciary, judges and their families.

Investigations by the institutions revealed propaganda accounts believed to be linked to a political party behind the campaign to defame judges.

According to government sources, the Aviation Division's post dated October 12 was first posted on December 16 (after about 2 months) by an account named JB affiliated to a political party, followed by the account of Umar Mehmood Hayat. The above post was posted on December 16th at 11:49 PM. From this account, the judges and judiciary have been criticized for the cases of PTI founder chairman.

According to government sources, a few social media activists also pushed the targeted agenda of that particular political party, and accounts linked to a political party actively participated in the campaign to assassinate judges and took the lead in spreading false propaganda virally.

Social media activists and a few vloggers who support a particular political party have been at the forefront of creating social media trends.

Even by taking screenshots of the news broadcast on a few TV channels, the nefarious purpose was furthered by the trolls connected to the political party on social media.

Propaganda was later countered by the clarification issued by the Supreme Court, but by then the character assassination campaign had reached its peak.

The sad thing is that the spreaders of this fake news did not even give an explanation to their followers, nor did they apologize.

Zardari's message on the occasion of Christmas

ISLAMABAD / KARACHI: Formed President of Pakistan and President Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari has congratulated the Christians all over the world, especially members of the community living in Pakistan on the occasion of Christmas. He said that the role of the Christian community for the development of Pakistan is unforgettable.

President Asif Ali Zardari said that Quaid-e-Awam, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had given all non-Muslims the right to be equal citizens in the 1973 Constitution. Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto had defended the fundamental rights of non-Muslim citizens.

Bilawal Bhutto paid rich tributes to Quaid on birth anniversary

KARACHI / ISLAMABAD (Online): Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has paid rich tributes to Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah on his 147th Birthday anniversary being celebrated on Monday (tomorrow). According to the press statement issued by Media Cell Bilawal House, the Chairman PPP, in his message to nation, said that as we celebrate the birthday of our Quaid, let us reflect on his steadfast commitment to justice, equality, and the principles that define the essence of Pakistan. He further said that Quaid-e-Azam was a democratic visionary leader, whose unwavering dedication paved the way for the creation of our beloved country, Pakistan.

"Our Quaid's indomitable spirit and unparalleled leadership continue to inspire generations, reminding us of the ideals upon which our great nation stands," he added.

Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that PPP steadfastly upholds the visionary ideals and objectives of the nation's founder, working towards the realization of an inclusive, democratic, and progressive Pakistan. He pointed out that Quaid-e-Azam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto fulfilled Quaid-e-Azam's vision by presenting the historic unanimous Constitution in 1973—a democratic structure grounded in the principles of equal rights for all.



Special Service Group of Pakistan Navy demonstrating drill onboard PNS ASLAT during Pakistan Navy-Royal Navy of Oman Bilateral Exercise Thamar Al Tayyib.

Senate committee to be briefed on Palestine, Kashmir

ISLAMABAD (Online): A briefing will be given to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee regarding Israel's barbaric bombing of Gaza and the termination of the special status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Committee will meet tomorrow (Tuesday) at Parliament House under the chairmanship of Chairman Senator Farooq H. Naik.

In the meeting, the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will give a briefing to the committee on the role of the Muslim Ummah and especially Pakistan regarding the ongoing barbaric bombardment by the Zionist forces in Gaza. In the meeting, the committee will also be informed about the situation created by the biased decision of the Indian SC.

WAPDA chairman visits K-IV project to review construction progress

LAHORE (APP): WAPDA Chairman Lt-Gen (ret'd) Engineer Sajjad Ghani visited Greater Karachi Bulk Water Supply Scheme (K-IV Project) to review progress on the project.

According to WAPDA spokesman here on Sunday, the K-IV project envisages to provide 650 million gallon per day (MGD) to Karachi from Keenjhar lake. The project will be completed in two phases. At present, WAPDA is constructing Phase-I, which is scheduled for completion in October 2024. Phase-I of K-IV Project will supply 260 MGD to Karachi. PC-I cost of the project is Rs 126 billion, expenditure till date is Rs 40 billion and accumulative progress of 40 per cent has been achieved.

General Manager (Projects) South, Chief Engineer/Project Director K-IV and representatives of the Consultants and the Contractors were also present during the chairman's visit.

The chairman visited in detail several sites of the project and witnessed construction work going on there. The project team briefed the chairman about the progress achieved so far. It was briefed that construction activities are continuing on all eight sites of the project. These sites include intake structure, pumping stations, water conveyance system consisting of pressurized pipes, reservoirs and filtration plants, project offices, colony and the approach road.



LAHORE: Participant giving final touches to the painting during the event in connection with 147th birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Tosha Khana case: PTI's appeal ready to end appeal against IHC verdict

ISLAMABAD (Online): A bench consisting of Acting Chief Justice Sardar Tariq Masood and Justice Athar Minallah can hear on Principle seat at Islamabad. PTI founder Imran Khan filed an appeal in the SC to suspend the decision of the IHC in Tosha Khana case. It was said that the sentence in the Tosha Khana case has already been suspended. High Court only suspended the sentence, not the entire decision. Election Commission took advantage of the error in the verdict of the High Court.

It is said in the petition that the Election Commission has issued a notification of the disqualification of the founder of PTI, the elections are near.



MUZAFFRABAD: Activists of Pasban-e-Hurriyat shouting slogans during protest in favor of their in the city.

SC 2-member bench consist to hear 75 cases

ISLAMABAD (Online): 75 cases have been appointed for hearing in front of two member bench comprising of Acting Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Sardar Tariq Masood and Justice Athar Minallah on Principal Seat Islamabad.

These cases include various types of cases and bail cases.

The said bench will hear more than fifteen cases every day and this process will continue till December 29. The bench will hear more than 75 bail cases throughout the week, including pre-arrest, post-arrest, tax matters, tenancy law cases, family and family cases.

Information notices have also been issued to the parties for this.

PTI leaderless party in fresh ECP's list of registered political parties

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has been mentioned as leaderless political party in fresh list of registered political parties of country released by ECP. Name of PTI founder Imran Khan has been removed by ECP from the party heads as it released the fresh list of 175 registered political parties in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Pervez Khattak-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Parliamentarians has been included in the list.

Victory of Atif and Saquib is the victory of business community

QUETTA/PISHIN: The victory of Atif Ikram Sheikh and Saquib Fayyaz is the victory of business community.

Their young leadership struggle is not for power, rather for the service of the business community beyond personal interests they will work for the improvement of the country's economy and FPCCI.

While addressing joint meeting of PCCI Executive Members and Nominees for FPCCI Election 2024-2025 Muhammad Asif Tareen Patron-in-Chief Pashin Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) and Executive Member Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) said that the success and failure of any institution depends on its leadership. An institution is recognized by its leadership, vision, experience, hard work and efforts.

The joint central candidates of the Alliance, the candidate for President Atif Ikram Sheikh and Senior Vice President Saquib Fayyaz Magu are talented, experienced, and aware of the situation.

GM Taj passes away Independent Report

QUETTA: The former Vice Chancellor, University of Balochistan and senior bureaucrat, civil service of Pakistan, Ghulam Muhammad Taj passed away after brief illness on Sunday.

The late Ghulam Muhammad Taj was father of the Secretary Government of Balochistan, Shehryar Taj, and brother of Engineer Umar Farooq Fateh Hussain, Fateh Ali Taj.

The Fateha Khawani departed soul would be held at Arman Manzil located in front of Sariab police station, Sariab road Quetta which would continue for three days.

IG, DC Islamabad transfer becomes challenge for ECP

ISLAMABAD (Online): Inspector General (IG) Islamabad and Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad has become a test case for Election Commission of Pakistan.

On August 17, a letter was sent to the Establishment Division regarding the change of both officers, but it could not be implemented.

ECP summoned Secretary Establishment on the matter on Tuesday.

In the letter written by the Secretary Election Commission to the Secretary Establishment Division, it is said that regarding the change of Deputy Commissioner Islamabad and IG Islamabad on August 17, the Election Commission has given the powers to the federal government in the constitution.

The letter has been implemented yet.

It has been said in the letter that a report should be sent to the Commission immediately on this matter and appear before the Election Commission on December 26 to explain why these two officers have not been replaced so far.



LAHORE: The Jinnah Khamita Foundation is providing free wedding supplies to people at an event held at Bagh Jinnah.