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## Interfaith harmony need of hour Nation to stand resolute & strong against enemies creating fissures: COAS

Says Pakistan's enemies hell-bent on creating fissures using religious, ethnic and political vulnerabilities; Army Chief Acknowledges contributions made by Christian community.

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir on Monday said that the nation would have to stand resolute and strong against the country's enemies who were creating fissures using religious, ethnic and political vulnerabilities.

"Enemies of Pakistan are hell-bent towards creating fissures using religious, ethnic and political vulnerabilities. We have to stand together and united to rise as a resolute and strong nation," the Army Chief said while speaking here at the Christ Church, where he joined the Christian community in Christmas celebrations.

The congregation welcomed the COAS and

thanked him for sharing the festivity. The Army Chief wished Merry Christmas to the entire Christian community in Pakistan.

Gen Asim Munir expressed reverence for the religious community and stressed upon the need for promoting greater interfaith harmony in the society in order to follow the true vision of Quaid-e-Azam of a united and progressive Pakistan.

He said, "Islam teaches us the lesson of peace, friendship and encourages interfaith harmony which is the need of the hour."

The COAS stressed upon the importance of having correct perspective, truth and knowledge-based opinions about national issues rather than following

rhetoric and propaganda, to address complex challenges and issues.

The Army Chief, paying glowing tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's great vision and leadership on his 147th birthday, quoted his historical remarks made in his speech on August 11, 1947 while addressing the Constituent Assembly: "You are free. You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan."

At the end, the COAS befittingly acknowledged the contributions and sacrifices made by the entire Christian community of Pakistan in all the fields and domains.



RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir addressing a Christmas ceremony at Christ Church

## Solangi stresses on democratic means, adherence to rule of law to tackle issues

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information & Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi Monday stressed on addressing the challenges being faced by the country through democratic means, negotiations, and adherence to the rule of law, as extra-constitutional measures could only lead to destruction.

Speaking at a speech competition organized by the Directorate of Elec-

tronic Media and Production (DEMP) among the students of model schools and colleges affiliated with the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) to pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on his birth anniversary, he underscored that the pivotal solution to the country's urgent challenges laid in upholding democratic

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ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi addressing event "Speech Competition on Quaid Day" organized by DEMPat Information Service Academy.

## Scrutiny of nomination papers of 2,669 candidates starts in Balochistan

QUETTA: The process of scrutiny of nomination papers of the candidates filed their candidature for the national and provincial assemblies started in the province as elsewhere in the country on Monday.

According to the sources of Provincial Election Commissioner (PEC) office, in all 2,669 candidates have filed the nomination papers for the general and reserved seats of the national and provincial assemblies from Balochistan.

Altogether 631 candidates have appeared to file the nomination papers for 16 seats of the National Assembly.

In all 19 female candidates are also those filed papers for general seats of the national assembly.

Similarly, 1788 candidates filed nomination papers for the provincial assembly seats.

They are included 45 females who submitted their papers for the general seats in the provincial assembly.

For 4 seats reserved for the women in National Assembly, a total of 60 candidates filed their nomination papers in the province.

At least 123 candidates have filed papers for 11 seats of the women in Balochistan Assembly.

While 67 candidates have filed papers for three seats reserved for minorities in the Balochistan assembly. They are included 57 male and 10 female candidates.

The Provincial Election Commissioner Ejaz Anwar Chohan told the scrutiny of notification papers of the candidates would remain continued till December 30, 2023.

Meanwhile, the process of training of assistant presiding officers and polling officers has also been started in the province.

## President visits Quaid's mausoleum

KARACHI (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Monday visited the mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah and paid rich tributes to the Father of the Nation on his 147th birthday.

Sindh Governor Mohammed Kamran Khan Tessori, Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Maqbool Baqar and his cabinet members were also present on the occasion.

The president along with the governor and chief minister laid a wreath on the Quaid's grave and offered Fateha.

He also prayed for the development and prosperity of the country.

## PPP to form next govt, says Zardari

NAWAB SHAH (INP): Former president and Pakistan Peoples Party candidate for NA-207 Asif Ali Zardari urged PTI members to work hard, highlighting that success requires effort.

Speaking at the office of Returning Officer after filing his nomination papers in Nawab Shah, Zardari expressed confidence in the Peoples Party's future.

## Bolan Mail restored from Quetta to Karachi after one year & four months

QUETTA: The operation of Bolan Mail was restored between Quetta and Karachi on Monday. The inauguration of restoration of the Bolan Mail was held at the Quetta Railway Station.

The Divisional Superintendent of Railways Quetta, Yousaf Leghari formally inau-



gurated the Bolan Mail.

The high ups of Pakistan Railways were also present on the occasion.

Needless to mention here that the Bolan Mail has been restored after one year and four months. The operation of Bolan Mail was suspended on August 20 last year due to the devastating floods in the province.

Speaking to the media persons on the occasion, the DS Railways said that the Bolan Mail has been restored after one year and four months. He announced that by the grace of Allah Almighty, the Nawab Akbar Bugti Express would also be restored within couple of months. He said that the fate of economy class in Bolan Mail has been fixed as Rs. 2200 per passenger, which is normal.



ZIARAT: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki addressing a ceremony held in connection with Quaid Day at Ziarat Residency

## Election 2024: ECP receives over 28,000 nomination papers from candidates

7,713 and 18,546 people submit papers for NA and provincial seats

ISLAMABAD (INP):

With the deadline for the submission of nomination papers expiring on Sunday, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has received a total of 28,626 nomination papers from prospective candidates across the country aiming to contest upcoming polls slated for February 8, 2024.

As per the ECP's data seen by Geo News, 7,242 men along with 471 women have filed nomination papers for national assembly seats (general), whereas for provincial assemblies, the number stands at 17,744 and 802, respectively.

The ECP is currently scrutinising the nomination

papers filed by the candidates with the stage set to culminate on December 30 (Saturday).

Meanwhile, appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers can be submitted by January 3, and decisions on these appeals will be made by January 10.

The top electoral body will issue the list of candidates on January 11, with candidates having the option to withdraw until January 12 i.e., before the ECP allots electoral symbol on January 13.

As per the data shared by the ECP, a total of 459

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## Flag hoisting ceremony at Quaid Residency Ziarat: Interim Govt endeavouring to provide relief to masses by putting Balochistan on path of peace & progress: CM

Mir Ali Mardan Domki pays homage to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah for visionary leadership, untiring struggle to get separate state for Muslims of sub-continent

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki has stated that the interim government is endeavouring to provide relief to the masses by putting the province on path of peace and development. The Chief Minister said that the numerous minerals as well as the unique Gwadar deep seaport, Saindak and Reko Dik projects are located in Balochistan.

The work is being done on priority basis on the China-Pak Economic Cor-

ridor as well as the development projects including those of dams and roads.

These and similar other views were expressed by the caretaker Chief Minister while addressing the ceremony organised to mark the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah at the Quaid residency Ziarat on Monday.

The Chief Minister said that we had been able to get an independent Muslim state on August 14, 1947 just because of the visionary leadership, untiring efforts and continuous struggle of the Quaid. The

flag hoisting ceremony was attended by the caretaker provincial ministers, high ranking civil and military officers, tribal elders and students of different educational institutions.

He said that we got the country after great sacrifices and in this, the great services of the Quaid have been written with the golden words, he maintained.

He said that it is utmost endeavour of the provincial government to provide relief to the masses by putting the province on path of peace and development with support of the Pak

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## Government releases all Baloch protestors

ISLAMABAD (APP): The government has released all the remaining 290 Baloch protestors, in light of the deliberations of the committee formed by Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

The decision to release the arrested protestors was taken in view of the directions of the honorable court, an Interior Ministry spokesperson said in a statement on Monday.

He said that peaceful protest was the right of every citizen, but no one was allowed to take the law into their hands. The security of the Capital's Red Zone, where constitutional institutions and the Diplomatic Enclave were located, would be ensured at all costs, the spokesperson added.

He said that a special assistance center was set up by the Islamabad Police, which could be contacted at telephone numbers 0519001534 and 03459600622 or email address assistance.ictp@gmail.com.



NAWABSHAH: Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari inspecting different arts and science projects prepared by students of Bakhtawar Cadet College

## Bilawal vows to abolish 17 federal ministries if PPP voted into power

PPP chief says Rs1,500 billion subsidy given to the "elites" in various sectors including energy, fertiliser

NAWABSHAH (INP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Monday vowed to abolish 17 federal ministries if his party elected into power following general elections to save taxpayers "Rs300 billion".

Addressing a public gathering in Nawabshah, Bilawal said the 17 federal ministries should have been devolved to provinces after the 18th Constitutional Amendment, Geo News reported.

The PPP chief said Rs300 billion was spent on the ministries and an Rs1,500 billion subsidy was given by the government to the "elites" in various sectors including energy, fertiliser and others.

Bilawal said his party would end the subsidy for elites to provide funds to labourers and farmers through cards, he said.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment was passed on April 8, 2010. It devolved multiple federal ministries and powers to provinces. It divested the president of all his executive authority and made him a ceremonial head of the state.

Calling the youth the future of the country, the PPP chief said old politicians are a thing of the past. Bilawal said the country's issues could be resolved by burying the politics of "hatred and division".

He highlighted that the country is facing enormous challenges related to the economy and climate change.

## Abdullah rules out normalcy unless India addresses Kashmir's core issue through talks with Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): National Conference President Farooq Abdullah has denounced the normalcy propaganda being peddled by the Modi-led Indian regime in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and asked for addressing the core issue of Kashmir through talks with Pakistan.

According to Kashmir Media Service, talking in Srinagar, Farooq Abdullah said, militancy is alive in Jammu and Kashmir and it cannot be finished by the use of military or police, urging New Delhi to find ways to address its root cause.

"Shouting normalcy or propagating tourist arrivals," he said adding that peace will not finish militancy which is still alive. Modi government, he

said, is claiming that militancy has finished with the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, but four years down the line, it is still there and will not finish till we try to understand its root, a reference to the lingering Kashmir dispute.

He was reacting to the killing of retired police officer who was shot dead at his Gantmulla village in Baramulla district.

"Those who are claiming normalcy are silent... they tried to heal the wounds in a superficial manner rather than addressing the root cause," Abdullah said.

He said the Modi government has to find ways in the right perspective to end bloodshed in Jammu and Kashmir, and advised New Delhi that if it really wants to end militancy, it

will have to "look for ways rather than claiming normalcy or talking about tourism which is fragile under the shadow of terrorism".

The use of military or police is not going to finish militancy, he said. "We have to go deeper and address the root cause to finish it off."

Asked about recent incidents in the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri, Abdullah said this contradicts the government's claims that everything is 'honky-dory'.

"Where are those shouting normalcy? Nothing is going to be achieved by propaganda as people are dying here. They have to find a solution and Farooq Abdullah does not have a book with a ready-

made solution," he said.

Asked whether he wants India and Pakistan to talk to address the problem, Abdullah said the central government has to decide on the subject.

Abdullah demanded a judicial inquiry into the killing of the three civilians in Indian army's custody and exemplary punishment to those involved in the brutal murder. "The killing of the civilians is a sad incident and a human rights violation," he said.



ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi, First Lady Begum Samina Arif Alvi and federal ministers cutting cake to celebrate the 147th birth anniversary of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.



ZIARAT: Guard of honour being presented to Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki at Ziarat Residency

## Pak vs Aus: Rizwan replaces Sarfaraz as 12-men squad announced for second Test

Five-day Boxing Day Test will begin today at Melbourne Cricket Ground

### Sports Desk

MELBOURNE: The Pakistan Cricket Board Monday announced the 12-men squad for the second Test against Australia with Sarfaraz Ahmed being replaced as the wicketkeeper by Mohammad Rizwan.

The five-day Boxing Day Test will begin on December 26 (Tuesday) at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

The cricket body, how-

ever, said that the playing XI will be named tomorrow.

Test captain Shan Masood, while speaking during a press conference, said Sarfaraz made a great comeback after four years.

"However, Rizwan's record was looking very good in this condition and considering that, he was selected for the playing XI," said the captain.

The 34-year-old skipper said that "dropping" is

not an appropriate word to use for Sarfaraz as he has been given some rest. "Sarfaraz will get a chance to play where the conditions are favourable for him," he added.

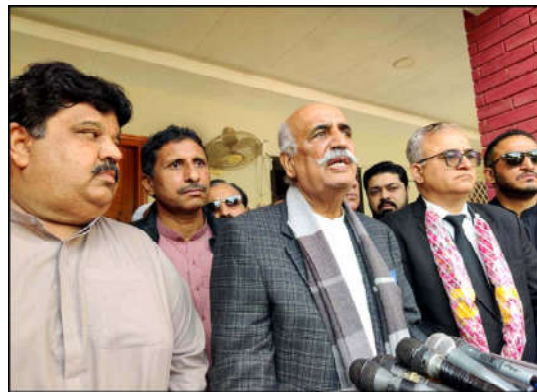
Masood said the Green Shirts will have to improve their batting, adding that the batters will have to play a bit fast as the team is playing 100 overs.

"Test cricket is difficult for fast bowlers," added the captain.

Meanwhile, Australia named an unchanged XI for the Boxing Day Test.

12-men squad  
Shan Masood ©, Shaheen Shah Afridi (vc), Imam-ul-Haq, Abdullah Shafique, Babar Azam, Saud Shakeel, Muhammad Rizwan (wk), Salman Ali Agha, Hasan Ali, Mir Hamza, Aamir Jamal, Sajid Khan

Australia XI  
David Warner, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Mitch Marsh, Alex Carey, Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins ©, Nathan Lyon, Josh Hazlewood



SUKKUR: Peoples Party (PPP) Leader, Khurshid Ahmed Shah talking to media persons after submits nomination papers to Returning Officer for participate in General Election, in Sukkur.

## Solangi stresses on democratic traditions.

Continued from page 1

traditions. "Respecting the Constitution is crucial as progress rests in following the law. Deviating from this may lead to chaos and a breach of constitutional principles," the minister said.

Solangi asserted that the country could overcome its prevailing challenges by wholeheartedly embracing the principles advocated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The Quaid, a proponent of the rule of law, advocated for its application impartially, regardless of right or wrong, he said, emphasizing the importance of respecting diverse opinions.

The minister observed that despite acknowledging the oppressive nature of British laws, Jinnah was steadfast in preserving the integrity of the legal system. He held the firm belief that all citizens were equal, emphasizing that genuine value was found in one's character and dedication to peaceful political pursuits.

Secretary Information & Broadcasting Ms Shahera Shahid, in her vote of thanks speech, commended the students for their insightful vision which they ex-

pressed through speeches. They were a guarantee for the country's bright future, she said, expressing satisfaction on the growing number of girls excelling in different fields of life.

The DEMP organized a series of speech competitions in connection with the Quaid's Day, which began in Karachi and then in Lahore, and finally at Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

The 10 students, who delivered speeches today, were the winners of the competition among the students of ICT model schools and colleges under the FDE.

Aimen Farhan was stood first while Sundas Farooq and Feroza Bibi claimed second and third positions among the 10 students, and received cash prizes of Rs 20,000, Rs 15,000, and Rs 10,000 respectively, along with published books from DEMP.

The remaining seven students, including Feroza Bibi, Zain Ali, Farqunallah, Aysha Hamad, Mahnoor Baloch, Fabiha Shahzadi and Saleh Tariq were awarded DEMP's published books and participation certificates.

## ECP Orders: Islamabad IG, deputy commissioner removed

ISLAMABAD (INP): In line with the directions of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the Establishment Division Monday removed Islamabad Inspector General of Police (IGP) Dr Akbar Nisar Khan and Deputy Commissioner Irfan Nawaz Memon from their posts with immediate effect.

It is pertinent to mention here that then-DIG (grade-20) Nasir was appointed as the top cop in the federal capital in May 2022, by the former Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)-led coalition government.

In October, the ECP had asked the interior ministry to transfer the officers after different political parties filed complaints against them fearing they may influence the outcome

of the upcoming elections.

In November, the interior ministry asked the Establishment Division to transfer the Islamabad IG and the deputy commissioner without further delay in light of the directives issued by the ECP. However, the division turned a deaf ear towards the directives. Last week, the ECP summoned the Establishment Division secretary, seeking an explanation for not removing the officers. The ECP directed the secretary to appear before it on December 26.

In a bid to avoid any departmental action or punishment, the authorities removed the officers from their posts just a day before the Establishment Division secretary was to appear before the electoral watchdog.

## Arafat named Pakistan's high-performance coach for New Zealand T20Is

LAHORE (INP): There's been another change in the Pakistan coaching set-up, with Yasir Arafat joining the crew for the side's five-match T20I series in New Zealand. Arafat has been appointed high-performance coach, and will replace the current man in the role, Simon Helmot.

It was a relatively late decision on the part of the PCB, and Arafat will fly directly to New Zealand with Pakistan's T20I specialists. It is understood that he has been assigned to the national side for just that one series for the moment. Helmot had been named as part of the coaching staff for the ongoing

Australia series, but according to a PCB source, he has personal commitments.

This marks yet another change since Mohammad Hafeez was given the role of team director and head coach for Pakistan's tour of Australia, replacing Mickey Arthur and Grant Bradburn. Arthur and Bradburn are still on the PCB's books, but did not travel to Australia, and have not yet been assigned elsewhere. Following Hafeez's appointment, Umar Gul was announced as the fast-bowling coach, Saeed Ajmal as the spin-bowling coach, Adam Hoolioake as the batting coach, and Helmot the high-performance coach.

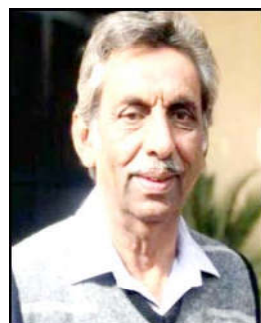
## Advocate Zahid Muqem Ansari passes away

### Independent Report

QUETTA: Zahid Muqem Ansari, Advocate Supreme Court who was passed away in Karachi on Friday laid to rest in local graveyard of Karachi.

He was son of Muhammad Muqem Ansari, brother of Javed Muqem Ansari, Shahid Muqem Ansari, Sajid Muqem Ansari and Ubaid Muqem Ansari and cousin of Yousaf Ansari.

His fatiha khawani will be held at his resident located at House No. 11,



Survey 53, Defence Officers Housing Scheme Zarhoon Road Quetta from 27th to 29th December.

## Ceremonies organize across district on birth day of Quaid-e-Azam

By Rana Shahid Mehmood

KOT ADDU: According to the details, a prestigious ceremony was organized on the birthday of Quaid-e-Azam in Government Girls High School Mochi Wala. Deputy Commissioner Kot Addu Syed Munawer Abbas Bukhari attended as a special guest.



The children presented a tableau on the efforts of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in making Pakistan.

The premises of the school were decorated with posters of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and green crescent flags. Deputy Commissioner Kot Addu Syed Munawer Abbas Bukhari cut the cake with the children who presented the tableau.

The school children also wore Jinnah cap along with Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah style dress.

School teachers and Deputy Commissioner Kot Addu, while addressing the children, shown light on the life of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The Deputy Commissioner said that this country was made the Islamic Republic of Pakistan by sacrificing thousands of lives.

The Deputy Commissioner taught the lesson of brotherhood, protection of minorities, giving equal rights to people of every colour and face.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a role model for everyone in Pakistan. This country and everyone living in it love their leader.

## ECP establishes election appeal tribunals to review nomination paper objections

ISLAMABAD (INP): Following the conclusion of the nomination paper collection phase nationwide, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has taken a proactive step by establishing Election Appeal Tribunals to meticulously address objections raised against nomination papers.

Comprising judges from five different high courts, these tribunals are set to operate from January 3 to January 10, providing a dedicated platform for the scrutiny of objections. The distribution of judges reflects a balanced representation, with five judges from

Peshawar High Court, nine from Lahore High

Court, two from Islamabad, and two from Balochistan High Court, each assigned to carefully evaluate objections in their respective jurisdictions.

One notable aspect of this process is the appointment of Justice Faisal Zaman Khan, who will preside over objections related to the reserved seats for women and minorities in the Punjab National Assembly. His role signifies a specialized focus on ensuring fair representation and inclusivity in the political landscape.

In the Faisalabad and

Sargodha Divisions, objections pertaining to national and provincial general seats will be heard by Justice Asjad Javed Gharal. Simultaneously, Justice Sultan Tanveer Ahmad will oversee objections from Bahawalpur Divisions and District Lodhran concerning ethnic and provincial general seats.

This initiative underscores the Election Commission's commitment to upholding the integrity of the electoral process, ensuring that the rights of candidates and the democratic principles of the nation remain at the forefront.

## Minorities enjoy complete religious freedom in Pakistan: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Monday said that all minorities, including the Christian community in Pakistan, enjoyed complete religious freedom.

In his message of Christmas greetings to the Christian community, the minister said the Constitution of Pakistan guaranteed protection to the rights of minorities.

"Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah made it clear in his address to the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947 that the rights of minorities will be fully protected in the state of Pakistan," Murtaza Solangi added. The minister said the Christian community had played an important role in the development and prosperity of Pakistan. All Pakistanis were united for the development and prosperity of the country, Murtaza Solangi maintained. He said, he equally shared the joy of the Christian community on Christmas.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi presents a certificate to participant during the speech competition on Quaid Day organized by DEMP at Information Service Academy.

## Terrorist attack on police station foiled in Lakki Marwat

LAKKI MARWAT (INP): The police foiled a terrorist attack on a police station and forcing the attackers to flee.

According to a private TV channel, armed miscreants stormed Gambella police station of Lakki Marwat on Sunday-Monday midnight. However, the police personnel through quick response foiled the attack and assailants were forced to escape.

## Interim Govt..

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army and security institutions. He particularly said that the role of Pak army and Frontier Corps has been very important with regard to development and maintaining peace in the province.

He commended the role of army and FC in different sectors including education, health, sports besides tackling the challenges of floods and other natural disasters in the province.

The Chief Minister pointed out that an important reason behind backwardness of the province has been the insufficient development investment.

He said that the incumbent provincial government has taken positive steps for the help of people of Balochistan.

He referred the initiatives of Health Card besides other ones meant for providing maximum relief to the marginalised segments of the society.

## ECP receives over 28,000...

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and 1,365 nomination papers have been received by the electoral body for the reserved seats for national and provincial legislature, respectively.

Meanwhile, on the reserved seats for non-Muslims, 361 men and 32 women have submitted their nomination papers for provincial assemblies. For national assembly seats, the number stands at 140 and 10, respectively.

A total of 7,713 people have submitted their nomination papers for national assembly seats (general), with the number standing at 18,546 for provincial assemblies (general).

Here's a brief province-wise breakdown of the nomination papers filed across the country.

**Balochistan**  
The top electoral body received a total of 2,669 nomination papers of which 631 were for general national assembly seats, whereas 1,788 were for general provincial assembly seats.

Meanwhile, 183 women along with 67 non-Muslims submitted nomination papers for their reserved seats, respectively.

**Sindh**  
The ECP received a total of 6,498 nomination papers in the province, with 1,681 candidates seeking to contest polls for the national assembly (general), whereas 4,265 nomination papers were sub-

mitted for provincial assembly seats (general).

A total of 427 nomination papers were filed for women's reserved seats, along with 125 who seek to contest polls from the reserved seats for non-Muslims in the province.

**Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**  
A total of 5,278 nomination papers have been filed in the province, with 1,322 candidates seeking to contest polls for the national assembly (general), whereas 3,464 nomination papers were submitted for provincial assembly seats (general).

A total of 418 nomination papers were filed for women's reserved seats, along with 74 non-Muslims applying to contest elections from their respective reserved seats.

**Punjab**  
The province saw a total of 13,823 nomination papers being filed with 3,871 and 9,029 nomination papers being filed for national and provincial assembly seats (general), respectively.

A total of 796 and 127 people filed their nomination papers for the reserved seats for women and non-Muslims, respectively.

**Islamabad**  
The federal capital saw a total of 208 people submitting their nomination papers for the national assembly (general), whereas 150 nomination papers were filed on the reserved seats for non-Muslims.



**ISLAMABAD:** Activists of Jammu Kashmir Pir Panjal Freedom Movement holds banner and shouting slogans during protest outside National Press Club against the Indian Forces un humane behavior with Kashmir's and the murdered of Kashmir's Youngsters at Poonch district of the IIOK.

## Capitalizing youth's potential for Eco-Entrepreneurship critical to address Pak environmental issues

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** The experts at a dialogue on Rethinking Urban Development in Pakistan: The Potential of Youth for Eco-Entrepreneurship have said that capitalizing on youth's potential for Eco-Entrepreneurship in managing urbanization well in Pakistan and aligning it with natural resource conservation is imperative for a livable and climate-resilient future.

This entails a critical assessment of the current and future urban trends, incorporating principles of sustainability in the urban development process, and bringing together thinkers and implementers for co-creating solutions to this complex problem. Youth

can play an important role in this regard especially since youth forms a sizable segment of the population and is likely to be most impacted if proactive steps are not taken to enhance environmental protection.

Institute of Urbanism (IoU) and School of Leadership Foundation (SoLF) with the support of the U.S. Embassy Islamabad organized a dialogue titled 'Rethinking Urban Development in Pakistan: The Potential of Youth for Eco-Entrepreneurship'. In the session, the students of Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) who were a part of the 02-month Green Urban Development School (GUDS) shared the projects

they proposed for solutions on urban solid waste management and urban water management in Islamabad with the relevant experts, media, policy-makers, and researchers and discussed how such solutions can be scaled up in the city to create a long term impact to encourage green development practices in Islamabad.

In Pakistan, unleashing the potential of youth is the game changer in climate adaptation. Their fresh perspectives and innovative ideas break conventional boundaries, paving the way for sustainable solutions. Engaging youth is crucial for understanding local contexts, as their deep knowledge of community

dynamics informs effective adaptation strategies for green urban development. These empowered youth aren't just researchers; they become the driving force behind community outreach, advocating for policy changes that prioritize sustainability and resilience. In a nutshell, investing in youth engagement in climate adaptation research is the catalyst for a resilient and environmentally just future in Pakistan, said Mariyam Irfan, Managing Director at SoLF in her welcome remarks. With the increase in various amenities and infrastructural development in an urban environment, people are shifting from rural to urban areas.

## Christmas celebrations in Pakistan, Joyful festivities across the nation

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** The Christian community in Pakistan on Monday embraced the spirit of Christmas with traditional zeal and enthusiasm, mirroring global celebrations from official gatherings to cake-cutting ceremonies and illuminated houses, the festive fervour was evident as the community delved into the heartwarming activities to mark this joyous occasion.

Various ministries and departments in Pakistan held special cake-cutting ceremonies on the working day preceding Christmas, extending happiness to Christian staff members and recognizing their valuable contributions.

To mark the Christmas celebrations the Associated Press of Pakistan in Islamabad, led by Managing Director Muhammad Asim Khichi, held a notable cake-cutting ceremony to honour Christian employees and commend their role in the country's progress.

Churches across the nation hosted special services where prayers resonated for the peace, progress, and prosperity of

Pakistan, as well as the safety of humanity from natural disasters and diseases. These gatherings were a testament to the significance of faith during the festive season.

Key elements of the Christmas festivities included decorating Christmas trees, the arrival of Santa Claus, church prayers, carol singing, and the exchange of gifts. The Christmas tree, adorned with various ornaments and topped with an angel or star, symbolized the joyous spirit of the season.

The National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage (Lok Virsa) collaborated with UP Church and Saint Thomas Church Islamabad for special programs at the Pakistan National Heritage Museum. These included a cake-cutting ceremony, congregation, Christmas tree erection, artisans' exhibition, and joyful activities like the distribution of sweets by Santa Claus, along with Christmas and folk songs and dances. The Executive Director Lok Virsa Uzair Khan felicitated the Chris-

tian community at their special occasion. In a display of solidarity, Islamabad Traffic Police organized a Christmas ceremony, distributing gifts among employees. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) arranged a magnificent event presided over by Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, showcasing support for the university's Christian employees.

With a commitment to safety, Islamabad Police deployed over 1500 policemen around churches and public places, ensuring comprehensive security arrangements for Christmas. The tight security included special checks outside churches, guaranteeing a peaceful celebration for all.

Notable in the capital were the vibrant Christmas displays in shopping malls, offices, and hotels, enticing visitors, especially children. Christian communities added to the festive atmosphere by organizing bazaars with a variety of Christmas-related items. In areas where a significant Christian population resides, such as Katchi Abadis.

Churches across the nation hosted special services where prayers resonated for the peace, progress, and prosperity of



**ISLAMABAD:** Christian community members cutting cake on Christmas day at Fatima Church.

## Social media users celebrates 147th birth anniversary of 'Jinnah'

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** On the 147th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Pakistani nation shared Quaid's inspiring quotes and photos from his speeches on Monday to express their respect and love for Jinnah, who fought selflessly for the Muslims of undivided India and laid the foundations of a new country, Pakistan.

"Social media users, while paying rich tributes, had posted messages on various platforms commemorating his sacrifices and struggles in achieving a

separate homeland for the Muslim population," said a report aired by the PTV news channel.

Social media is the best opportunity for students because it provides a good platform for learning and knowing about the historical struggle of the founder of the nation, said a teacher.

Pakistanis, including various politicians and celebrities, also posted heartfelt messages for Muhammad Ali Jinnah on Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and Instagram posts, said a citizen.

Thanks indeed, Sir, for

your diligent efforts in making a beautiful and independent homeland for us, said a Facebook user while sharing the post. On his anniversary, we remember the founding father of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, with respect and gratitude, according to another post on Twitter. "There is no power on Earth that can undo Pakistan," said a politician while sharing his views on Twitter. Let's pay real tribute to Quaid-e-Azam by making Pakistan as per his dream and vision, said an Instagram post shared by a celebrity.

## Jamal Shah pays tribute to Quaid-e-Azam, calls for unity, progress

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** In a heartfelt tribute, Caretaker Minister for Culture and National Heritage, Syed Jamal Shah, on Monday commemorated the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Acknowledging Jinnah's unwavering determination, Jamal Shah emphasized how the founder's visionary leadership transformed the dream of a separate homeland for Muslims into a tangible reality.

Jamal Shah urged the nation to unite on this significant day, echoing the spirit that fueled the independence movement for the creation of Pakistan. Regardless of differences in caste, creed, or faith, he called for collective efforts towards a common goal.

Expressing his hopes for the nation's future, Jamal Shah prayed for strength and unity. He envisioned a Pakistan that lives up to the ideals set by Quaid-e-Azam, aspiring to

become the strongest nation on earth.

Highlighting the caretaker government's commitment under the leadership of Prime Minister Anwar Ul Haq Kakar, Jamal Shah shared their dedication to building a society free of corruption. Emphasizing a system that uplifts the poor and underprivileged, he underlined the alignment of these efforts with the founder's vision for Pakistan.

In a broader message of inclusivity, Jamal Shah extended warm greetings to the Christian community in Pakistan on the joyous occasion of Christmas. This gesture underscored the minister's commitment to fostering harmony and celebrating the diversity within the nation. This tribute not only commemorates the visionary leader Quaid-e-Azam but also calls for collective action and unity to fulfill the aspirations of a stronger, more prosperous Pakistan.

## HEC Chairman pays tribute to Quaid-e-Azam, emphasize youth to follow his vision

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed Monday paid eulogizing tributes to the Father of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, emphasized upon the youth to adopt Quaid's attributes of honesty, hard work, perseverance and dedication.

Talking to PTV news channel, the Chairman said that the young population should follow the footsteps of Jinnah and would have to show dedication to develop Pakistan on the pattern as envisioned by its founder Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah as it is need of hour.

Calling upon the

youth to contribute towards the development of the country, he said today, every person, every institution, and every organization has to move forward with the pledge that whatever I do should be for a developed Pakistan.

He said that youngsters are very important elements of the societies, adding, youth should work hard for their character building.

"We as a nation need to understand the importance of independence in its true spirit", he added.

He said there was a dire need to keep high the message and thoughts of the great Muslim philosopher in practical life.



**ISLAMABAD:** Children enjoying on the Jumping jack in a local Park during the celebrations of Christmas at Katchi Abadi area in Federal Capital.

## Authorities crack down on begging in twin cities, 67 accused face legal action

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** In a bid to curb the rising trend of professional begging in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, authorities have implemented robust measures resulting in legal actions against 67 beggars and throughout December 2023, about 42 cases were registered, signalling a determined effort to address the issue.

This move aimed not only to decrease the prevalence of begging but also to encourage alternative means of earning a livelihood. The Islamabad Deputy Commissioner's office revealed that after a thorough investigation process, legal proceedings were initiated against 67 individuals involved in professional begging. These cases, now in the hands of the competent jurisdiction, mark a significant step in tackling the persistent is-

ssue, an official in the Ministry of Interior told APP.

The measures taken have led to a noticeable decline in begging activities across the twin cities. Officials express optimism that these actions will redirect beggars towards more sustainable sources of income, emphasizing the importance of hard work and labor.

He further said that efforts to address inflation and poverty are also underway, with the government working tirelessly to provide equal employment opportunities for all segments of society. The goal is to create an environment where citizens can earn a living through legitimate means, reducing dependency on begging as a source of income.

Notable areas identified for professional begging include Saddar, Committee,

## Nilofer to stress on women empowerment in Christmas Community

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** Chairperson of National Commission for the Status of Women (NCSW) Nilofer Bakhtiar extended her heartfelt greeting to the Christian community on the occasion of Christmas that minorities in Pakistan enjoy all political, economic, and social rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan.

In her Wishing message on Twitter, She added that everyone a joyous and Merry Christmas May the spirit of unity and peace prevail. "Let's celebrate diversity and empower the women in our minority to contribute to the tapestry of our shared future," She added.

## 11 outlaws arrested; drugs and weapons recovered

**Independent Report**  
**ISLAMABAD:** Islamabad Capital Police apprehended 11 outlaws from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered drugs and weapons from their possession, a public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city.

Following these directions, the Tarnol police team arrested three accused namely Noman, Nisar Khan and Naem Ullah and recovered two pistols and 1230 gram heroin from their possession. The Sabzi Mandi police team arrested an accused namely Hassan and recovered 1133 gram hashish from his possession. Likewise, the Noon police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Aryan and recovered one 30 bore pistol from his possession, while the police team also arrested an accused namely Muhammad Ali.

## AIOU to hold convocation on January 31

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** The Convocation of Alama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) will be held on January 31, 2024, at the Jinnah Convention Center, Islamabad. According to the AIOU, the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi, who is also the Chancellor of the University, will be the chief guest at the event. The ceremony will be hosted by the Vice Chancellor, of AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood. Federal ministers, secretaries, senior officials of HEC, vice chancellors of various universities, rectors, renowned journalists, eminent social personalities, deans, professors, principal officers, faculty members, and students

of AIOU will participate in the convocation.

Convocation is the most important event of the university, Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood has directed students to register for convocation by January 5 to ensure maximum participation. Graduates who have secured 70% marks in all degree programs from the semester of Autumn 2004 to the semester of Spring 2022 are eligible for registration. Students are directed to visit the convocation website [convocation.aiou.edu.pk](http://convocation.aiou.edu.pk) for registration and more information. The administration of AIOU has completed preparations for the upcoming convocation ceremonies.

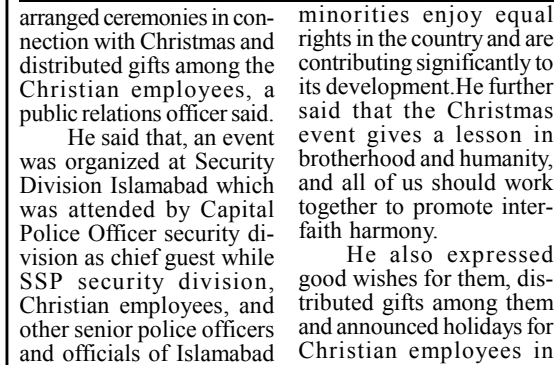
## CPO distribute gifts among Christian employees in connection with Christmas

**Independent Report**  
**ISLAMABAD:** Following the special directions of the Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police arranged ceremonies in connection with Christmas and distributed gifts among the Christian employees, a public relations officer said.

He said that, an event was organized at Security Division Islamabad which was attended by Capital Police Officer security division as chief guest while SSP security division, Christian employees, and other senior police officers and officials of Islamabad Capital Police were also

present.

On this occasion, the CPO security division said that we are proud of our Christian employees who are serving in various wings of the force. They said that



**ISLAMABAD:** Muslim police officers presenting gifts to Christian employees during Christmas.

## Special Traffic education, enforcement campaign in full swing

**Independent Report**  
**ISLAMABAD:** Islamabad Capital Police took prompt action against underage motorcyclists and drivers and imposed fines on them under the campaign of Special Traffic education and enforcement. Following the directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan and CPO Safe City/Traffic, the Islamabad Capital Police launched a special traffic education and enforcement campaign in order to solve the traffic related problems faced by the citizens on roads, a police public relations officer said.

He said that, campaign is underway against under-

age bikers, those involved in rash driving and violating traffic rules. Under the supervision of chief traffic officer Islamabad, zonal DSP's are ensuring strict action against those violating traffic rules. In this regard, Islamabad capital police already formed special squads to set up special roadblocks in major highways and squares of Islamabad in order to take strict legal action against underage drivers and other traffic rules violators. Pamphlets and leaflets are being distributed to create awareness among citizens. While various teams of the education wing are spreading awareness about road safety rules among the road users.

## Gas pipeline explosion in Rawalpindi, no casualties reported

**ISLAMABAD (APP):** A house collapsed after an alleged gas pipeline explosion which was reported in Dhamiala village of Rawalpindi district of Punjab on early Monday morning. According to details, rescue sources said the explosion occurred early this morning and soon after the explosion, three firefighter tenders and six emergency vehicles reached the site immediately. Private news channels reported. No casualties were reported so far in the incident, they said. The police also called the Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) to investigate the nature of the blast.



**ISLAMABAD:** Musician Raees Khan performing on stage during ceremony to mark the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah at Pakistan National Council of Arts in Federal Capital.

Daily Voice of Masses  
**Independent**

Tuesday December 26, 2023

## Gaza bloodbath

While other news, both domestic and foreign, compete for people's attention, we should not forget that one of the most brutal massacres of the modern age, perpetrated by one of the world's most powerful military machines, continues in the Gaza Strip against a starved and terrorised civilian population. Since Oct 7, Israel has been doing in Gaza what it has always been doing to the Palestinian people since the Nakba, but in more concentrated fashion. The torture, murder, humiliation and pillage the Arabs of Palestine have faced since 1948 — and even before, since the Zionist encroachment of Arab land began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century — can be seen in condensed form in what the Israeli state has unleashed over the past 80 days or so in the forsaken Strip. Gaza has become an emblem for the hypocrisy of the 'international community', and the complete lack of empathy many of the self-professed global champions of human rights are capable of. They play politics to protect Israel at all costs as Palestinian children cry out in unbearable pain.

Some of this hypocrisy was on display at the UN Security Council, when the world body passed a resolution on Friday that called for the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, yet remained silent on stopping state-sponsored Israeli violence. As many global bodies observed, the resolution is meaningless: aid will be of little use as Tel Aviv continues to bomb Gaza. This pointless resolution is the result of much hard work by the US, which did all it could to prevent calls for a meaningful ceasefire, and abstained at the time of voting. True to form, Israel dismissed even this watered-down text, reflecting what it really thinks of world opinion. Meanwhile, famine-like conditions loom in Gaza, with the UN's World Food Programme saying the Strip faces "catastrophic conditions" as its people confront starvation. This is another war crime to be added to the many Israel has already committed against the Palestinians.

Unfortunately, those who are trying to tell Gaza's story continue to be exterminated; the Committee to Protect Journalists recently said 68 journalists and media workers have been killed since hostilities began. The vast majority of fatalities (61) are Palestinian. Moreover, Tel Aviv has told foreign wire services that it could not guarantee the safety of their journalists in Gaza. The message is clear: whoever dares to report on the misery in Gaza could themselves become a target of Israeli bombs. Yet even the death of 20,000 Palestinians — most of them women and children — has been unable to shake the world's conscience. The bravery and steadfastness of the Palestinian people can only be commended, while their killers and tormentors have shown they are capable of truly bestial violence.



Irfan Rizvi

Henry Ford, when unveiling the Model T, was asked why he developed an automobile without consulting public demand. His response, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."

This anecdote highlights the essence of forward-thinking innovation. It is especially pertinent to the debate in Pakistan's healthcare system about integrating robotic surgical systems in public hospitals. Critics, focusing on economic constraints, advocate for prioritising basic healthcare services. This perspective, while mindful of fiscal responsibility, overlooks the comprehensive nature of healthcare advancement and the diverse benefits of integrating advanced technologies.

Robotic surgery, often perceived as a luxury, is in fact a critical step towards healthcare modernisation. These systems, renowned for their precision and efficiency, promise improved outcomes, quicker recovery, and reduced complications, significantly impacting both individual and economic stability. This technology is a gateway to the digital transformation of surgical practice. With platforms like Proximie, surgeons, even in resource-limited settings, can access global expertise via a smartphone, democratising surgical education and enhancing patient safety. By adopting robotic surgery, Pakistan steps into a future where digital surgery enhances outcomes and broadens access to top-tier medical care.

The trajectory of robotic surgery in neighbouring India offers a compelling narrative for Pakistan. Since acquiring its first robot in 2006, India has established over 76 centres and trained more than 500 surgeons, a stark contrast to Pakistan's five centres and a handful of trained surgeons since its first acquisition in 2011. India's re-

cent launch of its own surgical robot, the SSI Mantra, in early 2023 marks a significant milestone in transitioning from technology consumers to creators. A salient point to consider in our discussion on robotic surgery is its unique and well-documented benefits in certain types of surgeries. It's important to recognise that while robotic surgery may not be a universal solution for all surgical interventions, it is particularly advantageous for specific surgeries routinely performed in tertiary care centres.

Robotic surgery excels in navigating challenging and hard-to-reach areas of the body, making it exceptionally beneficial in fields like urology, rectal surgery, gynecological oncology, treatment of other pelvic malignancies and thoracic cancers. For optimal outcomes, these procedures should ideally be conducted in high-volume, reputable centres.

Concentrating robotic surgeries in such settings not only helps in reducing costs and enhancing quality but also plays a crucial role in training the next generation of surgeons. This

strategic approach leverages the technology where it's most needed, ensuring both efficiency and excellence in specialised surgical care.

Criticism of robotic surgery's cost and perceived modest benefits in high-income countries overlooks its vital role in LMICs, which bear 92% of the global surgical burden yet have limited access to such advanced technologies. Contrasting with the US, which holds 70% of the world's robotic systems for only 5% of surgical volumes, LMICs' need for this technology is acute. Robotic surgery in these regions could significantly reduce physician burnout, surgical site infections, and hospital stays, addressing a critical gap in surgical care. Embracing this technology is not just about cost; it's about bridging a significant healthcare divide, aligning with the goals of global health equity and providing essential surgical care where it's most needed.

Drawing from global experiences, such as the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, one understands the intricate balance required in

health technology assessment. NICE's health technology assessment (HTA) policy, while focused on cost-effectiveness, has also been criticised for stifling innovation and yielding to political influence from authorities in power.

While these global insights are useful, LMICs like Pakistan need to develop their own nuanced approach to HTA, one that considers local healthcare needs and the potential long-term benefits of advanced technologies. Here, the conversation transcends the realms of technology and economics. It calls for examining governance and accountability in healthcare interventions.

The reality regarding maternal and child health in Pakistan is worth considering. The high maternal and child mortality rates in Pakistan have led the government and donors to identify maternal and child health as a priority on the health agenda. Over the last 20 years, a total of \$225 million have been spent by foreign funded programmes to improve maternal and child outcomes. However, based on a recent BMJ study by Malik et al. hardly

any tangible gains have been made so far. In contrast other South Asian countries like Bangladesh and Nepal have done significantly better.

Would the critics of this technology, when faced with the decision for themselves or their loved ones, adhere strictly to their principled stance? Or would the undeniable benefits of minimally invasive, precise, and advanced care offered by robotic surgery sway their choice? Furthermore, it provokes ethical reflection if critics, blessed with the means, choose to undergo robotic surgery abroad at considerable expense. Such a choice, while valid for an individual, raises an ethical conundrum. How can one justify denying the same advanced medical benefits to their less fortunate countrymen? This scenario highlights a deeper moral question: the responsibility of ensuring equitable access to the best available healthcare, irrespective of one's economic status. It is a reminder that healthcare decisions, at their core, are not just about economics or technology, but fundamentally about equity and empathy. -- Courtesy Dawn

## Global security initiative



Yang Yundong

In April 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Security Initiative (GSI) at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference. In February of this year, China released the Concept Paper of the GSI, proposing 20 priorities of cooperation under this framework, as well as suggestions for the platforms and mechanisms of cooperation.

The GSI is a complete system and is the result of applying the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy to the field of international security. It also improves and goes beyond the Western theory of geopolitical security.

The initiative is underpinned by 'six commitments' — staying committed to the vision of common, comprehensive, coop-

erative and sustainable security; staying committed to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries; staying committed to abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter; staying committed to taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously; staying committed to peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation; and staying committed to maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains. These six commitments are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, including macro thinking of top-level design as well as methods and pathways for addressing practical issues. They form an organic whole of dialectical unity.

Through the GSI, China seeks to work with the international community in upholding the spirit of the UN Charter, and calls for adapting to the profound changes in the international landscape through solidarity, addressing traditional and non-traditional security risks and challenges with a win-win mindset, and creating a new

path to security that features dialogue over confrontation, partnership over alliance, and win-win results over zero-sum game.

Over the past year and more, the GSI has been widely welcomed and warmly received by the international community. It has received support and appreciation from more than 100 countries and international and regional organizations, and has been written into a large number of bilateral and multilateral exchange and cooperation documents between China and other countries and international organizations. Steady progress has been made in cooperation under the GSI framework.

As a responsible major country, China actively implements the GSI, making significant contributions to the maintenance of world peace and security.

First, China has actively participated in and promoted multilateral security cooperation. It has dispatched the most peacekeepers among the permanent members of the UN Security Council and is the second largest contributor to the UN peace-

keeping budget. China firmly supports the global process of conventional arms control, and has completed its ratification of the UN Firearms Protocol. It supports the implementation of the 'Silencing the Guns in Africa' initiative. The country is actively engaged in international humanitarian demining cooperation, contributing to helping countries in the region eliminate this hazard and enhance the security and wellbeing of the people.

Second, China has actively carried out mediation diplomacy and made unremitting efforts to promote political settlement of hotspot issues. China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis and China's Position on the Afghan Issue both stand firmly on the side of peace. China successfully mediated the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which set a fine example for regional countries to resolve disagreements through dialogue and consultation and achieve neighbourly relations and friendship.

Since the latest outbreak of conflict between

Palestine and Israel, China has actively communicated and coordinated with the relevant parties, sent a special envoy to visit regional countries, and provided humanitarian assistance to Palestine immediately. China is working for a de-escalation of the situation, and to prevent the expansion of the fighting and a humanitarian disaster, in a bid to create conditions for a political settlement.

Third, China has engaged actively in cooperation with all parties in such nontraditional security areas as counterterrorism, cybersecurity, food security and climate change. The country has successfully held the first meeting of the China-Pakistan-Iran trilateral consultation on counterterrorism and security.

It has proposed the International Cooperation Initiative on Global Food Security under the framework of the G20, launched the center for disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation between China and Pacific Island countries, and promoted the establishment of a global law enforcement and security training system. China has also launched the Global Initiative on Data Security and the Global Initiative for Artificial Intelligence Governance, leading the international security governance process in emerging areas.

China attaches importance to Pakistan's vital role in maintaining global and regional peace and security and is willing to work together with Pakistan as well as the international community, to firmly uphold the UN-centered international order underpinned by international law. China is committed to tirelessly promoting world multipolarity and democratization of international relations, advocating and practicing genuine multilateralism, uniting with Global South countries, opposing any form of hegemony and bullying, pushing for the improvement of global security governance, facilitating political resolutions to international and regional hotspot issues, and injecting more stability and positive energy into the complex and varied international situation. -- Courtesy TheNews

## Two trajectories



Luay Shabanch

Last summer, I had the privilege of joining a Canadian delegation on a field mission to monitor a UNFPA-Canada-supported initiative — the Sihat Mand Khaandaan (SMK) programme — focused on promoting 'healthy families'. Our journey led us to the heart of Memon Gi Wasi village in Matiari district, Sindh, where we were welcomed to an "adolescent and youth-friendly space".

A few dozen young people and some delegation members sat on the sand under an old wooden roof, where we were briefed by the youth about their hopes and challenges and how their engagement with SMK activities had improved their lives. I eagerly absorbed the valuable insights of young women who had managed to discover hope amidst adversity and daunting circumstances. They were brilliantly drawing roadmaps and shaping their dreams, while benefiting from their participation in youth activities and methods they employed to help their communities.

The presentations by these amazing young females reminded me of the UNFPA model for the trajectory of the 10-year-old girl introduced in 2014. The model assumes two trajectories for the girl; the first is what I called at the time 'shining', and the alternative is 'down-nosing'. The shining trajectory starts by keeping the girl at school, protecting her from child marriage, in fact, delaying her marriage until she com-

pletes her education and is equipped with skills and confidence, provided a decent job opportunity and empowered to enjoy her rights. This leads to better health for the girl, a smaller family, lifelong education, and economic independence. Ultimately, she will be better equipped to make decisions about her own reproductive health and raise healthy, happy children, making her a woman leader in her family, community, and larger society, one who is fit to participate in politics and contribute to her nation's prosperity.

On the flip side, the downward trajectory starts with a 10-year-old girl discontinuing her education, leading to early or child marriage, early pregnancy, a growing number of children, health challenges, lack of skills, difficulty in securing stable employment, limited access to education, and heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence (GBV). The accelerators to lift the girl from the down-nosing to shining trajectory were identified by strengthened systems (education, sexual and reproductive health, GBV prevention and response), programmes (population and youth policies, capacity building for quality service provision, laws and policies upholding SRH rights, criminalising violence against women and ending discrimination), and individual capabilities (lifelong education, enabling work environment, knowledge, skills, opportunities and income-generating activities). Go-vernment spending on a 10-year-old on the down-nosing trajectory is far higher than the cost of investing in her education, skills, and opportunities in the shining trajectory.

Although investing in women is a human right, governments, too, can gain multiple benefits from such investment. Cultural barriers and discriminatory social norms are often guarded by community gatekeepers,

including women who enable the reinforcement of discriminatory value systems and myths within the household and family structure. Women with a high level of human capital are the natural agents of change in social norms that prevent socioeconomic progress.

Research shows that people live in cycles, and socioeconomic and demographic cycles are interlinked with strong association. Poor families are trapped because they have a bigger family size, a higher dependency on breadwinners, are uneducated and unhealthy, and have fewer chances of getting high-income jobs because of their economic burden. Breaking out of this vicious cycle and transitioning to a more prosperous path requires a change in family demographics, and this usually requires investments in women's human capital and opportunities.

Discussions at a recent population conference highlighted the experience of Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia, Tunisia, and Turkey, which showed that investing in women's human capital, skills, rights, and opportunities comprise a multiplying factor in calibrating population with resources. Pakistan lags behind countries such as Bangladesh and Malaysia, which have achieved remarkable progress in recent years in terms of economic growth and empowering women and integrating them as productive members of society. For example, the female labour force participation rate in Pakistan is 24 per cent compared with 43pc in Bangladesh and 55pc in Malaysia.

Pakistan has no choice but to allocate substantial funds and design long-term programmes to invest in women and girls to shift the nation's trajectory from 'down-nosing' to the 'shining' approach. -- Courtesy Dawn

## Bits of hope



Huma Yusuf

The focus on Pakistan's upcoming elections is of an existential nature: will they take place? Will the PTI endure in any form? Can Pakistani democracy survive such blatant orchestration? The answer to the last question is: it has to. And so we must seek for shreds of hope.

Our country's democratic system is arguably facing its darkest spell yet, which may seem a dramatic assessment as the hurly burly of elections kicks off. But this is against the backdrop of a censored media, enforced disappearances, suppression of minority rights, a compromised judicial system, including a push for civilian trials in military courts, and threats to the Constitution, particularly targeting the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. In this context, a sham election seems the least of one's problems.

The election itself, beyond the obvious puppet mastery, has more fundamental flaws, key among them the persistence of disenfranchisement. As Sarwar Bari wrote last month, up to 15 million voters across 102 (out of 134 districts) are missing from the electoral rolls.

This disenfranchisement is prevalent in Balochistan, where one-third of eligible voters in 31 districts have been excluded, but also in more developed parts of the country.

The missing voters include both men and women, with poverty likely a major reason for non-registration. The Ahmadi community is also systemically

denied suffrage due to requirements to flag voters' religious identities.

So where are those shreds of hope? The assumption is that sham elections erode a public's engagement with the democratic process. But ours is a nation accustomed to democratic perversions, and it has not yet lost the appetite for democracy (think of elections in 1988, 2008, and to some extent 2013). In dark political times, should we entertain the idea that the electoral charade itself has merit?

If nothing else, the February elections will keep the electoral machine moving. More than 128.5m voters are registered — no small feat. The election gender gap persists, with women accounting for only 46.13 per cent of registered voters. But enfranchisement is improving; the gender gap for the first time in a decade is less than 10m, and marginalised communities continue to seek representation (consider the candidacies of Nayab Ali and Sobia Khan who are championing transgender rights).

The tenuous link between polls and service delivery also endures. The powers that be acknowledge the need to mobilise 'electables' who draw votes in exchange for patronage (a road, a tube well) for their district. At a brighter moment in Pakistan's democratic trajectory, this trend must be entrenched with better local government structures to improve accountability.

There's also something to be said for instilling the electoral habit. Anyone who has cast a vote recalls the thrill of it — the joy of collective participation, the fleeting euphoria of empowerment, the pride of sporting an ink-stained thumb. Voting is addictive, and one hopes that the more than 59m voters under the age of 35 will leave the polls in February with a craving for more democ-

racry. Pakistan will head to the polls in a big year for elections — 76 countries, including eight of the 10 most populous, will hold elections in 2024. But democracy lovers are not celebrating. Many important elections (Pakistan, Russia, Bangladesh, Mexico) will not be free or fair, and other critical ones (the US, India, Indonesia) will be deeply flawed. Quality of polling, not quantity, is the purist's call.

However, even in the global context, there is some cause for optimism. Elections that are neither free nor fair are explicitly so. The widespread acknowledgement that some elections are democratic facades erodes trust in current political stakeholders, but should not in the long run irreparably damage democratic systems. Failures in representation, service delivery and policymaking will be blamed on the real power brokers and their complicit proxies, but not on the system itself. If the arc of the moral universe bends toward less nostalgia for autocrats, martial law and hybrid regimes, that is no bad thing. Another interesting trend is the re-engagement of voters in developed democracies with the power of their vote. One example of this is pro-Palestine US voters who will struggle to vote for Joe Biden given his support for Israel. The notion of voting for Biden to keep Trump out no longer seems compelling enough. Such thinking in the short term may lead to more instability and worse political outcomes, but in the longer run would invigorate issue- and values-based politics and reinstate the integrity of the vote, strengthening democracy overall. So darkness will persist, but democracy will prevail. Any other conclusion would be too bleak as we enter an annus electorum. -- Courtesy Dawn

## ‘Minorities must be treated with kindness’, CM Punjab

**Punjab govt celebrates birth anniversary of Quaid-i-Azam**

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: Caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi said on Monday that minorities must be treated with kindness as per the teachings of our beloved Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).  
He said this while addressing a prayer ceremony held at Cathedral Church here.

CM extended Christmas greeting to christian community.

Mohsin Naqvi said that Churches and houses damaged in Jaranwala incident had been repaired, while houses which had been burnt were provided financial assistance.

He further said that ‘after Jaranwala incident, ‘Meesaq’ centres have been established in all the districts for the protection of the rights of the minorities and the

promotion of inter-faith harmony”.

CM said that today biggest ‘Meesaq Centre’ will be inaugurated in Lahore.

For the first time Punjab Cabinet meeting was held in Jaranwala Church to express solidarity with christian community, he said and added that doors of Mosques were opened for Christians after Jaranwala incident.

Mohsin Naqvi said that Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah also emphasized on protecting rights of minorities.

He said that services of christian community in the field of education could not be denied.

CM said, “Sacred heart, Convent and other educational institutions of christian community are source of pride for all of us.” He said, “Muslims

deeply respect Hazrat Isa (AS) as one of the great messengers of Allah Almighty”.

It is pertinent to mention here that Archbishop of Lahore Sebastian Francis Shaw welcomed the CM at the Church and presented flowers to him. Christmas cake was also cut on the occasion.

Meanwhile the Punjab government on Monday celebrated the birth anniversary of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah in an unprecedented manner at Chief Minister’s office. According to a handout issued here, Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi and members of the cabinet participated in a cake-cutting ceremony, extending heartfelt wishes to the nation on the revered occasion of the Father of the Nation’s birth anniversary.



LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi cutting the cake on the occasion of Christmas Day at St. Anthony’s Church, in the City.

## Caretaker CM Sindh declares Mirpurkhas as load-shedding free district

MIRPURKHAS (APP): Sindh’s Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (retd) Maqbool Baqir on Monday declared Mirpurkhas load-shedding free on the occasion of Quaid’s birthday.

The announcement was made during a ceremony at the HESCO office in Mirpurkhas, attended by federal Minister for Power Muhammad Ali and Secretary Power Division Rashid Muhammad Langria, among others.

In his address, Justice (retd) Maqbool Baqir emphasized the importance

of timely bill payments and responsible electricity usage to sustain this load-shedding-free status.

He highlighted the efforts of HESCO workers in securing meters, transformers, and conducting developmental work to reduce losses from 30% to 17%. The Caretaker CM praised the ongoing nationwide campaign against electricity theft and urged public cooperation.

He commended the people of Mirpurkhas for their role in achieving the load-shedding-free status and expressed hope for similar initiatives in other

cities. Federal Minister Muhammad Ali and Secretary Energy Rashid Muhammad Langria acknowledged the collaborative efforts that led to this achievement, thanking the district administration, police, business community, and journalists.

CEO of HESCO, Bashir Ahmad Gujjar, provided details on the extensive work undertaken to secure Mirpurkhas against load shedding.

He highlighted the expected annual savings of 364 million units due to these efforts.

## Quaid-e-Azam changed map of sub-continent through democratic struggle: Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Haji Gulam Ali here Monday said that the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had changed the map of the sub-continent and made the creation of Pakistan possible for Muslims through a democratic struggle.

In a message on the 147th birthday anniversary of the legendary leader, Gulam Ali said that the ideology of Pakistan for Quaid-e-Azam was not acquiring merely a piece of land but the creation of a separate and sovereign

state where they can live a free and dignified life.

Paying rich tributes to the great Quaid, the Governor vowed to make every sacrifice for Pakistan. “Pakistan is our pride and identity and every citizen has to play a constructive role for its prosperity and progress by strictly adhering to faith, unity and discipline principle of the charismatic leader.”

He called for results-oriented efforts for national cohesiveness and unity to make Pakistan more stronger and prosperous.

## Fire break out due to gas leakage in Rawalpindi

RAWALPINDI (APP): A fire broke out due to a gas pipeline leakage in Dhanyal, Rawalpindi, on Monday. According to spokesperson Rescue 1122, six emergency vehicles, including three fire tenders, and more than a dozen personnel participated in the operation.

Fortunately, there were no reported casualties, but a house was badly damaged due to the fire. Soon after the incident, Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chatta, Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khuram Ali.

## Arts Council organizes conferences out of country besides Karachi: Minister

KARACHI (INP): Mohammad Ahmed Shah, the Provincial Minister for Information, Minority Affairs, Social Welfare, and President of Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi, stated that this year, the Arts Council organized conferences not only within the city but also extended its reach to the United States.

He expressed these thoughts while addressing the General Body meeting at the Arts Council of Pakistan on Sunday night. He mentioned that this year, Literature Festivals were organized in other cities of Pakistan as well, aiming to bring together all languages and communities of the country.

According to him, these initiatives were relatively successful. Shah noted that the all Arts Councils of Sindh came together for the first time, and with the collaboration of members from all over Sindh, he was selected as the President of the Arts Council of Pakistan.

He emphasized that

they are serving artists nationwide, and the credit for the social revolution goes to the members of the Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi, who trusted him.

Commissioner Karachi and Chairman Arts Council, Saleem Rajput, praised President Ahmed Shah’s efforts, saying that the people of Pakistan appreciate his endeavors. Saleem Rajput said that he himself is a member and came from Gilgit to cast his vote. He suggested organizing a program in Gilgit and Skardu through the Arts Council.

He mentioned that the Sindh government is working on various aspects for the convenience of city dwellers, including transportation, price control, and other areas. During the Annual General Body meeting, the activities of the past year, audit reports, and a performance report on the video screen were approved. Following the General Body meeting, a large number of members participated in a dinner.



KARACHI: Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (Retired) Maqbool Baqir along with Caretaker Provincial Minister for Information and Minorities, President Karachi Arts Council, Muhammad Ahmed Shah talking to media during their visit to St Petrich Cathedral Church on the eve of Christmas Day celebrations.

## Christmas celebrates in Larkana division

LARKANA (APP): The Christmas festive was celebrated on Monday with religious zeal and enthusiasm in the five districts including Larkana, Kamber-Shahdadkot, Shikarpur, Jacobabad and Kashmore-Kandhkot of Larkana division. Special services were organized at the churches in the five districts of the Larkana division, where prayers were also offered for global peace, national integrity, solidarity and prosperity.

The Christian community celebrated Christmas by wearing new dresses and the Santa Claus distributed gifts among the children. They had also decorated churches and houses. After the church services, members of the Christian community visited friends and relatives distributed sweets and cakes and held feasts.

In Larkana, Christmas Day was celebrated with religious enthusiasm by the Christian community. A

ceremony was held at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in the city, in which Christian men including Father Ashfaq George, Danish Sami, Anthony Sahotra, Sohail Jervez, Parvez Michael, Khushi Peters, Naem Khushi, women, children and youths participated in a large numbers in the event, wearing new costumes. In the event, the children and youths of the Christian community made the event four moons by presenting tableaux on Christmas songs.

Later, the leaders of the Christian community cut the birthday cake together and offered special prayers for the country’s security and prosperity. Addressing the ceremony, Father Ashfaq George and others said that today is a very holy and beneficial day for the Christian community. The leaders said that December 25 is the birth day of the Prophet Jesus Christ, and we pay great respect to this day.



PESHAWAR: Chief Traffic Police Officer Dr. Zahid Ullah distributing helmets, mugs and history books of Quaid-e-Azam to a motorcyclist on the occasion of Quaid-e-Azam day at Khyber Road.

## Kashmiris remember Quaid e Azam on his 147th birth anniversary

MIRPUR (AJK) (APP): People across Azad Jammu Kashmir celebrated Quaid-e-Azam day marking the state-wide celebrations of 147th birth anniversary of the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on Monday with great enthusiasm and devotion coupled with the renewal of the pledge to continue the individual and collective role for making Pakistan progressive and prosperous in letter and spirit as envisioned by father of the nation.

It was gazetted holiday across AJK on this occasion. The day dawned with special prayers in the mosques throughout AJK for the integrity, solidarity, progress and prosperity of Pakistan and for the early success of the Kashmir freedom movement.

Special ceremonies to celebrate the birthday of Quaid-e-Azam were hosted in all ten districts, as well as the subordinate tehsil headquarters of Azad Jammu Kashmir including the state metropolis – Muzaffarabad and divisional headquarters of Mirpur and Rawalakot were the hallmark of the day. Various social, political and intellectual organizations held special programs to celebrate this day with great fervor and enthusiasm. The Quaid’s birth day cakes were cut in these ceremony to celebrate the historic day with great elation amid the clapping by the jubilant participants and voicing “Happy birth day to Quaid-e-Azam” to express their heartfelt love and affection with the Quaid. Addressing these ceremonies speakers paid glorious tributes to the founder of Pakistan.



KARACHI: Activists of Palestine Foundation holds rally to mark the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and show solidarity with Oppressed Muslims of Palestine in Provincial Capital.

## CM KP extends warm wishes to nation on Quaid’s Day

PESHAWAR (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice @ Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, in commemoration of the birth anniversary of the founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, extended warm wishes to the nation on this significant day and urged the nation to renew its commitment to making Pakistan an Islamic welfare state.

Chief Minister Syed Arshad Hussain Shah delivered a heartfelt message, addressing the entire nation. Chief Minister Arshad Hussain Shah acknowledged the relentless efforts and visionary leadership of Quaid-e-Azam in establishing a separate state.

He emphasized the

enduring commitment and unwavering struggle that paved the way for the creation of the blessed country of Pakistan. Reflecting on the principled and scholarly leadership of Quaid-e-Azam, the Chief Minister highlighted that the nation, under his visionary guidance, emerged as the manifestation of Allah’s gift. In the context of current crises, the Chief Minister stressed the need for the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to adhere to the principles of faith, unity, and discipline laid out by the founding fathers.

CM Arshad Hussain urged everyone to play their role in steering the country away from prevailing crises and towards the path of progress.



FAISALABAD: Visitor keenly viewing the displayed portrait during an exhibition in connection with Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s 147th birthday at Nasrat Fateh Ali Khan Auditorium of Arts Council.

## Commissioner shares Christ joy in colourful event

RAWALPINDI (APP): In a heartwarming Christmas gathering, Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chatta highlighted the universal message of love for humanity preached by all religions, emphasizing the value of unity and respect for diverse beliefs. Speaking as the chief guest, Commissioner Chatta said that minorities are fully protected and

enjoying equal rights. He assured the Christian community of foolproof security measures, emphasizing that the security of Pakistan is intertwined with the collective attitude towards other religions and minorities. He called upon everyone to actively contribute to making the country a haven of peace and security.

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## CM KP greets newly office bearers of Tank Press Club

PESHAWAR (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice Retired Arshad Hussain Shah on Monday felicitated the newly elected office bearers of Tank Press Club.

He extended congratulations to President Rafiq Ahmed Kundi, General Secretary Sheikh Rehmatullah along with entire cabinet, on their successful election.

In his official statement, Chief Minister Arshad Hussain Shah expressed hope that the newly elected cabinet would utilize their leadership and professional skills for the prosperity and advancement of the journalistic community in the area.

He emphasized their responsibility in fostering a positive journalistic environment and promoting excellence in the field of journalism.

## Policeman die in accidental bullet fire

KARACHI (Online): One among two policemen who were accidentally shot has died in Jinnah hospital during treatment.

Police said police man who died has been identified as Fahmid and the injured policeman as Gul Sher. Police said the incident had occurred at 7.30 a.m. Constable Ali Ahmad was checking pistol of DSP traffic section Landhi and the bullet was fired by him accidentally. One bullet hit two constables who were shifted to hospital where one police man succumbed to injuries.

## Pizza delivery boy shot dead

FAISALABAD (APP): A pizza delivery boy was shot dead after minor altercation in the area of Sadar police station.

Police spokesman said here on Monday that Kashif resident of Mansoorabad was working as a pizza delivery boy when he was called by one Rashid for delivering pizza in a house situated at Faisal Town Chak 215/R-B.

When the delivery boy delivered pizza and demanded its price amounting Rs.3500, an altercation occurred between the customer and the pizza boy. Over this issue, the customer and his accomplices opened fire and seriously injured the delivery boy.



HYDERABAD: Secretary General of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) Sindh Maulana Rashid Mahmood Soomro meeting with Additional Deputy Commissioner/RO after submitting his nomination paper for NA 194 (Larkana-1) for upcoming General Election 2024.

## 135 male, 7 female for NA, 470 male, 22 female submitted papers for PK seats in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): As many as 135 male and seven female candidates have submitted their nomination papers for five National Assembly seats while 470 male and 22 female have submitted their nomination papers for 13 provincial assembly seats in Peshawar for General Elections 2024.

According to a notification issued here on Sunday by the provincial election commission, said that 33 males have submitted nomination papers for NA-28 Peshawar-I, 21 males have submitted nomination papers for NA-29

Peshawar-II, 25 males and two females have submitted nomination papers for NA-30 Peshawar-III, 28 males and two females have submitted nomination papers for NA-31 Peshawar-IV and 25 male and two female have submitted nomination papers for NA-32 Peshawar-V.

Similarly, for PK-72 Peshawar-I 35 males and 1 female have submitted their nomination papers. PK-73 Peshawar-II 33 male, 2 female, PK-74 Peshawar-III male 29, PK-75 Peshawar-IV 38 male, 1 female, PK-76 Peshawar.

## 37 robbers killed during 58 police encounters in Vehari district

BUREWALA (APP): As many as 58 police encounters were took place in which 37 robbers killed in Vehari district during last 10 months. 41 dacoits were injured while two policemen were also injured in these encounters.

According to the spokesperson of Vehari district police, the criminals, proclaimed offenders and robbers left the area due to police raids under the supervision of DPO Vehari Isa Khan.

1608 property cases were traced in the district and property worth Rs 358 million.



HYDERABAD: Members of Government Retired Teachers Association hold a protest rally in the favor of their charter of demands.

## Pak-China building materials collaboration opportunities flourish in Linqu, Shandong

BEIJING (APP): The Linqu Building Materials Special Session, as part of the 2023 Weifang International Procurement Festival, was held in Linqu, Shandong, which provided a platform for international representatives to connect.

Tahir Zaman Muhammad, the CEO of Eagle Star Supply Chain and a prominent Pakistani business representative, received significant attention during his participation in the event.

"I am honored to have been invited to participate in this prestigious event. The organization of procurement festivals within industrial clusters provides an excellent opportunity for me to connect with outstanding

and reliable suppliers," said Tahir.

He also highlighted the increasing interest and potential for collaboration between the building materials industries of China and Pakistan, China Economic Net (CEN) reported. Linqu City is renowned for its abundant resource base, advanced manufacturing capabilities, and comprehensive supply chain. Its products, including ceramics, glass, cement, and steel, enjoy high demand both domestically and internationally.

"This event has given me valuable insights into the significant influence of Linqu and has introduced me to several high-quality building material enterprises," expressed

Tahir, impressed by the thriving building materials industry in Linqu.

Pakistan is currently witnessing a growing demand for building materials due to rapid urbanization and infrastructure development initiatives. The country's expertise in areas such as marble, granite, and textiles presents promising opportunities for collaboration with Linqu's building materials sector.

"I am determined to engage in further negotiations for future collaborations. I aim to introduce more potential partners to Linqu, fostering increased cooperation and contributing to the strong friendship between China and Pakistan," Tahir stated.



LAHORE: People working in the field of potato to take out potato from field.

## IASA to decide about PIA flight operations in Europe, UK next year

KARACHI (INP): International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA) will decide about lifting the European ban on the PIA flights in May 2024. However, it has sought documents related to the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA's) engineering, flight services, and flight operations.

Regarding the issue of ban on the PIA aircraft in Europe and the UK, the European Safety Agency Board will decide the future of PIA in May 2024. It has sought answers of different queries from the Civil

Aviation Authority which it posed to various operators during its audit. IASA has also requested documents from the PIA related to its observations on engineering, flight services and flight operations.

IASA will submit its final report in its board meeting going to be held in May 2024. It will also include the audit report of the PIA and Civil Aviation Authority in the agenda of the board meeting.

The European Safety Agency had audited the CAA and PIA last month.

## China's central bank adds liquidity via reverse repos

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): China's central bank conducted 381 billion yuan (about 53.65 billion U.S. dollars) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent Monday.

It also conducted 90 billion yuan of 14-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.95 percent.

The move aims to keep liquidity reasonable and ample at the end of the year, the People's Bank of China said in a statement.

A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

## PRGMEA, Customs hold interactive session to facilitate garment exporters

LAHORE (INP): The Pakistan Readymade Garments Manufacturers & Exporters (PRGMEA) held an interactive session on Monday in collaboration with the Model Customs Collectorate to facilitate the exporters to enhance value-added textile exports, contributing to the economic uplift of the country.

Participated by a number of PRGMEA members, during the interactive session Customs Collector Ms. Azmat Tahira along with her team including Ms. Farah Farooq, Deputy Collector Customs Ms. Syeda Sidra, ADC Additional Deputy Collector Customs, briefed the exporters about various issues including Rebate Calculations, Pending DTRE Cases, Bonded Warehouse Soft Clearance, Vender Registration for EFS, HS Code Approval, Maintenance of Customs Record in Duplicate both in manual and electronic and Access of different Analysis Certificate etc.

## Businessmen delegation calls on Collector Customs for discussion hurdles in trade

PESHAWAR (APP): A delegation of businessmen from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa called on the newly appointed Collector Customs Appraisal, Amjad-ur-Rehman for discussion over issues creating hurdles in trade in the region.

The seven-member delegation was led by President Frontier Custom Agents Association (FCAA), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, said a press release issued here on Friday.

The delegation members congratulated Amjad on his appointment and expressed hope for cordial relations between him and the business community of the province. They also lauded the services of outgoing Collector, Muhammad Ashfaq.

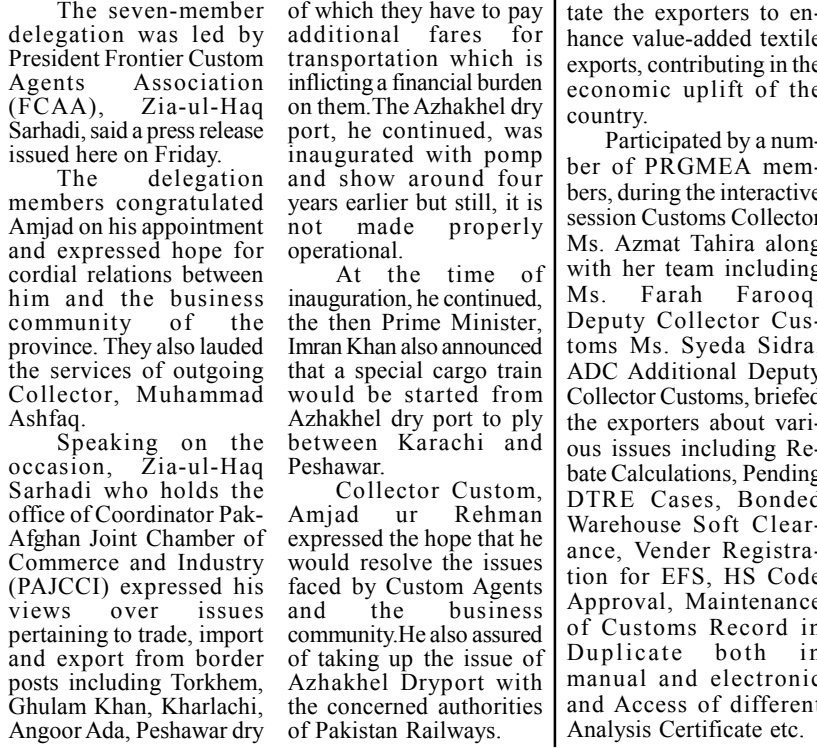
port and airport.

Zia Sarhadi said since the Azhakhel dry port is not operational and transportation of export through train has almost finished.

The exporters are sending their consignments in private trucks as a result of which they have to pay additional fares for transportation which is inflicting a financial burden on them. The Azhakhel dry port, he continued, was inaugurated with pomp and show around four years earlier but still, it is not made properly operational.

At the time of inauguration, he continued, the then Prime Minister, Imran Khan also announced that a special cargo train would be started from Azhakhel dry port to ply between Karachi and Peshawar.

Collector Custom, Amjad ur Rehman expressed the hope that he would resolve the issues faced by Custom Agents and the business community. He also assured of taking up the issue of Azhakhel Dryport with the concerned authorities of Pakistan Railways.



ISLAMABAD: A man is buying flower pot from vendor at nursery along the Park road in Federal Capital.



PESHAWAR: A delegation of Islamic Development Bank is meeting with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Integration of Districts, Industry and Crafts and Technical Education Dr. Aamir Abdullah, headed by regional operation team leader Kanamak Infrastructure Osama Trigo.

## FBR issues stern warning to non-filers

ISLAMABAD (INP): In a bold move, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has issued a warning to non-filers, signaling severe consequences such as bank account suspensions and travel bans for those who fail to comply with income tax return regulations.

Chief of Broadening the Tax Base (BTB) Muhammad Asif stressed the urgency for non-filers to register with the nearest tax office to avoid penalties, fines, utility disconnection, and the extreme measures of bank account suspensions and restricted travel.

FBR Chief Broadening the Tax Base revealed that a national drive has been launched to broaden the tax base, targeting all eligible individuals and those with taxable income.

A document from the FBR official highlighted Pakistan's narrow tax base, with only around 5.2 million people registered in the tax system in 2022 out of a population of 240 million. The country faces challenges of widespread tax evasion, a low tax-to-GDP ratio, and a shortage of tax revenues for critical

public services and socio-economic development.

The FBR, through third-party data acquisition, has compiled information on hundreds of thousands of financial transactions of individuals still outside the tax net.

The data, available on FBR's website under "MALOMAAT," aims to bring non-compliant individuals into the tax net.

Director BTB estimates that 1.5 million new taxpayers will be added during the current year, emphasizing the importance of broadening the tax base for the country's economic stability and growth.

With data readily available for eligible individuals to file their income tax returns, the FBR urges citizens to take advantage of the time, visit their nearest tax office, and register promptly to avoid penalties, fines, utility disconnection, and the severe consequences of bank account suspensions and restricted travel. The clock is ticking, and non-compliance may lead to serious ramifications in the coming weeks, the document added.

ISLAMABAD (APP): As the Christian community across Pakistan is celebrating their grand festival of Christmas on Sunday, the bakeries have designed and displayed a variety of 'cakes' decorated with images of Santa Clause, a Christmas tree, and other related themes to attract buyers with high demand.

A huge crowd was witnessed at the sweet shops and bakeries to place orders for the customized cakes and sweets, according to a report aired by a private news channel.

"This Christmas season, people are mostly placing huge orders to send gifts as well to celebrate the occasion with zeal and enthusiasm," said a citizen.

Various cakes, cupcakes, and other delights decorated with Santa, a Christmas tree, and other Christmas themes are the favourite choice of the people, especially children and we have displayed special designs which are highly appreciated by customers, said a famous bakery.

## Demand for 'cakes' goes up as Christian community celebrates Christmas with zeal

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A buyer commented there was no Christmas without cakes and sweets, "For me, Christmas celebrations are synonymous with cakes and sweets."

"I am not only booking cakes for my family but also my friends and relatives, as this is our tradition to gift cakes and sweets while visiting each other on Christmas," he added.

Different brands and eateries are offering good discounts for a variety of cakes on the occasion of Christmas to attract more customers, said another buyer. The majority of government and private organizations are organizing 'Christmas cake-cutting ceremonies' where huge orders were placed to hold special functions said a worker in the bakery, adding, however, the demand of cake is in high demand.

A local bakery worker said the festival attracts a large number of customers who bought sweets and cakes to take as a gift for their family and friends.

## Power sector adding to public miseries instead of providing relief: Shahid Rasheed

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt has said that the power sector has become a problem for the people and the business community.

In a statement issued here on Monday, he said that the electricity price was increasing continuously, while new tactics were being adopted to rob consumers, which we strongly condemn.

Shahid Rasheed Butt said that in the recent electricity bills, the due date has been changed from the 25th of the month to the 22nd, which will force millions of customers to pay a collective penalty of billions of rupees.

He said that banks were closed on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of this month due to the holidays; therefore, the bill payment date should be extended to December 27 and penalties should be abolished.

The business leader said that people were already worried about inflation, and the ever-increasing cost of electricity was bankrupting them while businesses were facing a

disaster.

Production and exports of the country's largest textile industry were also continuously falling due to the wrong policy of increasing power tariffs, he said.

Shahid Rasheed Butt said that by increasing the price of electricity continuously, its use was decreasing, but the government was forced to pay the power plants according to their production capacity.

He noted that the entire burden of wrong policies will be put on the public as usual, which was unfortunate.

The business leader said that people were not responsible for corruption and mismanagement in the power sector, but they were punished, which was sad.

NEPRA has decided to increase the electricity rates by more than Rs 3 per unit as part of the October fuel adjustment that will be charged in December bills, which means that consumers will be charged despite lower electricity consumption in December.

He said that the increase in electricity prices was being done at a time when there have been revelations of overbilling in electricity supply.

## SAPM says: Pakistan participating in Int'l Human Resource & Labour Expo in Riyadh

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) for Human Resource Development and Overseas Pakistanis Jawad Sohrab Malik on Monday said that for the first time Pakistan was participating in the International Human Resource & Labour Expo in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The SAPM, in a post on the social media platform 'X', said that the main purpose of attending the expo was to highlight "our talented workforce to the global stage, and generate extensive job opportunities for Pakistanis worldwide".

To generate extensive

job opportunities for Pakistanis worldwide, he added. He said it was crucial to grasp international market needs & tailor "our skills to meet them". He urged the overseas Pakistanis to join the Pakistan delegation at the @Rals2030 Expo in Riyadh, which would continue till December 27.

## RTA recovers excess fares from transporters

HYDERABAD (APP): The Secretary Regional Transport Authority (RTA) Hyderabad Saleem Memon here on Sunday recovered Rs 73,000 from drivers of 45 public transport vehicles and returned the amount to the passengers.

The RTA informed that he also slapped Rs 110,000 fine on the transporters for charging unauthorized fares from the public.

He noted that the fuel prices had kept declining over the last two months but the transporters had the tendency to charge excess fares on weekends and special occasions.

According to him, the action was carried out in the directions of Deputy Commissioner Tariq Qureshi.

## RCCI celebrates Quaid's 147th birth Anniversary

RAWALPINDI (APP): A cake-cutting ceremony in connection with the 147th birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was held at Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) here on Monday.

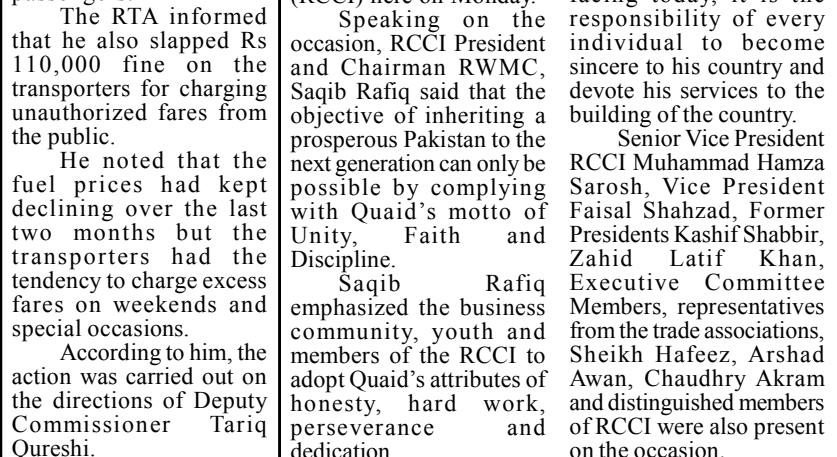
Speaking on the occasion, RCCI President and Chairman RWMC, Saqib Rafiq said that the objective of inheriting a prosperous Pakistan to the next generation can only be possible by complying with Quaid's motto of Unity, Faith and Discipline.

Saqib Rafiq emphasized the business community, youth and members of the RCCI to adopt Quaid's attributes of honesty, hard work, perseverance and dedication.

"We have to work together and give a better and prosperous Pakistan for future generations".

Group leader Sohail Altaf said that with the difficulties that Pakistan is facing today, it is the responsibility of every individual to become sincere to his country and devote his services to the building of the country.

Senior Vice President RCCI Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Faisal Shahzad, Former Presidents Kashif Shabbir, Zahid Latif Khan, Executive Committee Members, representatives from the trade associations, Sheikh Hafeez, Arshad Awan, Chaudhry Akram and distinguished members of RCCI were also present on the occasion.



RAWALPINDI: Vendors are busy in their work outside shop at Pirwadhia area in City.

## Secretary Industries Punjab visits RDA to inspect under construction BFC

RAWALPINDI (APP): Secretary Industries, Commerce, Investment and Skills Development Department, Punjab Ehsan Bhatta along with Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chatta here on Friday visited Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) to inspect the under-construction Business Facilitation Center (BFC).

The Secretary on the occasion said that the purpose of establishing the BFC is to provide maximum facilities to the industrialists, investors and entrepreneurs for obtaining No Objection Certificate (NOC).

"In Lahore, we have done this work on December 4, 2023. The objective of establishing a BFC in Rawalpindi is to provide facilities to the business community in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad has disconnected another 238 connections and imposed a fine of Rs 3.41 million on pilferers.

According to a press release issued here on Monday, in Lahore, the regional team disconnected 26 connections on illegal use of gas and 9 others on use of compressor and also imposed a fine of Rs 0.26 million against gas theft cases.

In Rawalpindi the

## Thanks to Punjab CM, LDA City affectees to get possession of plots

LAHORE (INP): In another historic decision, Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Monday announced plan to give possession of plots to the affectees of LDA City, who were awaiting this decision from the last nine years.

Sources in Punjab government said that handing over of plots possession to the LDA City affectees will start from December 31 in Block C. Commissioner Lahore Muhammad Ali Randhawa presented the LDA City plan to the Punjab CM.

Possession of 19 plots of 2 kanals and 309 plots of one kanal, 664 plots of 10 marlas and 561 plots of 5 marlas will be given to affectees in C Block of said housing scheme. Overall, Punjab CM will provide relief to the affectees of LDA City by giving possession of a total of 1553 plots.

Mohsin Naqvi has also barred the collection of additional development charges. He also announced that passion charges will be nominal and will be collected according to nominal DC rate.

team disconnected 4 connection on illegal use of gas while another one on use of compressor.

During the operation in Islamabad, the team disconnected eight connections on illegal use of gas. In Multan 3 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 10 on use of compressor.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 80 connections on account of direct use of gas and imposed fine of Rs 2.4 million against gas theft cases. The team also lodged two FIRs against gas pilferers.

## Crackdown against gas pilferers ongoing

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In Rawalpindi the

## Russian has the upper hand in arms race with the West, says Russian minister

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOSCOW: Russia has the upper hand in weapons production over the West and intends to keep the rate of growth high, a top Russian minister said on Monday after both the West and Russia ramped up arms production for the Ukraine war.

Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, triggering the biggest conflict in Europe since World War Two and the deepest confrontation between Russia and the West since the depths of the Cold War.

Ukraine and its Western backers ramped up arms production in an attempt to defeat Russian forces on the battlefields of Ukraine. Russia also hiked

production but says the West is to blame for the war which Moscow dates to 2014.

"I don't want to boast, but I can say that we began to gain and picked up the pace of production earlier than Western countries," Denis Manturov, the deputy prime minister who oversees arms production, told the RIA news agency.

"Another question is how long this race will last," Manturov said, adding that a 2025-2034 armament plan was due to be approved next year.

President Vladimir Putin and his defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, have said that production of artillery, drones, tanks and armoured vehicles is soaring.

Some former leaders of the West have spoken about a new Cold War between Russia and China on one side and the United States and its allies on the other, though Russia's \$2 trillion economy would find it hard to counter the entire might of the West alone for long.

According to IMF data, the United States' nominal gross domestic product was \$27 trillion this year while China's was \$17.7 trillion. "We must both replenish reserves and maintain the given rate of production," Manturov said.

"As far as it comes to the guts of Western countries - here I would not want to speak for them."



Pope Francis celebrates Christmas Eve mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

## King Charles III's annual Christmas message from Buckingham Palace to include sustainable touches

**Monitoring Desk**  
LONDON: King Charles III will give his second Christmas message from Buckingham Palace in front of a live tree decorated with sustainable ornaments. The message to be broadcast at 3 p.m. on Monday will be the king's second holiday address since he ascended the throne but the first since his coronation in May.

The natural decorations adorning the tree were made from wood, dried oranges, brown glass, pine

cones and paper. The tree will later be replanted, the palace says. Charles has promoted environmental causes, such as protecting wildlife and combating climate change long before it became popular, throughout much of his life. He spoke at the beginning of the month at the U.N.'s COP28 climate summit in Dubai.

Last year, in his first Christmas message as monarch, Charles evoked memories of his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II.

## Swedish court ruling against ex-official 'unjust': Iran

**Monitoring Desk**  
DUBAI: Iran said on Monday it would continue efforts to gain the release of a former Iranian official sentenced in Sweden to life in prison for his part in a mass execution of political prisoners in Iran.

"This unjust and outrageous ruling does not end Iran's diplomatic efforts to repatriate and free this Iranian citizen and we will use all legal and available means," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said, without specifying.

Last Tuesday, a

Swedish appeals court upheld the guilty verdict and life sentence for murder and serious crimes against international law for the former official Hamid Noury.

"We seriously object to the verdict and to what has taken place during this citizen's long period of detention... and his basic rights have not been respected in Sweden's prisons," Kanaani told a weekly news conference.

"We hope Sweden will take serious actions to compensate for its errors."

## UK to send naval ship to Guyana amid Venezuela issue

**Monitoring Desk**  
LONDON: Britain will deploy a naval ship off Guyana later this month, its ministry of defence said on Sunday, as the South American nation faces a border dispute with neighbour Venezuela over the oil-rich Essequibo region.

The deployment follows a visit by a British junior foreign minister to Guyana earlier this month, intended to offer the UK's support for the country, an ally and

former British colony. Guyana and Venezuela agreed earlier this month to avoid any use of force and not to escalate tensions in the long-running dispute.

The 160,000-square-km (62,000-square-mile) Essequibo region is generally recognised as part of Guyana, but in recent years Venezuela has revived its claim to the territory and to offshore areas after major oil and gas discoveries.



Supporters of the opposition 'Serbia Against Violence' (SPN) protest in front of the city hall, after the SPN alleged major election law violations in the Belgrade city and parliament races, in Belgrade, Serbia.



OCCUPIED WEST BANK: Members of the Palestinian youth scouting movement hold banners calling for an end to the conflict in the Gaza Strip during a procession to welcome the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

## France completes military withdrawal from Niger, leaving a gap in the terror fight in the Sahel

**Monitoring Desk**  
ABUJA: France on Friday completed the withdrawal of its troops after they were asked to leave Niger by the country's new junta, ending years of on-the-ground military support and raising concerns from analysts about a gap in the fight against jihadi violence across the Sahel region of Africa.

The last French military aircraft and troops departed Niger by the Dec. 22 deadline set by the junta which severed ties with Paris after the coup in July, the French Army General Staff told The

Associated Press by email. France already announced this week that it would close its diplomatic mission in Niger for "an indefinite period."

However, the country would continue to be involved in the Sahel — the vast expanse south of the Sahara Desert which has been a hot spot for violent extremism — although differently. President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday during a visit to a base in Jordan.

"I decided on some important reconfigurations," Macron said.

## Afghan schoolgirls are finishing sixth grade in tears. Under Taliban rule, their education is over

**Monitoring Desk**  
KABUL: Bahara Rustam, 13, took her last class at Bibi Razia School in Kabul on Dec. 11 knowing it was the end of her education. Under Taliban rule, she is unlikely to step foot in a classroom again.

In September 2021, a month after U.S. and NATO troops withdrew from Afghanistan following two decades of war, the Taliban announced that girls were barred from studying beyond sixth grade.

They extended this education ban to universities in December 2022. The Taliban have defied global condemnation and warn-

ings that the restrictions will make it almost impossible for them to gain recognition as the country's legitimate rulers.

Last week, U.N. special envoy Roza Otunbayeva expressed concern that a generation of Afghan girls is falling behind with each day that passes.

Last week, an official in the Education Ministry said Afghan girls of all ages are allowed to study in religious schools known as madrassas, which have traditionally been boys-only. But Otunbayeva said it was unclear if there was a standardized curriculum that allowed modern subjects.



Migrants walk as they leave Tapachula in a caravan to attempt to reach the U.S. border, in the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

## Turkey retaliates at home, abroad after troops killed in Iraq

**Monitoring Desk**  
ANKARA: Turkey said on Monday its air force "neutralised" 26 Kurdish militants in strikes in Syria and northern Iraq in response to the killing of soldiers at the weekend, while dozens of pro-Kurdish opposition activists.

On Saturday, the defence ministry said 12 Turkish soldiers were killed during fighting with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in northern

Iraq, prompting Ankara to conduct a barrage of air strikes and operations in the region.

On Monday, it said initial findings showed that at least 26 militants were "neutralised" in those strikes. Ankara typically uses the term to mean killed. Defence Minister Yasar Guler also said on Sunday that 30 PKK militants had been neutralised in an area of northern Iraq where Turkey carries out cross-border operations.

## On Christmas Eve, Bethlehem resembles a ghost town

**Monitoring Desk**  
BETHLEHEM: The typically bustling biblical birthplace of Jesus resembled a ghost town Sunday after Christmas Eve celebrations in Bethlehem were called off due to the Israel-Hamas war. The festive lights and Christmas tree that normally decorate Manger Square were missing, as were the throngs of foreign tourists and jubilant youth marching bands that gather in the West Bank town each year to mark the holiday. Dozens of Palestinian security forces patrolled the empty square.

"This year, without the Christmas tree and lights, there's just darkness," said Brother John

Vinh, a Franciscan monk from Vietnam who has lived in Jerusalem for six years.

Vinh said he always comes to Bethlehem to mark Christmas, but this year was especially sobering. He gazed at a nativity scene in Manger Square with a baby Jesus wrapped in a white shroud, reminiscent of the thousands of children killed in the fighting in Gaza.

A nativity scene decorated to honor the victims in Gaza is displayed in Manger Square, near the Nativity Church, which is traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Jesus, on Christmas Eve, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023.

## Staff deaths in Gaza reach unprecedented levels, says UN chief

**Monitoring Desk**  
UNITED NATIONS: In a startling disclosure, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said on Sunday that 136 UN personnel had lost their lives in Gaza over the past 75 days, marking an unprecedented tragedy in UN history.

Mr. Guterres expressed deep concern over the appalling human suffering, physical destruction in Gaza, and urged Israel not to continue its 'collective punishment' against the Palestinian people.

The secretary-general paid tribute to the UN staff, most of whom were forced from their homes, and thousands of aid workers risking their lives to support civilians in Gaza. He emphasized the international

community's responsibility to leverage its influence to prevent further escalation and end the crisis, urging Israel to avoid "collective punishment."

"The international community has a responsibility to use all its influence to prevent further escalation and end this crisis," Mr. Guterres insisted.

In response to the dire situation, the United Nations and its partners proposed a plan outlining the minimum necessary to scale up humanitarian operations, requiring an estimated \$1.2 billion to sustain existing services amid ongoing hostilities. The UN appeal noted that the magnitude of this tragedy surpasses anything seen before in the Middle East.

## Thousands join migrant caravan in Mexico ahead of Secretary of State Blinken's visit to the capital

**Monitoring Desk**  
TAPACHULA: A sprawling caravan of migrants from Central America, Venezuela, Cuba and other countries trekked through Mexico on Sunday, heading toward the U.S. border. The procession came just days before Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrives in Mexico City to hammer out new agreements to control the surge of migrants seeking entry into the United States.

The caravan, estimated at around 6,000 people, many of them families with young children, is the largest in more than a year, a clear indication that joint efforts by the Biden administration and President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's government to deter migration are falling short.

The Christmas Eve caravan departed from the city of Tapachula, near the country's southern border with Guatemala. Security forces looked on in what appeared to be a repeat of past tactics when authori-

ties waited for the marchers to tire out and then offered them a form of temporary legal status that is used by many to continue their journey northward.

"We've been waiting here for three or four months without an answer," said Cristian Rivera, traveling alone, having left his wife and child in his native Honduras. "Hopefully with this march there will be a change and we can get the permission we need to head north." López Obrador in May agreed to take in migrants from countries such as Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba turned away by the U.S. for not following rules that provided new legal pathways to asylum and other forms of migration.

But that deal, aimed at curbing a post-pandemic jump in migration, appears to be insufficient as the number of migrants once again surges, disrupting bilateral trade and stoking anti-migrant sentiment among conservative voters in the U.S.

## Death toll from China earthquake rises to 149, with 2 still missing

**Monitoring Desk**  
BEIJING: The death toll from China's most powerful earthquake in years has risen to 149, with two people still missing after the tremor hit northwestern parts of the country last week.

The 6.2-magnitude quake struck a remote mountainous area between Gansu and Qinghai provinces on Dec. 18, reducing homes to rubble and triggering heavy mudslides that inundated two villages in Qinghai province.

State broadcaster CCTV said on Monday the death toll in Donghai city in Qinghai has risen by one, to 32, and rescuers were still searching for two missing people. In neighboring Gansu, authorities had reported 117 dead.

Nearly 1,000 were injured and more than 14,000 homes were destroyed in China's deadliest earthquake in nine years.

Primary schools in Jishishan county in Gansu resumed classes in tents on Monday, state media reported.

ported. Local authorities said they would use the upcoming winter break to repair damaged schools and erect temporary structures so that classes could resume as normal in the spring semester. Authorities also rushed to erect temporary housing units for survivors facing temperatures well below freezing. CGTN, the state broadcaster's international arm, said the first batch of 500 temporary housing units had been built for residents in Meipo, a village in Gansu, on Friday night. More than 87,000 people have been resettled after the quake.

The tremor caused economic losses estimated to be worth tens of millions of dollars in the agricultural and fisheries industries, according to state media.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Saturday visited several villages in Gansu and a county in Qinghai and urged authorities to improve living conditions for the survivors, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

## Drone attack damages ship off India's coast

**Monitoring Desk**  
DUBAI: A drone strike damaged a merchant ship off the coast of India on Saturday, but caused no casualties, two maritime agencies said, with one reporting the vessel was linked to Israel.

The attack caused a fire on board, according to the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, or UKMTO.

Ambrey, a maritime security firm, said the "Liberia-flagged tanker... was Israel-affiliated" and had been on its way from Saudi Arabia to India.

Both agencies said the attack occurred 200 nautical miles southwest of Veraval, India.

China's deadliest earthquake in nine years.

Primary schools in Jishishan county in Gansu resumed classes in tents on Monday, state media reported.

## Christmas in China brings glittering decor and foreign influence concerns

**Monitoring Desk**  
BEIJING: Giant Christmas trees adorned with lights, tinsel and gift boxes greet shoppers at glittering malls in big Chinese cities like Shanghai and Chongqing, but in many parts of China, extending season's greetings is out of the question.

In southwest Yunnan province, a property management company issued a notice to shopping mall tenants urging them not to sell Christmas cards and presents and to even refrain from hanging decorations, saying foreign traditions should not be "blindly" followed, and one should be confident in one's own culture.

Schools in some cities from Dongguan in the south to Harbin in the northeast similarly called on students and parents not to follow foreign traditions and culture without thinking.

In Gansu province in China's northwest, a local branch of the Communist Youth League told its members to instead celebrate

"The Battle at Lake Changjin", a 2021 Chinese film depicting a fierce fight between the Chinese People's Voluntary Army and U.S. forces during the Korean War.

China does not ban Christianity or forbid Christian worship, but like all permitted religions, it must be strictly managed and governed amid concern about "foreign influences".

Christmas Day is not a public holiday in mainland China, where Buddhism and Taoism are the major religions, with ancestral worship also a common practice. The ruling Communist Party is officially atheist. Wang Huning, the fourth-ranked member of the party's powerful Politburo Standing Committee led by President Xi Jinping, told Christian groups last week to "adhere to the direction of the sinicisation of Christianity". ("We must) interpret the doctrines and rules in line with the requirements of contemporary China's development and progress.



ZIARAT: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki, provincial ministers and high officials photographed with children after a ceremony at Ziarat Residency in connection with Quaid Day.

## President urges children to achieve high academic goals, adopt Quaid's principles

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Monday urged children to contribute to the country by achieving high standards in education and adopting the Quaid-e-Azam's principles of unity, faith, and discipline.

In an event titled 'Quaid and Children', the president said adhering to the golden values of the founder of Pakistan would make the country prosper in the comity of nations.

The colourful ceremony held here at the Presidency to celebrate the birth anniversary of the Quaid-e-Azam was attended by First Lady Samina Alvi, ministers, parliamentarians, and a large number of school children including the differently-

abled ones. President Alvi recalled that during the Pakistan Movement, children were also among the population who loved their Quaid and steadfastly stood with him in his struggle for a separate homeland. He read out a few passionate letters written by children to the Quaid-e-Azam where they penned their support to him besides sending him the money collected after savings. The president said Quaid-e-Azam was a strong believer in mainstreaming women and other marginalized segments of society to ensure economic prosperity.

He emphasized providing equal opportunities to women and differently-abled people in the fields

of education and employment. He said the Quaid-e-Azam created this country with utmost dedication and commitment and stressed that it was the responsibility of every citizen to play a part in its development.

President Alvi mentioned that the people in Kashmir were suffering at the hands of Indian occupation forces while the religious minorities faced continued persecution.

"The current situation in India reinforces the significance of the Two-Nation theory that necessitated the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent," he said.

He said Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a great leader

whose struggle led to bringing a change in the world. "This homeland was created after the sacrifices of thousands of people and it needs to be strengthened with hard work and commitment," he said.

President Alvi and Samina Alvi cut the cake to celebrate the birthday of the Quaid-e-Azam among children. The children clad in traditional dresses danced to the tunes of folk songs depicting the rich culture of the four provinces and Kashmir. A group of differently-abled children including the visually-impaired presented a tableau on the song 'Dil Dil Pakistan', which was highly appreciated by the audience that waved national flags during the performance.

## Solangi for implementation of Quaid-e-Azam's principles to make Pakistan prosperous

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Monday called for the implementation of the principles of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah to make Pakistan a developed and prosperous nation.

In his message on the birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, he said today the entire nation paid homage to "Mohsin-e-Pakistan"

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

Quaid-e-Azam tirelessly fought for the freedom of the Muslims of the subcontinent and the establishment of a separate independent state, Murtaza Solangi said.

He said the Quaid-e-Azam made it possible to create a state in the form of Pakistan where all citizens have equal opportunities to live and develop without any discrimination of colour, caste, religion, language.

The Quaid-e-Azam

made the dream of Pakistan a reality due to his skills, determination and exceptional character, Murtaza Solangi remarked.

"To overcome the challenges, we have to adopt the golden principles of unity, faith and discipline," Murtaza Solangi added.

"Today we reiterate our resolve to make Pakistan a greater and stronger country," Murtaza Solangi said.

### PAF pays tribute to Quaid-e-Azam through video

ISLAMABAD (INP): A short video was released by Directorate of General Public Relations, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) to pay tribute to the Founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on his birth anniversary.

The PAF video stated that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah offered the oppressed Muslims of the Subcontinent a ray of hope and united them as one nation to achieve a separate and independent homeland for them.

According to news released by PAF in this connection, "It is because of the Quaid's tireless efforts that we are breathing in a free state today."

### George says: Christmas bring people closer for ending their differences

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Human Rights, Khalid George here on Monday said that all minorities including the Christian community enjoyed complete religious freedom in Pakistan.

In his message on Christmas Day, the minister said that Christians bring people closer and the best way to celebrate it was to include the poor, orphans and needy in our happiness and share joys besides ending differences.

"We all are Pakistani and united for the progress and prosperity of our country," he said while addressing the cake-cutting ceremony of Christmas during a function held here at a hotel. He said that all Prophets had come to this world for guidance of humanity, and delivered the universal message of peace.

### Nusrat Sehar Abbasi quits politics

KARACHI (INP): Three times MPA from Sindh on women seat during three consecutive general elections, Nusrat Sehar Abbasi quits politics.

According to details, from 2002 to 2018, Nusrat Sehar Abbasi contested elections on PML-F ticket and elected member Sindh Assembly on special seat.

She remained top among the women participating in the Sindh Assembly's proceedings.

As an opposition member, Nusrat Sehar raised the public issues, corruption, fake appointments and problems faced by women.

She quit the politics and has shifted to Canada.

## Aneeq says: Provision of best Hajj facilities to pilgrims' govt's top priority

ISLAMABAD (INP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed Monday said that provision of best Hajj facilities to Pakistani pilgrims is top priority of the government for which the government was taking all possible steps.

Interacting with a private TV channel here, he said that in its Hajj Policy 2024, the federal government has significantly reduced the Hajj expenses as compared to previous year.

Ameed Ahmed said that the Hajj 2024 was set to embrace digitalization, providing pilgrims with a mobile application which will function without Internet connectivity. This innovative app will offer various features, including a complaint lodging option to the pilgrims this year, he added.

### Change of Guards ceremony held at mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam

KARACHI (INP): Change of guards ceremony held at the mausoleum of the Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on his 147th birth anniversary on Monday. An elegant change of guards ceremony held at the Quaid's mausoleum in Karachi today to pay tribute to the Father of the Nation.

A smartly turned-out contingent of the Pakistan Military Academy Kakul assumed the ceremonial guards' duty. Commandant PMA Major General Itikhar Hassan Chaudhry was the chief guest in the change of guards' ceremony at Mazar-e-Quaid.

Commandant PMA laid floral wreath at the Mazar-e-Quaid and paid respects. The nation is celebrating Quaid's birth anniversary today across the country with enthusiasm and national spirit.



GADANI: Additional Chief Secretary Home Zahid Saleem listening problems of prisoners during his visit to Gadani jail.

## ECP introduces online facility center to check nomination papers process

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission has introduced an online facility center to streamline the process of checking nomination papers for the upcoming general elections.

The spokesperson of the Election Commission on Monday revealed that the online facility center, located in the Election Commission Secretariat, is operational 24 hours a day, supported by NADRA, NAB, FIA, FBR, and the State Bank. Information is promptly relayed to the relevant institutions for necessary actions.

The Election Commission spokesperson added that directives have been issued to the Secretary of Power Division and Secretary of Petroleum Division to obtain lists of candidates from the returning

officers. Similarly, the Secretary of National Telecommunication and Secretary of Housing have been instructed to collect candidate lists from returning officers. Chief Secretaries of the four provinces and the Chairman of CDA have also received orders to procure candidate lists from Returning Officers.

Furthermore, the Election Commission spokesperson emphasized that defaulting candidates should approach the Returning Officer for document verification between December 25 and December 30, following the release of the candidate list. All federal and provincial government institutions are urged to communicate directly with the immediate returning officers.



QUETTA: Security officials stand high alert to avoid untoward incident during on the occasion of Christmas Day celebration, outside Sacred Heart Church in Quetta.



KARACHI: Special Representative to the Caretaker Prime Minister on Religious Harmony & Islamic Countries Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi talking to media persons at Holy Trinity Cathedral Church.

### PM condoles demise of Nisar Qadri

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Monday expressed grief and sorrow at the demise of prominent actor Nisar Qadri.

In a message of condolence, he prayed for the elevation of the departed soul in the ranks of Jannah. He sympathised with the bereaved family of the deceased artist.

He said Nisar Qadri was among the experienced artists of Pakistan Television.

The services of Nisar Qadri for Pakistan Television, film, radio and theatre would always be remembered, he added.

### 4 killed, several injured in road accident

ISLAMABAD (INP): At least four persons were killed while another five got injured in a collision between a car and a motorcycle on Islamabad Expressway near Dhokh Kala Khan in the wee hours of Monday.

According to rescue sources, an over speeding car collided with a motorcycle, resultantly, four people were killed on the spot, a private news channel reported.

Police teams reached the spot and started an investigation after cordoning off the area, adding, the injured and bodies were shifted to hospital. Rescue teams also reached the accident site and launched a rescue operation.

### Earthquake of magnitude 4.4 jolts Mingora, surroundings

SWAT (INP): A low intensity earthquake jolted Mingora and its surrounding areas on Monday but causality or damage was reported.

According to National Seismic Monitoring Centre (NSMC), tremours measuring 4.4 on Richter scale were felt in Mingora and its adjoining areas.

### ANP's candidate Niaz Wali dies of cardiac arrest

PESHAWAR (INP): Awami National Party (ANP) candidate for provincial assembly, Niaz Wali passed away of cardiac arrest on Monday.

Niaz Wali had submitted nomination papers from constituency PK-70 of Ihsil Bara for general elections to be scheduled on February 08, 2024. The ANP candidate suffered heart attack which proved fatal.

## Muslims, minorities united for country's development: Ashrafi

KARACHI (APP): Special Representative to the Caretaker Prime Minister on Religious Harmony & Islamic Countries Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi on Monday said that Ulama and minorities, including the Christian community, were united for the peace and development of the country.

Ashrafi, who is also Chairman of the Pakistan Ulama Council, said the PUC and churches had always stood firm for peace in the country.

He stated this during his visit to Holy Trinity Cathedral to celebrate Christmas with the Christian community. Ashrafi, felicitating the Christian community on the auspicious occasion, said that the Ulama believed in having respect for all religions. The minorities including Christians, Sikhs and Hindus were free to go to their worship places in the country and their protection was the State's responsibility,

he added. Ashrafi said that the Chief of Army Staff Syed Asim Munir also visited a Church today to join the Christian community in Christmas celebrations.

Referring to the Palestine situation, he said that the Christians opened doors of their Churches for the Muslims when the latter were attacked.

He said that the Christians were also being targeted in Palestine along with the Muslims. "We want peace and do not want war," he added.

Recalling the incident of Jaranwala, he said that no one had the right to destabilise peace in the country. "Islam does not allow anyone to force for marriage as well as does not allow any act with force."

Ashrafi said that due to the efforts of the caretaker prime minister and the COAS, activities had been restored in the Pakistan Stock Exchange and reduced Hajj expenses by Rs 0.1 million.

## Visits DHQ Mastung Abdullah emphasises need for implementation of IPC protocols

Independent Report MASTUNG: The Secretary Health, Balochistan, Abdullah Khan, visited District Headquarter Hospital (DHQ) Mastung on Monday. The Divisional Directress Kalat Division, Dr Tahira Kamal Baloch, the District Health Officer (DHO), Mastung Dr. Rasheed, Deputy DHO, Staff Officer to Health Shoukat Baloch, and Section Officer Health Tahoor Khan accompanied.

The Medical Superintendent Dr. Nisar gave a presentation. The Secretary Health visited all the wards and units. It was informed that the posts of consultants are vacant, which needs to be filled. It was informed that 5 new doctors for the hospital have been hired on contract to fill the gap. Abdullah Khan, Secretary Health directed that attendance of doctors and staff be ensured. He appreciated the hospital management on the cleanliness and emphasised the need

for implementation of the IPC protocols. Regarding the blood bank, the secretary directed that it may be coordinated with the RBC to have a proper plan for the RBC. The secretary directed that for integration of Reproductive Health and Family Planning, the Population Department Centre located near to the DHQ may be shifted to the DHQ, which will help in the implementation of the Postpartum Family Planning for saving mothers. The secretary further said that the hospital should play a role to strengthen preventive and promotional healthcare, for which the DHO should come up with a plan. In the hospital, rehabilitative health also needs to be established. For a timely supply of medicine, the Medical Superintendent should coordinate with the suppliers to expedite the process, and the Procurement Cell and the MSD will provide support.



QUETTA: Christians community attend Christmas prayer ceremony at Bethel Memorial Methodist Church.

## Shehbaz Sharif urges nation to follow teachings of Quaid

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz President Shehbaz Sharif on Monday urged the nation to follow the guiding principles of the father of the nation to ensure progress and prosperity in the country.

In his message issued here on 147th birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, he said that separate homeland for the Muslims of sub-continent was created to ensure economic independence, besides providing education, health and social justice to all its citizens.

He said, "the best way to pay tribute to Quaid-e-Azam is to make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state."

Shehbaz Sharif said that Quaid-e-Azam struggled for free and independent country till his last breath.

He said, "Vision behind creation of Pakistan has to be followed in letter and spirit to achieve real objective of making Pakistan."

It was very essential to overcome economic instability, poverty, division and ignorance to protect country's freedom, he added.



QUETTA: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) District Chief, Maulana Abdul Rehman Rafiq addresses during Majlis-e-Amla meeting held in Quetta.

## Sheikh to reach out to public against PDM

RAWALPINDI (INP): Former interior minister and chief of Awami Muslim League Sheikh Rashid Ahmed has said that he will go to the public against the former ruling alliance, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

He was talking to media on Monday after his nomination papers were accepted after scrutiny.

He said that his and Raashid Shafiq's papers have been approved in National Assembly constituency NA-56.

Rashid said that 44 people have submitted nomination papers against him. "I have seen six or seven contestants, but never seen 44. By the grace of Allah, I will win constituency 56 and 57 as well," he added.

He said all the contestants in this election are respectable to him.

The senior politician said that he has been a minister 17 times and no corruption charge has ever been levelled against him.

Rashid announced that he would campaign for one month and hold his last rally on February 6. He would launch his election campaign on January 1 with pen and inkpot as his election symbol, the ex-minister continued.

He based his election drive on three points - Nullah Lai, a mother-child hospital and a college at Dhok Dalal.

"I have already built 60 educational institutions."

The former interior minister said that he eliminated land grabbing mafia. "I am not a commodity that can be sold. I belong to a respectable family. I am not a traitor. I will work for the development of Rawalpindi."