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

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

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

concluding session of the two-day 261st Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC), an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said. The Forum also took a holistic review of the ongoing actions being taken against smuggling, money laundering, power theft and hoarding of essential items amongst other illegal eco-

nomie activities. Pakistan Army will continue to provide all-out support to relevant government institutions and LEAs to curb such crimes. It also noted that requisite and necessary support will also be extended to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for forthcoming general elections. It paid rich tribute to

the supreme sacrifices of, Shuhada, including officers and men of the Armed Forces, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and citizens who laid their lives for ensuring peace and stability in the country. The participants also offered Fateha, for, the Shuhada, including those of Dera

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



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

PM bans New Year celebrations in solidarity with Palestinians

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

He also urged the general public to show solidarity with the oppressed people of Gaza and observe simplicity at the beginning of the New Year. The prime minister, in a special televised message, said that the entire Pakistani nation and the Muslim Ummah were deeply saddened by the genocide of the oppressed Palestinians, especially the massacre of innocent children, in Gaza and the West Bank.

number of innocent children - around 9,000," the prime minister remarked. He said to stop the Israeli bloodshed, Pakistan had raised its voice for the oppressed Palestinians at every world forum and it would always continue to do so in future as well. PM Kakar pointed out that Pakistan had sent two consignments of relief goods for the Palestinian brothers and sisters, while the third one would be dispatched soon. Likewise, he said, the Government of Pakistan was in close contact with Egypt and Jordan for the provision of timely relief to the Palestinians, besides evacuation of the injured from Gaza and their treatment.

The prime minister prayed to Allah Almighty that the New Year might dawn with the message of peace, prosperity and harmony for Pakistan and rest of the world.



SUKKUR: Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing a press conference

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

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

She said the country's courts were independent and had taken decisions in this regard on several occasions. Asked if the coming year held any prospects of resumption of ties with India, the spokesperson said India needed to take steps to create an environment for a dialogue.

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



QUETTA: Caretaker Provincial Minister for Home Captain (Retd) Muhammad Zubair Jamali presides over the meeting regarding Appointment Policy of Additional Inspector General Police at Mekran.

Overall law and order situation better than past in Balochistan, says caretaker Chief Minister

Mir Ali Mardan Domki says interim provincial government determined to conduct free, fair and transparent elections; formed fact finding committee for inquiry into Turbat incident

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Domki has stated that the overall situation of law and order is better than past in the province. The Chief Minister said that the figures of missing persons being presented at the unofficial level are based on gossips and unauthentic. The commission

formed about the missing persons is conducting inquiry and several people have also come back over the time. These and similar other views were expressed by the Chief Minister while speaking to the media persons on occasion of reception hosted by the tribal elder Mir Nazir Ahmed Rahu, in Goth Shahmir Rahu near Sakrand on Thursday.

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NAWABSHAH: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki addressing the public during his visit to Nawabshah.

FBR clears Nawaz, Shehbaz, Zardari, Bilawal, Imran

ISLAMABAD (Online): FBR has cleared former Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif, PTI founder Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Maryam Nawaz, Sheba Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari, Maulana Fazlur Rehman and others in tax matters in connection with election 2024 while completing their tax scrutiny.

34 more arrested Baloch protesters released

Caretaker federal government says all arrested marchers released after fulfilling legal requirements

ISLAMABAD (APP): On the recommendations of the Committee, established on the instructions of Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar, to negotiate with the Baloch protesters, 34 more arrested protesters were released after fulfilling the legal requirements.

Now all the arrested protesters have been released, said the statement issued on Thursday.



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

Scrutiny of nomination papers in all districts of Balochistan: PEC

ISLAMABAD (Online): Pakistani refineries have refused to refine Russian crude oil, local refineries have called Russian oil expensive. According to refinery officials, if Russian oil is available at cheap prices, it is feasible to refine it. Due to the cheapness of furnace oil in international markets, Russian oil is not usable, more furnace oil is produced from Russian oil, the price of furnace oil in international markets has decreased from 80 dollars per barrel to 60 dollars. In this situation, our refineries cannot clean the Russian oil, the refinery officials have also informed the Ministry of Petroleum about this situation, in the current situation, Russian oil should not be imported.

Info Minister calls for enhancing Pak-Iran media cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan and Iran on Thursday emphasized the importance of mutual cooperation in trade and economic sectors, especially in the scope of ECO organization, corridor from East to West, bilateral cooperation on the ports and expansion of relations between two brotherly countries. During a meeting between Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi and Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Reza Amiri Moghadam, multiple important issues, including cooperation in the fields of media, exchange of cultural delegations, bilateral trade relations, Iran Expo 2024, were discussed.

Solangi said that Pakistan valued the brotherly relations with Iran as both were bound by deep religious, cultural and linguistic relations. "Cooperation between the two countries in the fields of media is the need of the hour," Murtaza Solangi said adding Pakistan was keen to promote cooperation with Iran in the fields of film and drama. He said a memorandum of understanding has already been signed between the Associated Press of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA). Additionally, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and Iran's Audio Visual Media Regulation Authority (SATRA) and the Directorate of Electronic Media and Publications, Pakistan Television and Iran's audiovisual and cinema sector, had been working on the MoUs to promote bilateral cooperation, he added.

The minister and Ambassador expressed the willingness on the part of both countries to explore opportunities for promoting bilateral relations. Minister for Information Murtaza

Baloch protesters give govt 7-day ultimatum to meet demands



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

A detailed investigation into rights violations in Balochistan, an agreement should be signed under the auspices of the Working Group for the elimination of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, all victims of enforced disappearances should be immediately released, restrictions should be put on the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) and "state-sponsored death squads" should be eliminated as well.

Dr Mahrang Baloch, one of the organisers of the protest that is demanding an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of their community, said in an Islamabad press conference today that the government was being given a week for negotiations on the following demands. Dr Mahrang said that a fact-finding mission headed by a UN Working Group should be sent for a

She further demanded that the Ministry of Interior should "confess" to the alleged deaths of disappeared persons in fake encounters, adding that an acknowledgement letter be issued regarding this and a press conference held with the names of all victims.

IHC rejects PTI founder plea to stay cipher trial

ISLAMABAD (Online): Islamabad High Court (IHC) has rejected PTI founder plea to stay cipher trial. PTI founder Imran Khan petition against trial court December 12 order in cipher case came up for hearing before single bench of IHC led by Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb here Thursday.

During the course of hearing the court issued notice and sought reply.

The counsel for petitioner requested the court to stay the trial.

Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb remarked that notice is being issued. Later the court will see this matter.

Usman Riaz Gul counsel for PTI founder read out December 12 order in the court and took the plea that the court's proceedings is not being conducted in trial court as per requirement of sub section 3 of section 13. The word complaint has been mentioned in the law and not of FIR. This is special law and court's proceedings is possible under it.

The court inquired what is your point. What formalities has not been fulfilled.

The counsel told this proceedings is moving ahead

under FIR rather than complaint which is not correct legally. As per law the competent officer of the government was to file complaint directly in the court. But here even complaint has not been filed. Instead of it FIR has been registered.

Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb remarked this notification meets the requirements of section 13 (6).

Counsel Usman Riaz Gull said the court could not understand this matter. Statements of 25 witnesses have been recorded, cross questioning in respect of 3 witnesses has completed. Total witnesses are 28.

The counsel requested the court to halt the trial for some days. Otherwise the trial court will give final decision of the case till then. Because trial is running on day to day basis.

The court remarked first we will issue notice and then court will see this matter.

The court rejected the plea for granting stay order regarding cipher trial.

FIA prosecutor received notice in court room on this occasion.

Later the court adjourned the hearing of the case.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Secretary Kashmir Affairs & GB Jawwad Rafique Malik calls on Chief Minister GB Haji Gul Bar Khan at his Office.



GHOTKI: Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari attending a luncheon hosted in his honor by Jam Saifullah Dharjio and Jam Ikramullah Dharjio at Jam House Adilpur in Ghotki.

PML-N discusses seat adjustments, new constituencies' issues

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

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

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

"Ayaz Sadiq could be offered to the constitutional seat of Senate Chairman if

he becomes senator," sources claimed.

Former MNA Malik Riaz could be affected in NA-117 after Aleem Khan has submitted nomination papers from NA-117.

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

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

Qureshi sent to jail on judicial remand

RAWALPINDI (INP): A court of judicial magistrate on Thursday sent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi to jail on Judicial remand in 12 cases registered against him following May 9 riots.

Qureshi was presented before Duty Magistrate Syed Jahangir Ali's court in the GHQ attack case under strict security. At the outset of the hearing, police sought a 30-day physical remand of the former foreign minister but the plea was opposed by the lawyers of the PTI vice president.

The lawyers argued that those named in the May 9 violence cases were acquitted and urged the court to acquit Shah Mahmood Qureshi. On Wednesday, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) vice chairman, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, was rearrested from outside Adiala jail.

Punjab's RA Bazaar police station cops rearrested Shah Mahmood Qureshi after his release from Adiala Jail on bail in cipher case on Supreme Court orders. The release came after police pleaded to end the 15-day detention orders of the former foreign minister under 3-MPO.

Raza condemns violence on SM Qureshi

ISLAMABAD (Online): Former Chairman Senate Raza Rabbani has condemned the violence and disrespect by police officials against former foreign minister and Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) vice president Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

He also demanded the removal of involved police official from their position.

In his condemnation statement he said I strongly condemn the disrespecting action against Shah Mahmood Qureshi regardless that he is former foreign minister and politician but top of all he is the citizen of Pakistan. He deserve the most respect.

Former chairman Senate said police is dealing own citizens like they are enemies of Pakistan.

Election 2024: Interim govt allocates Rs 17 bln for security

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday allocated Rs 17 billion for security related to the upcoming general election in 2024, sources said.

A meeting was held to overview the security arrangements for the upcoming general elections scheduled to be held on February 08, 2024.

According to well-informed sources, the meeting - attended by the Inspector Generals (IGs) of all four provinces - briefed the meeting members about

the polling day security arrangements.

Reports indicate that to ensure a peaceful election in the country, a total of 600,000 police officials are necessarily required.

Sources further revealed that only 200,000 police officials are currently available leaving a significant shortfall, with an additional 400,000 personnel required to meet the basic security requirements for the upcoming general elections. Meanwhile, 58 percent of polling stations declared sensitive.



TANDOALLAHYAR: Foreigners dancing with the villager at the model of the Climate Resilience Markaz of bamboo housing by the Intellectual Property Organization, Government of Pakistan, in Pono village.

Army vows to provide necessary...

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Ismail Khan attack. It reiterated Pakistan Army's resolve to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan against direct and indirect threats.

The Forum expressed serious concern over continued repression and reprehensible human rights violations by Indian military forces in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

The recent acts of abduction, torture and killing of civilians by Indian Army were unequivocally condemned by the participants. "Such acts constitute grave crimes against humanity and cannot dampen the spirit of the brave Kashmiris who are struggling for their lawful right of self-determination.

Pakistan would keep supporting its Kashmiri brethren with all political, moral and diplomatic support for resolution of Kashmir issue according to international law and relevant UNSC resolutions," it resolved. The Forum was briefed on the prevalent geo-strategic environment, challenges to national security and own strategy in response to evolving threat.

The sanctuaries and liberty of action available to the terrorists of proscribed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other groups of that ilk, in a neighboring country and the availability of the latest weapons to the terrorists were noted as serious points of concern impacting security of Pakistan.

The Forum resolved

that all terrorists, their facilitators and abettors, working on the behalf of hostile forces to destabilise Pakistan, would be dealt with full might of the state.

It expressed full solidarity with the people of Palestine and condemned serious human rights violations and war crimes being perpetrated in Gaza while reiterating the Government's stance of demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict.

The Forum was briefed on the operational preparedness of the formations. The COAS stressed the need for continuously maintaining operational excellence in cognitive and physical realms and the pursuit of high standards of motivation and training.

MoFA committed to promote Pakistan's interests at global level: FM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani on Thursday said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Pakistan's missions abroad would continue to promote the country's external relations and protect its interests at the global level. The foreign minister expressed these views in a year-end interaction with the beat reporters held here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

FM Jilani gave a roundup of the achievements made by Pakistan in

the domain of global foreign policy and highlighted the high-level visits of the leadership that led to the strengthening of ties with key States. A fataha was offered for the soul of former foreign secretary Riaz Khokhar who passed away in Islamabad on Wednesday. Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, media persons from newspapers and television, foreign correspondents, and officials of the ministry attended the interaction.

Niece vs uncle: Hina Shah to contest election against Qaim Ali Shah

KHAIRPUR (INP): Hina Shah Jeelani to contest election against her uncle Qaim Ali Shah, senior Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader and former chief minister Sindh, on PS-26. Following acceptance of nomination papers, Hina Shah Jeelani said she will give tough time to her uncle Qaim Ali Shah in the upcoming general elections, scheduled to take place on February 8. Shah said her uncle Qaim Ali Shah has become old. "Sain has become old now, he is not taking rest, nor giving us a chance."

It is to be noted that the niece and uncle will contest the election for the Sindh Assembly seat from Khairpur (PS-26).

As the nation holds its breath, the political narrative unfolds, offering a glimpse into the dynamics that will shape the representation in the National Assembly.

The next few days will be crucial, setting the stage for the political players and their constituents as they navigate the intricate web of scrutiny and decision-making in this pivotal election season.



QUETTA: Deputy Commissioner, Saad Bin Asad distributing wheel chairs among disabled persons during a ceremony organized by Muslim Hands International, in Quetta.

India's series dream ends in three-day defeat by South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA (AFP/APP): India's dream of winning a Test series in South Africa for the first time was ended inside three days as they crashed to an innings and 32 runs defeat at Super Sport Park in Centurion on Thursday.

With the series consisting of only two matches, they can at best earn a share of the honour if they win the second Test starting in Cape Town on Wednesday.

India crashed to 131 all out in their second innings after conceding a 163-run first innings lead.

A day which started

with the match evenly poised turned into a rout for the tourists.

Dean Elgar (185) and Marco Jansen (84 not out) transformed a slender 11-run lead for South Africa at the start of play into a strong position.

They shared a 111-run sixth wicket partnership as South Africa took an overnight 256 for five to 408 all out despite the absence of injured captain Temba Bavuma.

Virat Kohli hit an aggressive 76 for India before he was last man out but the rest of the batting collapsed

against South Africa's fast bowlers on a lively pitch.

The second innings lasted just 34.1 overs. Kohli hit 12 fours and a six in an 82-ball innings. Shubman Gill made 26 but no other batsman scored more than six.

Kagiso Rabada set the tone for South Africa, bowling Sharma for a duck with a superb delivery which deviated off the pitch to hit the off stump.

Rabada, who took five for 59 in the first innings, took two for 32 and finished the match with an outstanding diving catch at long-on to dismiss Kohli off Jansen, who took three for 36.

Overall law and order situation...

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Referring the Turbat incident, the Chief Minister said that a fact finding committee has been constituted for investigation of the incident.

He said that the FIR has been registered against the nominated personnel after dismissal from service.

The transparent inquiry of the matter is being conducted.

To a query about alleged conduct of the Islamabad police with protesters, the Chief Minister responded by saying that the federal government has constituted special committee comprising three members of the caretaker federal ministers.

However, there was also some mistake of the protesters who attempted to move towards the red zone, on which the Islamabad police had to

take action against them, he added.

However, the government is desirous of resolving the issue through mutual understanding, and for the purpose, the special committee has held several meetings with the protesters.

During the course of meetings, it had been decided to release around 200 arrested persons. Of them, 163 have already been released and remaining would be set free after necessary legal action soon, adding he mentioned.

The Chief Minister stressed that we have to move ahead for promotion of national unity by ending hatred.

The unity and harmony is need of the hour for a prosperous and developed Pakistan si we have to ensure it, he maintained.

Marsh's 96 gives Australia edge as Pakistan left to rue dropped catch

SYDNEY (INP): In-form Mitchell Marsh and a battling Steven Smith struck half-centuries under pressure to deflate Pakistan as Australia regained control of the Boxing Day Test after recovering from a calamitous top-order collapse.

In cloudy conditions and on a tricky MCG surface, Australia had crashed to 16 for 4 in their second innings with a lead of just 70 runs. But Marsh and Smith combined for a 153-run partnership in the highest fifth-wicket stand in Test history from a total of 20 for 4 or lower. In a late twist, they both fell in the final session with Smith dismissed for 50 on what proved to be the last ball of day three when he gloved a brutal delivery from spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi to gully.

Afridi's strike gave Pakistan hope, but Australia still had the edge with a valuable lead of 241 runs with four wickets in hand. Pakistan, however, could have been in a far better position. The pivotal moment came early in the second session when Marsh on 20 was badly dropped by Abdullah Shafique at first slip off quick Aamer Jamal when Australia were 46 for 4. Reminiscent of his blunder early on day one when he spilt Warner, Shafique could not hold onto a thick edge from Marsh's attempted drive. The ball almost rebounded to Salman Agha, who appeared to be caught off

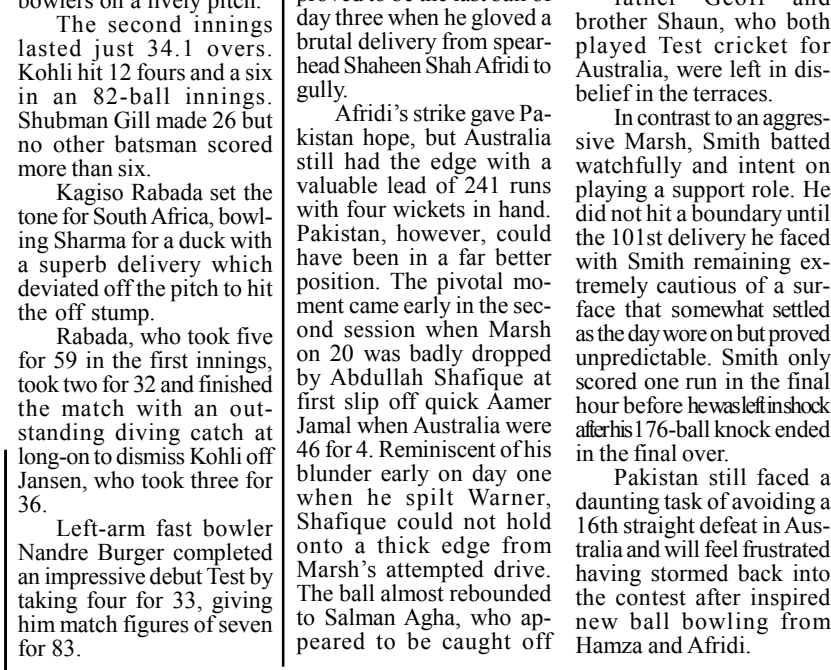
guard. Shafique was eventually removed from the slips as Pakistan's confidence nosedived. Ghosts of the past appeared to be rearing for Pakistan as seemingly distracted captain Shan Masood misfielded at mid-off on the next delivery to gift Marsh a boundary.

Marsh made a dejected Pakistan pay with 96 off 130 balls to continue his rich form since being recalled to the team in Headingley during the Ashes. But he missed out on his fourth Test century when he edged a brilliant delivery from left-arm quick Mir Hamza that was superbly taken low at slip by Salman His

father Geoff and brother Shaun, who both played Test cricket for Australia, were left in disbelief in the terraces.

In contrast to an aggressive Marsh, Smith batted watchfully and intent on playing a support role. He did not hit a boundary until the 101st delivery he faced with Smith remaining extremely cautious of a surface that somewhat settled as the day wore on but proved unpredictable. Smith only scored one run in the final hour before he was left in shock after his 176-ball knock ended in the final over.

Pakistan still faced a daunting task of avoiding a 16th straight defeat in Australia and will feel frustrated having stormed back into the contest after inspired new ball bowling from Hamza and Afridi.



JAMSHORO: A spectacular view of mass PT performing during 61st Parents Day of Cadet College Petaro.

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

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Madad Ali Sindhi on Thursday took strict notice of the inordinate delay in the development of campus of Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) in Punjab.

During a meeting with Advisor Planning HEC and Director P&D QAU, he ordered an immediate inquiry to be done and the report to be presented to him by January 04, 2024.

Madad said that such delays are a major obstacle in the academic journey of our youth. He ordered HEC and QAU to immediately resolve all of the pending issues related to it and further coordinate with the Punjab Government to ensure speedy construction of

the campus. He said that it is high time that the relevant departments are held accountable for inefficient and ineffective management. Madad Ali Sindhi also paid a surprise visit to the QAU Islamabad Campus. He visited the hostels and said that the existing condition of the hostels is deplorable. He highlighted the poor maintenance of the facilities.

Students met with him and highlighted their plea about insufficient academic facilities such as the availability of the Internet. Madad took notice of the situation and ordered an immediate revamp of the hostels. He said that students cannot study unless they have the basic facilities. He said that it was unimaginable for students

to focus on their studies if they had to deal with such problems.

Madad assured the students that he would order an immediate revamp of the conditions of the hostels. Madad said that we work towards student exchange programs with friendly countries but after looking at the conditions of the hostels, it is pertinent that we first fix our institutions before inviting foreign students to study here.

He said that it is a sad state of affairs and that this will limit opportunities for our students to go abroad in student exchange programs. He said that such problems need to be addressed on war footing and ordered the relevant authorities to resolve these issues immediately.



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

CPEC promotes economic transformation & regional integration: Speakers

ISLAMABAD (APP): The speakers during a webinar on Thursday highlighted a pivotal role played by the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in fostering a community for a shared future between China and Pakistan.

The Webinar on "A Decade of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" was organized by the Centre for BRI and China Studies, Institute of Peace and Diplomatic Studies (IPDS) and Pakistan Research Centre, Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences, China, in collaboration with the Alliance of China Pakistan Research Centres.

The mega initiative had significantly transformed Pakistan's economic landscape and contributing to poverty reduction, the speakers said, adding the implementation of connectivity projects, particularly in farm-to-market initiatives, had brought revolutionary changes to agriculture and industrial development in Pakistan.

While looking at the decade of CPEC's impact, they said the global community must recognize its

status as a game changer and a fate changer.

President of IPDS Dr. Farhat Asif emphasized the significance of the webinar, introducing the forthcoming book, "CPEC: A Decade of Transformation across Pakistan - Regional Impacts and Progress," a collaborative effort of both institutes.

Director of the Pakistan Research Centre Richer Tang Jun offered insights into the book, focusing on the developmental strides made over the decade.

Director of the CPEC Research Centre Dr. Xiaqing Xie highlighted the poverty reduction impacts of CPEC in Pakistan through energy projects.

Dr. Liaqat Ali Shah, Head of Policy, Centre of Excellence for CPEC, emphasized the role of academia and think tanks in formulating actionable policies.

Prof. Dr. Sun Hongqi, Director of the Pakistan Center for Educational and Cultural Studies, Jiangsu Normal University, emphasized the close ties between China and Pakistan, drawing global attention to CPEC.



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

Experts call for anticipatory climate adaptation to cope crisis in the region

ISLAMABAD (Online): Experts at a high-level roundtable called upon yesterday, the government and policy makers to come up with an inclusive and holistic approach to meet the exacerbating climate crisis through anticipatory adaptation.

The roundtable titled "Foresight and futures thinking for Anticipatory Adaptation in Pakistan" was organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in collaboration with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) to address how various stakeholders are thinking of future risks, and how these risks could be integrated into existing plans and policies.

In his opening remarks, Dr Babar Shahbaz, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Agricultural Extension Education and Rural Development, set the ground for the participants to deliberate on pertinent and relevant issues precisely. To become future-fit,

he said, it is important to understand future risks and take anticipatory actions.

Amina Maharjan, Senior Specialist Livelihoods and Migration, ICIMOD briefed the participants on the foresight and futures thinking for anticipatory adaptation in the region, methods to explore future pathway in terms of foresight, scenario development, development of efficient strategies and understanding foresight beyond predictions.

She briefed the participants on the emerging concept of foresight as the method of scoping, sensitization, participatory scenario development, integration into plans and policies and gender inclusive steps to address data gaps, and other shortcomings hampering climate resilient future development through a futuristic approach.

Sultan Mehmood, the World Food Programme (WFP) representative, mentioned the climate adaptation related interventions being implemented

through the WFP collaboration particularly the Living Indus Initiative. He underscored the need to address water management, governance, land cover area protection and multi-hazard vulnerability risk assessment (MHVRA) as crucial components to successfully meet the challenge of climate foresight.

Muhammad Farooq, Senior Joint Secretary, Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, briefed the participants about the steps taken by the Ministry in the aftermath of rising magnitude of climate catastrophes. He shed light on the development of the baseline data based on modern techniques, MHVRA being done for high resolution data work underway on climate on mapping and prediction by 2090.

Mr Farooq also pointed out lacunas in existing strategies particularly no linkage between adaptation and NDCs which has been done by developed countries. Pakistan has sub-



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

Over 1400 Aero Apprentices passed out at PAF Airmen Academy Korangi Creek

ISLAMABAD (APP): The passing out Parade of Aero Apprentices was held at the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Airmen Academy, Korangi Creek, here Thursday. Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (Air Defence), Air Marshal Irfan Ahmad, was the chief guest at the occasion, a PAF news release said.

Earlier, Air Vice Marshal Syed Imran Majid Ali, Air Officer Commanding, PAF Academy Korangi Creek, received the chief

guest. A total of 1,410 Aero Apprentices including 66 trainees from Pakistan Navy and 01 trainee from Sri Lanka have successfully completed their technical training.

While addressing the ceremony, the chief guest said, PAF is a highly professional organization that is venerated as a combat efficient force and has always come up to the expectations of the nation during testing times through its historic valour, operational preparedness and professional excellence.

He further said that PAF was equipped with state-of-the-art weaponry and had full potential to defend the aerial boundaries of the motherland.

The chief guest emphasized that the current security scenario called for a fully harmonized training of PAF workforce that was fully capable of protecting and maintaining its next generation defence assets.

Anaemia reduction programme launched in 50 girls' schools

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly Iron Folic Acid Supplementation (WIFAS) pilot project has benefited over 5,000 in-school adolescent girls for anaemia's reduction.

The project was jointly started by the Federal and Punjab governments and Nutrition International (NI).

The pilot project reached adolescent girls with the recommended scheme of WIFAS and enhanced their knowledge about nutrition and iron deficiency anaemia.

Under the project, the Nutrition International joined hands with the Nu-

trition Wing of Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, Integrated Reproductive Maternal Newborn, Child Health and Nutrition Program Punjab and Lodhran district's health and education authorities to pilot the programme in 50 public sector schools.

As per the findings of the National Nutrition Survey 2018, 54.7% of the country's adolescent girls are anaemic, with a higher prevalence in rural areas (56%) than urban areas (53%).

The consequences of outcomes due to anaemia and malnutrition can lead to di-

Scrutiny of nomination papers for elections continues

ISLAMABAD (INP): Scrutiny of the nomination papers filed by candidates for next general elections is underway which will continue till Saturday.

Appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers can be submitted until the third of next month and decisions on these appeals will be made by the tenth of next month.

The list of candidates will be displayed on the 11th January and candidates would have the option to withdraw by the 12th January.

PBC starts special program 'Elections City 2024'

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) has launched a series of special programmes, "Elections City 2024", in connection with the forthcoming general elections 2024.

The first special programme, jointly produced by the News and Current Affairs Channel and Programme Wing, was broadcast live at News and Current Affairs Channel from Islamabad, said a press release issued on Thursday.

Speaking in the programme, Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said that Radio Pakistan had a long history of providing timely and accurate information to the masses.

Appreciating the historical role of Radio Pakistan during all the previous and forthcoming general elections, he expressed the hope that all regional and local stations would also follow the National Hook-up Programme and plan their transmission accord-

ingly.

Director General Elections, Election Commission of Pakistan, Syed Nadeem Haider said conducting elections was a massive exercise in which about one million election staff would be deputed. About 92,000 polling stations would be set up across the country, while a special security plan would be chalked out for around 47,000 sensitive and extremely sensitive polling stations to ensure law and order, he added.

He said the Election Monitoring and Complaint Cell had also been established which would monitor the election process round the clock.

Lauding the role of Radio Pakistan, the ECP DG Elections said it had an edge over other mediums of communication due to its access to the far flung areas of the country.

He also appealed to the political parties to extend cooperation to the ECP in conducting peaceful, free, fair and transparent elections.



DG FIA awards letters of appreciation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Director General of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Thursday awarded appreciation letters to Deputy Director FIA Anti-corruption Islamabad Afzal Khan Niazi and Deputy Director FIA Majid Manzoor Awan.

Both the officers were awarded with the appreciation letters on best performance during the year 2023.

Jamal stresses for revival of 'Cinema industry' with affordable tickets

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Caretaker Minister for National Heritage and Culture Syed Jamal Shah

Thursday stressed the need for revival of 'Cinema industry' with affordable tickets and said that it was high time to invest in Pakistan's entertainment industry to implement a methodology in producing quality films.

Talking to a Private news channel, on the eve of World Cinema Day, minister said that almost 4000 new cinemas are required to revive this industry, adding, Cinema and film making in Pakistan can comeback if it revives the industry with multi task films of all countries.

He said that Pakistan was highly rich and diverse and we wish to encourage our artists to showcase their talent and promote the diversity in the cultural landscape of the country through the art of music, adding, investors should also be encouraged to invest in Cinema industry for the revival of film industry.



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

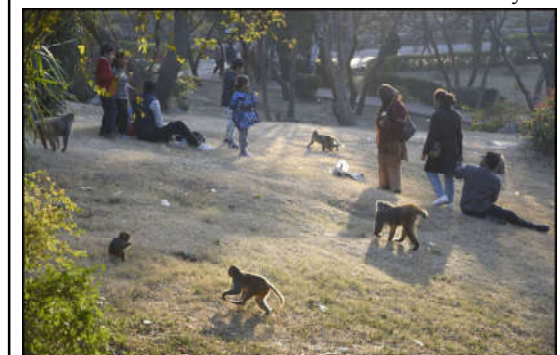
Closing ceremony of weapons handling training course held

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD: The closing ceremony of a three-day weapon handling training course held at Police Line Headquarters, in which 25 participants participated. In the weapon handling course, basic knowledge of weapons and training were provided to the participants.

According to the details, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, a series of self-defense courses is being conducted for the citizens of the federal capital Islamabad, in order to ensure the safety of their lives and property and train them to deal with any emergency situation.

In this regard, a closing ceremony was organized at Police Line Headquarters, in which AIG Logistics was the chief guest. He distributed the certificates among the participants who had successfully completed the training course.



ISLAMABAD: A view of monkeys sitting around the picnickers for food at Dam-e-Koh in Federal Capital.

TDEA-FAFEN registers more than 300,000 women as voters

ISLAMABAD (Online): The Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability - Free and Fair Election Network (TDEA-FAFEN) showcased the efforts of women political workers and leaders to get their civil and political rights and demonstrate leadership skills through a four-year program, 'WE'RE Leaders' funded by Global Affairs Canada.

Starting in 2019, the four-year project was implemented in 20 districts of all four provincial capitals through 19 FAFEN member organizations. The project also worked with the rights-based commissions, the Election Commission of Pakistan, the National Database and Registration Authority, the me-

dia, and other government institutions. Celebrating the successful closeout of the program, Mr. Luke Myers, the Counsellor (Development) and Head of Cooperation, at Global Affairs Canada said the gender gap on the electoral rolls has been minimized due to the collaboration between civil society and the institutions. He appreciated the increased number of women filing their nomination papers for the general elections 2024, as compared with the previous two general elections. However, he emphasized that the reality should not be overlooked as around 13,000 female voters will still be missing in each of the 266 National Assembly constituencies in the upcoming general elections.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent
 Friday December 29, 2023

A level pitch

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

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

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

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

The judicial authorities should consider expediting the hearing of this case to dispel any remaining uncertainty regarding the PTI's use of its election symbol. Of course, as this paper has consistently stated, the PTI and all other contenders need to be provided a level playing field in order to freely contest the general elections. Yet the PHC's decision aside, the party still appears to be getting the rough end of the stick.

For example, PTI vice chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi was manhandled and rearrested outside Adiala jail in an undisclosed case on Wednesday, despite securing bail in the cipher case. Meanwhile, the PTI has also moved a contempt petition in the SC citing alleged violation of the court's Dec 22 order by the ECP, and seeking an end to the arrests and harassment of its workers and candidates.

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

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

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



Ali Tauqeer Sheikh

Perhaps the most important takeaway from the climate summit in the UAE was the engagement of young boys and girls from almost a dozen youth groups representing Pakistan's different regions. Each group focused on specific concerns of interest to them in their respective areas. They engaged with each other, their international counterparts, and with the Pakistani Pavilion, arguing passionately about their views on how to make Pakistan a climate-resilient, prosperous, and socially cohesive country.

They were the finest young minds reflecting Pakistan's promised energy and vibrancy. They represented 18 per cent or about 22 million new voters that have been added to the electoral rolls since the 2018 elections. It is estimated that

voters from the ages 18 to 35 years will constitute 45pc of the electoral college on polling day in February. Yet, they were mostly political orphans as none of the mainstream political parties have shown any serious interest to listen to them or to weave their ambitions and aspirations into party platforms and manifestos.

Ignoring this demographic profile will be perilous for any political party, indeed for democracy in Pakistan. This will weaken any government's mandate and legitimacy. In 2018, for example, more than 100 National Assembly members from a total of 266 directly elected seats, were won by a plurality — that is, not the majority of registered voters. Further, an unbelievable 86 NA seats were won or lost by a narrow margin of less than 1,000 votes, and another 26 seats by a difference of under 2,000 votes. In 51 constituencies, mostly in the political battleground of Punjab, the winning candidate's margin of victory was under 6,000 votes in constituencies that mostly comprised some 900,000 voters. These are indeed "fragile margins of victory" as Maleeha Lodhi labelled

them in this space a few weeks ago.

Given these narrow margins, young voters can tip the outcome if they participate in the election in significant numbers. Increased youth participation can ensure that more than 51pc votes (the last election's threshold) are cast. Ignoring the youth can at best give a fractured victory, denying any party a clear majority. Instead, the larger political parties have been shepherding electables to their barn of candidates. Political parties can overcome this predicament and strengthen democracy in the country simply by wooing an additional 10pc youthful voters by addressing their concerns.

Most of the 22m new voters have seen creeping climatic changes that have adversely affected the quality of their lives and narrowed job markets as well as livelihood options. They have witnessed Pakistan's GDP shrinking by as much as 4pc owing to climate-triggered disasters. They breathe toxic air and they know this is due to poor environmental governance. They drink polluted water and eat contaminated foods

and are aware that this stems from the country's degraded natural resource base. They know that presently Pakistan is spending more on maladaptation, rather than adaptation, and that this factor adds to societal vulnerabilities. They have seen how the economic growth rate has dwindled, service delivery has floundered, and how inclusion, equity and justice have become even more elusive because of the recurrent costs of climate change.

The political discourse is fast becoming irrelevant for the youth as it alienates them from mainstream politics. Most parties have traditionally dealt with climate issues superficially and with platitudes.

Many mainstream political parties have a misplaced and cynical view that the electorate in Pakistan is uneducated, and therefore, people do not vote for party manifestos. They have forgotten that at least twice in our political history, manifestos captured the voters' pulse and swept the country with winds of change. The first time was in 1969 when during Ayub Khan's period of growing inequalities, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto

captured the common man's imagination with his slogan of equity — 'roti, kapra aur makan'. The second time was during the last elections when Imran Khan harnessed the sentiments of young people with slogans of tabdeeli, or change, against the manipulated but unimaginative game of musical chairs that had been ongoing since the 1990s, between the PPP and PML-N.

The aging leadership of the mainstream political parties has forgotten that manifestos galvanise public opinion and create a momentum of support for them or their opponents. The manifestos represent the party leadership's vision and clarity of purpose, supported by programmes for implementation. They draw ideological lines and present the rationale for their priorities. The second and third echelons of leadership, often siblings of senior leaders, have not enjoyed political space to develop their narratives for climate-smart demographic dividends, let alone harnessing it for their respective parties' advantage.

Most political parties have not rooted their programmes in internal bottom-up processes. Unsurprisingly, climate

considerations are typically not embedded in each chapter of their manifestos, nor is the role of youth visible in delivery. Many political parties are continuing with the decades-old practice of having a stand-alone section on environment that leaves climate change hanging in isolation without cross-referencing with other planks of the manifesto. This approach is least helpful in integrating resilience in sectoral responses.

Political parties can still exercise leadership by showing an integrated approach to attract and inform private and public-sector investments at the provincial and federal levels. It is expected that the political parties will need to also show how they will fund their programmes, given that the fiscal space has diminished. The domestic and international climate finance landscape has changed profoundly, with funds mostly unavailable to fulfil tall promises. The political parties have a chance to show in their manifestos how they will harness youthful energy to spearhead the country's drive for climate resilience, prosperity and social cohesion. — Courtesy Dawn

The year through the haze



Kamila Hyat

This year that has almost gone by has brought with it many events which are seen as insignificant in the eyes of websites and organizations that document these events. In Punjab, the smog which has descended over many parts of the province leaves people looking out into a permanent sea of grey which sometimes allows in small rays of sunshine but there is nothing to end the pollution that has already become a major health hazard in the province.

But as we move beyond the central Punjab, and particularly beyond Lahore and Sheikhupura, the smog lifts to let us think back on events of various kinds in 2023.

The most significant of these is perhaps the lead-up to the next election, the appointment of Anwarul

Haq Kakar as caretaker prime minister, and the taking over by Justice Qazi Faez Isa as the chief justice of the Supreme Court. But with these events, we have others such as the many audio recordings that have surfaced this year and left judges asking who is making these invasions into the privacy of homes and sometimes bedrooms. We also have a series of cases against Imran Khan who for now almost stands ousted from the next election and whose party has effectively been disbanded by the very forces which first created it. The situation is a strange one. Many can predict who the next prime minister would be, but few, if any, know if an election will take place at all.

These for Pakistan are perhaps mundane events. In the long history of the country, where dictators have ruled the majority of years, elections seem to be only ceremonial. However, it will be important to see if an election does take place in early 2024. And if so, quite how it is conducted and how it is handled by the powers that be. The interest in the agenda of major parties has already been expressed and there are al-

ready some positive signs with a woman given a ticket for the Buner seat for the very first time, Buner being a district where the Pakistani Taliban had previously banned women from participation in any political or other public activity.

At the same time, the TTP is back killing military officers and police officers, notably in the former tribal areas of the country. This has been a notable issue during the year and shows that the TTP has neither lost venom nor force. Along with this, the driving out of Afghans, some of whom have lived in Pakistan for three generations, is a measure that depicts the kind of state Pakistan has become, with humanity at an all-time low. And this is a concern for the fact that we allowed in the Afghans after 1979 and used them against Soviets and for our own purposes. It is quite obvious that, as is the rule in most countries, at the very least, Afghans born in Pakistan should be allowed to stay and the entire community should not be vilified as is currently happening.

Of immense significance was the burning of churches and homes belong-

ing to Christians in Jaranwala in August this year. The event has been covered somewhat hesitantly in the national media, but is of enormous importance to the community and indeed the country. Children aged even three years old can remember the events that took place, and even today, while many churches have been rebuilt, often as a result of the work of private agencies and NGOs, there are families that live without homes, either in rented quarters or in the cramped dwellings offered up by relatives. The horrifying nature of the event has left a mark on a community. But whether it has shaken the country enough to bring change is difficult to say.

The same can hold true for other events. In Balochistan, the protest by women from a traditionally conservative community has had an impact. But again, it is difficult to know if this is enough to bring about the kind of change we need. The manner in which the women were treated by the CTD in Islamabad has been felt by many. But what comes beyond this, we still do not know.

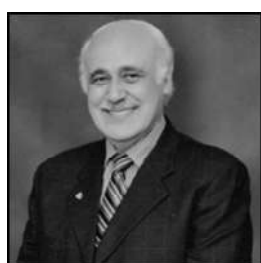
We also saw, during the year, the death of a former autocrat, Pervez Musharraf, reminding us of the damage he had inflicted on the country much like previous dictators. The drone attacks on allegedly militant targets, the handing over of persons to US troops to be sent to Guantanamo Bay or other places sometimes in exchange for money further added to the divide within the country. And so did the remark by Pervez Musharraf about the Pakistani constitution being nothing more than a few pieces of paper, which could be tossed into the dustbin. If this is the thinking of its top command, a country is clearly in trouble.

At the same time, we also need to build the skill sets of people so that those working overseas can send in larger amounts of money. Right now, most of these remittances come from labourers or low level workers in areas such as the sanitary industry, dishwashing, taxi driving etc. If we could provide the techniques needed to develop good-level electricians, IT experts and those who excel in their

fields, the volume of remittances would obviously increase and allow a slightly better economic outlook for a country which has badly lost direction in this field. At the same time, we must consider the demand that land be taxed and that more taxes be brought in from the wealthy rather than the method of indirect taxation which punishes everyone regardless of their income and regardless of what is already deducted from their wages at source.

The question of schooling is imperative. It has to be considered very seriously and in a great deal of depth. At present, we are simply schooling and not educating our children. This has to change if there is to be any hope for the future. We must offer an education which has some meaning to lives and which can add quality to the kind of work people do. Vocational training is a good idea given the current situation that we face. The World Bank notes that Pakistan lacks quality labour. And this is also among the many tasks that lie before us as we move towards the next year. — Courtesy TheNews

Reimagined idols



F.S. Aijazuddin

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

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

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

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

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

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

expats — Akbar S. Ahmed and Jamil Dehlavi. The actor chosen to play Jinnah — Christopher Lee — had made his name in horror films. Nevertheless, Lee relished the role, describing it as "the most important" he had ever played.

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

Every new nation attributes its existence to one person, a father of the nation, responsible for its paternity. Prominent amongst them, for example, were Soekarno in Indon-e-sia, Kenyatta in Kenya, Ben Bella in Algeria, and Nkrumah in Ghana. To Bangla-deshis, it is Banglabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Sheikh Mujib's life can be split into two halves — from his birth in 1920 to Pak-is-tan's independence in 1947, and the second from 1947 until his assassination in 1975. Shyam Benegal's recently released biopic Mujib: The Making of a Nation (2023) covers both, with commendable sensitivity.

Such a film, sponsored by the Bangladesh government of Prime Minister Hasina Wajed (Mujib's daughter) and the Indian government could have been clouded by bias, (Attenborough's Gandhi reeked of Mrs Indira Gandhi's benediction). In fact, Shyam's film is surprisingly free of sponsored prejudice.

The film is playing to packed houses in Bangladesh. It could be shown safely in Pakistan, without risking a riot.

The film opens with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's return to Dhaka on Jan 10,

1972, after president Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto ordered his release from jail in West Pakistan. The story then reverts to his early years, his tutelage under the Bengali leader Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy (prime minister briefly from September 1957 to October 1958 of a united Pakistan), and his demands for equitable treatment for a neglected East Pakistan.

Confrontation with Gen Ayub Khan's military government led to stints in jail. In 1966, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced his neo-secessionist six-point plan.

The general election held in 1970 gave Mujib's Awami League a majority in the National Assembly. That proved indigestible to president Yahya Khan and to Mr Bhutto who preferred to reign in a divided hell than to serve in a united heaven.

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

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

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



Hafsa Azam

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

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

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

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

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

According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, over the past two decades, rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and arid conditions have elevated wildfire risks.

Climate change amplifies interconnected factors such as temperature and humidity in vegetated areas, triggering dangerous wildfires. In July 2023, Greece faced devastating wildfires, the US battled wildfires in California, and Canada struggled with over 900 active fires, 599 of them "out of control". Also, in Southeast Asia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam experienced wildfires. Chile's Megadrought culminated in a catastrophic wildfire earlier this year.

AI plays a crucial role in providing weather forecasts for anticipating natural disasters accurately. Conventional forecasting relies on intricate mathematical models, which may not be able to predict extreme events. AI's foremost contribution lies in providing early warning mechanisms and post-disaster recovery efforts. Through the analysis of extensive data from sources like satellite imagery, weather stations, and social media, AI algorithms can discern patterns and trends indicative of impending disasters. For instance, AI-driven systems can detect hurricane formation and factors that could lead to wildfire, such as smoke plumes, rapidly changing heat signatures and the appearance of hotspots in vegetated areas in satellite images, enabling timely warnings and evacuations.

The US utilises AI to enhance weather predictions, early warnings, flood monitoring, disaster-response coordination, infrastructure assessment and long-term climate modelling, which improves resilience and disaster management. Japan has introduced an emergency announcement system, utilising automated drones to facilitate disaster evacuations. These drones operate on a dedicated private wireless network that remains functional during emergencies. They are equipped with infrared cameras to capture real-time images of disaster-affected areas and transmit them to disaster-response centres to urge people to evacuate. This technology enhances the speed and security of remote damage assessment, thereby improving disaster response efficiency. Pakistan needs to integrate AI into the operations of its meteorological departments due to the severe impact of climate change. The country faces challenges such as reduced agricultural productivity, irregular water supplies, coastal erosion and increased extreme weather events, making AI-based climate disaster management crucial. Pakistan ranks among the top 10 countries which are most affected by climate change. Severe floods in 2022, with rainfall three times higher than the national average, had caused damage to the tune of \$30 billion, with more than 1,200 fatalities. There are no AI-based measures mentioned in the National Artificial Intelligence Policy to address climate disaster mitigation. Countries, such as the US, which have invested in AI for disaster response, have witnessed notable improvements in preparedness and rapid response time, underlining the potential benefits of a dedicated climate-disaster-mitigation AI policy. Pakistan should therefore consider incorporating climate-disaster-mitigation AI technology measures into the NAP to effectively cope with the impacts of climate change. — Courtesy Dawn

CM directs MDA to start uplift work on housing scheme of nullah affectees

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Baqar presided over a meeting to finalise the development of a township at Taiser Town for the affected people of Gujjar, Mahmoodabad, and Orangi Nullahs at Taiser Town Scheme -45, Sector 16 of Malir Development Authority.

The Sindh government will allot a plot measuring 80 square yards to each affected person/family and after handing over the possession of the plot, with title and free from all encumbrances, the cost of construction will also be paid to the affected persons.

The chief minister directed the MDA to engage an architect so that proper development of the housing scheme for the nullah-affected people. He directed the MDA to develop a park, a playground, a school, and a mosque for the housing scheme and equip it with all the utility facilities such as gas, water and electricity.

Justice Baqar directed the finance department to release the funds so that the inner and outer development of the housing scheme could be started. He added that he

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

Naqvi allocates Rs300m for AED equipment in 800 ambulances

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited the Emergency Services Academy Thokar Niaz Baig and attended the passing-out parade ceremony on Thursday.

Observing their emergency response, Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi witnessed impeccable rescue drills, including swimming training, equipment inspections, and a symbolic descent from a fire tower with the national flag.

Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi received salutes from the passing-

out rescuers. He inspected the rescuers' parade and awarded shields and prizes to those excelling in the training, emphasizing the significance of life-saving skills. Emergency Services Academy Director General Dr Rizwan Naseer, administered the oath to the rescuers.

Addressing the ceremony, Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi highlighted that every fourth patient faces heart problems and announced funds of Rs 300 million for Automated External Defibrillator (AED) equipment in 800 ambulances to enhance

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

timeframe.

Under this flagship program, 20 provincial and federal departments are providing services to the investors under one roof; he added and disclosed that business facilitation centers are also being set up in Faisalabad, Sialkot, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi and Multan, contributing to the overall ease of doing business across the region.

Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has ordered Lahore Education Board to make all facilities online for students within seven days.

Governor for carbon free architecture, town planning

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Governor Punjab Muhammad Baligh-ur-Rehman Thursday said that the historical buildings of Bahawalpur are masterpiece of architecture.

He was addressing the Architects Convention and Workshop held at Noor Mahal under the auspices of the Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners.

He said that town planners and architects play an important role in the development of a city. He said that correct and disciplined planning is important for the prosperity of the area.

The governor said that town planners and architects must keep in view the future needs and climate changes for better planning and designing.

Baligh-ur-Rehman said that the training workshop has been organized for architects of South Punjab in this regard.

He said that zero-carbon buildings are the need of the hour.

The Governor Punjab distributed certificates to the participants of the workshop.

Chairman Pakistan Council of Architects and Town Planners Muhammad Arif Chingeezi said that the workshop has been organized for the architects of South Punjab to promote the architecture and town planning industry.

He said that the construction of environment-friendly buildings and reducing the carbon in the environment is very important for the next generation.



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



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi flanked by the Doctor Rizwan Naseer inspecting training at CPR stall during his visit to emergency service academy.

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

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice @ Syed Arshad Hussain Shah's recent visit to Ayub Medical Institute (AMI) marked a significant milestone with the inauguration of key facilities aimed at revolutionizing healthcare and education in the region.

During the visit, the Chief Minister inaugurated the Ayub College of Dentistry, Patient Facilitation and Complaint Center, and the Cornea Transplant Facility at AMI. Notably, the chief minister also announced the university status for Ayub Medical College (AMC), expressing a commitment to streamline the accreditation processes

to elevate the institution's standards.

Syed Arshad Shah emphasized the importance of upgrading Ayub Teaching Hospital (ATH) and AMC to meet international standards, directing the Board of Governors (BOG) and hospital executives to discuss further enhancements in a meeting scheduled in Peshawar on Friday.

Following the inauguration of Ayub College of Dentistry, the Chief Minister conducted a comprehensive tour, inspecting the college's skill lab and other departments. He lauded the efforts of the college administration and faculty for their dedication to establishing an institution that excels in

dental education.

The Chief Minister expressed confidence that the newly inaugurated building of Ayub College of Dentistry would significantly contribute to providing high-quality education, research, and healthcare services for the community.

During the visit Chief minister also chaired a meeting where various dignitaries, including Chairman BOG Mushtaq Jadoon, BOG members Ijaz Khan, Dr. Aftab Rabbani, Javed Tariq, Fawad Saleh, and Asad Jadoon were also present. The meeting provided a platform to discuss and improve overall healthcare services and educational offerings at Ayub Medical Institution.

KP Minister inaugurates IT skills training center at Qadafi, Utmankhel

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for newly merged districts affairs, Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Dr. Amer Abdullah has paid a day long visit to District Bajaur and formally inaugurated the Information Technical Skills Training Center at Qadafi, Tehsil Utmankhel.

The project was established under the mega IT project of "Digital Connect" launched by the provincial government, for the youth of merged districts. During his visit, the caretaker minister also took briefings at district headquarters Khar, from the administration, police and line departments on the overall situation of administrative affairs, law and order and development process in the district.

On this occasion, he also interacted with the local journalist community and the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Deputy Commissioner Bajaur

Anwar Haq, District Police Officer Kashif Zulfikar, Additional Deputy Commissioner Hamza Zahoor and other officers were also present.

During inauguration the IT Training Center established under the KP Information Technology Board, the Caretaker Minister in his address to the ceremony composed by training participant students and local elders, said that the youth in the merged districts will be given IT skills training and an opportunity for them to work in the relevant sector avenues.

He added that such centers are being set up in seven districts as these districts remained behind other regions in digital literacy. He further said that this initiative has been started from Bajaur while such a training center is also ready in Orakzai and this project will be spread in other merged districts in which IT training will be given according to the needs of the market.



KARACHI: Amir Jamat-e-Islami (Karachi) Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman visits flowers exhibition at Park in Provincial Capital.

Chinese Cultural Center Peshawar to promote Pak-Iran contacts

PESHAWAR (INP): Director General of the Cultural Center of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Dr. Hossein Chaghomi, has said that the Chinese Cultural Center established in Peshawar can play an important role in the people to people contact between Pakistan and Iran in addition to Pakistan-China friendship.

He expressed these views while talking to the media during his visit to China Window, a Chinese cultural center here Thursday.

Dr. Hossein Chaghomi visited various galleries of China Window, signed the friendship wall and recorded his comments

in the guest book.

The DG said that the relations between Pakistan and Iran were very strong on traditional and cultural basis and he was sure that people to people contact between the two countries would increase in the coming days. Everyone knows about the friendship between Pakistan and China and that is why the Chinese cultural center established in Peshawar which undoubtedly is center of attention of the people, he added.

He said that the cultures of different countries were also being highlighted in Peshawar. Giving the example of Khana Farhang e Iran.

PHC suspends notification to end free electricity to WAPDA officers

PESHAWAR (INP): The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Thursday suspended the decision of the caretaker government to end the provision of free electricity units to the WAPDA employees.

The ruling was announced during the hearing of a plea of PESCO offices for free electricity units provision.

The PHC after suspending the notification of the government, issued notices to the caretaker federal government and WAPDA.

The respondents have been asked to submit their responses at the next hearing of the case.

It is to be noted that Pakistan ended free electricity units for the DISCOs and GENCOs, WAPDA and NTDC officers from December 1, 2023.

In a notification issued by the power division, it was stated the federal cabinet had approved monetisation of free electricity units admissible to the employees of Wapda, ex-Wapda companies, including distribution companies (Discos), generation companies (Gencos), National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) and Power Information Technology Company (PITC).

The WAPDA employees had been protesting for the continuing of free electricity units to them.

Heavy fog affects flight operations at Lahore Airport

LAHORE (INP): Flight operations at Allama Iqbal International Airport in Lahore have been severely affected by heavy fog on Thursday morning.

Due to heavy fog, ten affected domestic and international flights have been diverted to other airports. As per schedule PK-9761 will land at Islamabad International Airport instead of Lahore while the flight from Lahore to Madinah and Dubai will also take off from Islamabad Airport. The schedule of flights at Allama Iqbal International Airport has been affected due to heavy fog in Lahore. Due to fog, nine domestic and international flights have been delayed including flights to Riyadh, Jeddah,

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

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) wrote a letter to Punjab Chief Secretary and Inspector General Police (IG) on the request of PTI's Faisal Chaudhry directing them to redress the complaints of the party.

The text of the letter, issued on Thursday, says "It should be ensured that all the candidates along with their proposers and seconders, including of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), participate in the scrutiny process.

The ECP directed that no obstruction will be tolerated in the arrival of the proposers and endorsers to the RO office. No political leader or party should be deprived of their fundamental right,

Customs seize drugs worth millions at Karachi airport

KARACHI (INP): The customs personnel recovered drugs from the luggage of a Jeddah-bound passenger at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport on Thursday.

According to the details, the collectorate customs revealed that the amphetamine drugs which was seized from the passenger worth Rs 60 million in the international market.

Meanwhile, the accused was booked under the Customs and Narcotics Act and later arrested.

Back in August this year, an outbound passenger was caught by the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) at Peshawar's Bacha Khan International Airport while carrying drugs worth millions.

Adnan Jalil part ways with ANP, decides to 'join' PPP

PESHAWAR (INP): Awami National Party (ANP) leader and former Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP) caretaker minister Adnan Jalil has decided to join the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Jalil, who served as caretaker minister for industries and technical education, was sacked by the late caretaker CM Azam Khan. The son of late ANP leader Haji Adeel, has held several meetings with the PPP leadership and is likely to join the party soon. Sources having knowledge of the matter said that Adnan Jalil was having 'disagreement' with ANP leadership on various matters and decided to join PPP. He will soon make an official announcement during a joint presser with PPP KP chapter president Muhammad Ali Bacha.

Earlier this month, caretaker interior minister Sarfraz Bugti quit the federal cabinet and joined Pakistan People's Party.

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37 candidates from KP including PTI founder defaulters of ECP

PESHAWAR (INP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Election Commission released on Thursday list of candidates who failed to pay fines to the commission against violations of rules and regulations.

According to a document, around 37 candidates from KP violated rules and regulations in the past while PTI founder and former Chief Minister Mehmood Khan were also included in the list.

Many of the former ministers and members of PTI were also among the defaulters.

It was disclosed

Kamran Bangash, Taimur Jhagra, Shaikat Yousafzai and Ishtyaq Armard were also among the defaulters.

PPP Information Secretary Amjad Afridi also said to be an indebted to the commission.

On the other hand, the members of Istehkam-i-Pakistan Party (IPP) also failed to pay fines of Rs80,000 to the commission.

Jamaat-e-Islami's Inayatullah Khan could also not pay Rs50,000 in the past.

The nomination papers of candidates who failed to pay their fine to ECP would face rejection of their nomination papers.

Repatriation of undocumented Afghans continues

PESHAWAR (INP): The repatriation of illegally residing Afghans in Pakistan continued through borders in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as according to the provincial Home and Tribal Affairs Department, 537 Afghan nationals returned to their country through Torkham Border the other day.

So far, it said a total of 271503 illegal Afghans have been repatriated to their country. Through Torkham Border a total of 267111 undocumented Afghans have repatriated to Afghanistan. It said that through other borders

including Kharlachi and Angoor Adda, repatriation of Afghans was also continued.

The Home and Tribal Department said so far through the Angoor Adda border a total of 3693 undocumented Afghans have been repatriated while through Kharlachi Border, a total of 698 Afghans have returned to their country.

Through the three borders of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it said, a total of 271503 illegal Afghan refugees have been repatriated to their country so far.

May 9 episode being hushed up, facilitators still in action: Javed

LAHORE (INP): Javed Latif - a senior PML-N leader known for his hardline stance - on Thursday questioned why the events related to the May 9 violence was being swept under the carpet and said the nation must be informed about the origin of facilitators. An attempt was underway to make the upcoming general elections controversial in continuation of the overall conspiracies, Latif told reporters in Lahore, adding that those who orchestrated the May 9 and May violence were not being punished. The PML-N leader said he had been reminding even during the 16-month coalition government that the PTI leadership was being actively facilitated. Pressing his argument, Latif said courts had binned the bogus cases filed against the PML-N leaders by acquitting them of all the charges, but the foreign funding case was being

delayed despite the fact people asking about the origins of the money received by the PTI. "Someone is being described as 'innocent' today. Why we are not being named as 'faultless'," he remarked - a clear reference to the remarks passed during a hearing at the Supreme Court. Latif said signing the Charter of Democracy resulted in political stability and peaceful transfer of power for 10 years - from 2008 to 2018 - but those desirous of creating a third force brought a philosophy of ruining everything. They continued destroying Pakistan for four years, he added. The Charter of Democracy was a historic document signed by two archrivals slain Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in 2006, as they decided to ditch their differences and formulated an arrangement for how to run Pakistan according to democratic principles.

'Aqua Business Promotion Symposium' unites experts, stakeholders

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

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

The event started with recitation of Holy Quran verses and the national anthem, setting a respectful and patriotic tone. Secretary ICI&SDD Ehsan Bhatta extended a warm welcome, initiating the symposium with an inclu-

sive and cordial atmosphere. Highlighting the significance of the event, he delivered an illuminating keynote address, emphasising the importance of the aquaculture sector in the province's socio-economic landscape.

Dr. Aamer Irshad, Assistant FAO Representative (Programme), elucidated the UN FAO's role in the Hand-in-Hand project in Pakistan, outlining its significance and objectives. Hibi initiative launched in 2019, is a flagship of FAO and one of its core priority programme areas. Areas of intervention have included developing value chains for priority commodities, building agro-industries and efficient water management systems, introducing digital services and precision agriculture, reducing food losses and waste, and addressing climate challenges and weather risks. Dr. Sikender Hayat, DG Fisheries Punjab, offered valuable insights into the indispensable role played by the Fisheries Department Punjab in nurturing and advancing aquaculture practices within the region.



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

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

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce, Industries and Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz, Thursday, reiterating the government's commitment to economic revival said that SIFC was working vigorously with countries of Gulf Cooperation Council and China and inflow of huge foreign investment was expected in Pakistan that would promote industry and exports and bolster employment opportunities in the country.

The delegation was

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

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

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

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

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

in making investments in Karachi.

He said that the government has planned to open the Garment City and a new industrial estate and also to set up a new Special Economic Zone and an Export Processing Zone in the metropolis with a vision of instituting innovative trends of industrialization through the promotion of small industries.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



LAHORE: Workers are busy in Ironing the clothes at Laundry Warehouse at Landa bazaar of the Provincial Capital.

Stable steel industry vital to economic growth: Meher

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

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

Meher said that the iron and steel industry was the backbone producer industry and the mother of all industries as it caters to other industries, thus contributing towards industrial and national development.

He said that worldwide, the steel industry was considered one of the vital aspects of stable growth and

economic development. "Our industrial policy needs to be revisited to prioritize steel production over sugar, cola and cigarettes production," he remarked.

There was definitely a dire need for promoting the steel sector as the demand for steel was higher than its production and the demand and supply gap was met through imports. "Even if the reverse were the case, we would have exported steel given its high demand world over," he highlighted.

The FTO Coordinator said steel was also recyclable and, therefore, unlikely to run out like fossil fuels. "About 88 per cent of steel is recycled throughout the world and unlike other recycled materials.

Rupee gains 26 paise against Dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistani Rupee on Thursday witnessed the 12th consecutive recovery session as it gained 26 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 281.93 against the previous day's closing of Rs 282.19. However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the Dollar in the open market stood at Rs 281.9 and Rs 284.4 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs 1.87 to close at Rs 313.47 against the last day's closing of Rs 311.60, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

Spices exports increase 19.21% to \$45 million

ISLAMABAD (APP): The exports of spices witnessed an increase of 19.21 per cent during the first five months of the financial year 2023-24, as against the exports of the corresponding months of last year. The spices exports from the country were recorded at US \$45.179 million during July-November (2023-24) against the exports of US \$37.898 million during July-November (2022-23), according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

In terms of quantity, the exports of spices also surged by 82 per cent going up from 8,478 metric tons to 15,431 metric tons, according to the data. Meanwhile, year-on-year basis, the exports of spices increased by 4.29 per cent during the month of November 2023 as compared to the same month of last year.

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

ISLAMABAD (APP): The experts at a roundtable discussion on Pakistan's ties with Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Azerbaijan on Thursday called for a better strategy and efforts for improved and galvanized relationship with CARs and Azerbaijan amid growing economic significance of the region.

The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a roundtable discussion on "Pakistan's Relations with Central Asia and Azerbaijan: Imperatives of Regional Connectivity" to initiate discourse on workable solutions to further improve cooperation with the CARs.

ISSI Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, in his welcome remarks, said the country's relationships with the Central Asian region were important and Pakistan was

the first country to recognize CARs' states and expanded its cooperation expanded in multiple domains.

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

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

Senior Fellow (Central Asia and Eurasia), East West Institute, Brussels, Dr. Najam Abbas, in his keynote address, said the

country needed to line up its policy discourse to set priority areas for enhanced bilateral cooperation with the Central Asia region as the world after the pandemic and Ukraine-Russia Crisis was looking for alternate supply chains and trade routes to avert any blockade.

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

"The Europe, South Caucasus, China and CARs can be connected through Pakistan as the countries like Azerbaijan and Iran that are not well connected due to certain reasons and sanctions can get recovery," he underlined.



LAHORE: Workers sewing bags at their workplace.

Stocks move past 62,000 yet again with over 2pc surge amid a weakening dollar

KARACHI (INP): Stocks were surging for the second consecutive day as the benchmark KSE-100 Index climbed over 2.0 per cent during early trading on Thursday, meaning that the market may end the year on a high note after two weeks of massive losses.

At 11:34am, the KSE-100 was recorded at 62,113.95 after a gain of 1,250.33 points, or 2.05pc, against the previous closing of 60,863.62.

The latest trend means the market has shrugged off the fears related to political instability, at least temporarily, amid the looming general elections which will produce a new elected government whose policies are going to decide the future of Pakistan.

One of the factors behind the surging stocks is a weakening US currency as the dollar index, which measures it against six rivals, fell to a fresh five-month low of 100.81 on Thursday in Asian trading. The index fell 0.5pc on Wednesday and is on course for a 2.6pc decline this year, snapping two straight years of strong gains.

In money market, the local currency was up by

another 10 paise during early intraday trading in official exchange rate on Thursday, thus following the global trend and strengthening the impression that the country won't see more of the dreaded rupee devaluation and the US Federal Reserve will soon go for interest rate cuts — starting a cycle for countries like Pakistan too.

A strong rupee means reduction in imports bill and possible reduction in inflation, which has been on the rise despite a weakening dollar thanks to the increase in power and gas tariffs. At the same time, the oil prices too are not increasing to the alarming level, as feared, which may fuel inflation to new highs.

Elsewhere, Asian shares scaled five-month peaks on Thursday as market wagers on ever-more aggressive rate cuts extended a huge rally in US stocks and bonds, while also leaving plenty of scope for disappointment in the new year.

The S&P 500 has climbed 14pc in just two months to within a whisker of its all-time closing peak, while its price to earnings ratio is up by a quarter on the year at 24.0.

ICCI asks MCI to consider affordable signboard tax rate

ISLAMABAD (NNI): Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) leading a delegation, visited the Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) and held a meeting with Yasir Farhad, Director Municipal Administration MCI to discuss the issue of the signboard tax rate for the traders.

Ajmal Baloch President All Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajirran, Khalid Chaudhry former Senior Vice President ICCI, and others were in the delegation. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI said that the business community is not against the payment of taxes, however, MCI should finalize all taxes in consultation with the stakeholders to save the traders from unnecessary tax burden. He proposed that the MCI should consider a fixed signboard tax rate of Rs.20 per sq. ft. for small traders or make it affordable for them. He further said that MCI should take the stakeholders into confidence about the property tax, water and sanitation charges as well as solid waste management fees to make them affordable for the taxpayers.



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

Govt urged to frame economic policies in consult with chambers

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

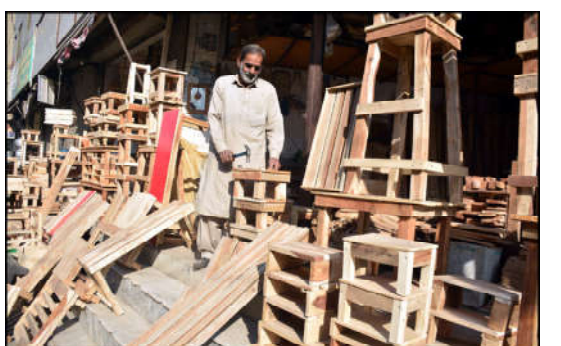
The SCCI chief also demanded review on IPPs agreements to overcome the rising energy crisis and control on high electricity tariffs. He sought pragmatic steps for provision of electricity and gas on subsidized rates to industries in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

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

The delegation of under training senior officers was spearheaded by Director Staff, NIM Islamabad Muhammad Imran. The meeting was attended by SCCI vice president Ijaz Khan Afridi, ex-

ecutive member Muhammad Ismail Safi, former president Faiz Muhammad Faizi, former senior vice presidents Ziaul Haq Sarhadi, Imran Khan Mohmand, former vice president Shuja Muhammad, and former executive member Muhammad Aurangzeb, Ishtiaq Muhammad, Fazal-e-Wahid and others. A detailed multi-media presentation was given regarding the chamber history and its objectives to the visiting senior officers here at SCCI house. The SCCI President said bureaucracy has played a pivotal role in framing policies. He, however, called for taking chambers and stakeholders on board before formulation of policies and tax-reforms initiatives so that it will enable them to execute them at every level.

While responding to various queries of senior officers, he stressed it is essential to ensure uninterrupted electricity and gas supply to industries in K-P.



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

FCCI president discusses exports to Saudi Arabia with addl secretary

FAISALABAD (APP): President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) Dr Khurram Tariq held a meeting with Rizwan Saeed, additional secretary, Middle East Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and reviewed ways and means to enhance exports to Saudi Arabia.

After meeting here on Thursday, the FCCI president stressed the need to enhance exports to Middle Eastern countries in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He said an FCCI delegation was scheduled to perform Umrah, but it has now been linked with the Pakistan

single country exhibition, scheduled to be held in Riyadh in February next year.

He said the event could provide the business community of Faisalabad to interact with the credible importers of Saudi Arabia.

He said that Rizwan Saeed had assured that earlier Sialkot Chamber was given an opportunity to play a key role in the exhibition held in Saudi Arabia.

However, the ministry of foreign affairs intends that FCCI should play a key role in the scheduled exhibition to give a quantum jump to the Pakistani exports.



LAHORE: A vendors selling and displaying oranges at their roadside setup.

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

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: The intrigues of Western countries whose dominance is ebbing away are largely responsible for pitching the world into turmoil, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview published on Thursday.

Lavrov, in a year-end interview released by the official Tass news agency, warned that no one worldwide could be certain of escaping unscathed from Western machinations in 2024.

"Storms continue in the world and one of the reasons is that the ruling circles in the West provoke crises thousands of kilometres from their borders in order to resolve their own issues at the expense of other peoples," Tass

quoted Lavrov as saying in extracts released ahead of the full publication.

"It can be said that given conditions in which the West is clinging to the domination slipping away from it, no one can be protected against its geopolitical intrigues. There is a growing understanding of this."

Moscow has come to blame the West for much of the turmoil and conflict in widely separated regions.

Russia describes its war in Ukraine as an existential struggle against the "collective West" resolved to expand the reach of NATO and inflict a "strategic defeat" on Moscow.

It also says the outbreak of conflict in the Middle East is a result of the longstanding failures of

U.S. foreign policy and called for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

In his comments to Tass, Lavrov called for de-escalation of the Middle East conflict, denouncing as "unacceptable" both acts of terror and "collective punishment".

"It is vital to break the vicious cycle of violence and do away with the injustice from which several generations of Palestinians have suffered," he was quoted as saying.

"Only by doing this can stability be achieved in the zone of confrontation in the Middle East as a whole," Lavrov also restated Russia's complaint that Ukraine was unwilling to hold peace talks to end the 22-month-old conflict in Ukraine.



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

Germany in talks with EU partners on Red Sea maritime mission

Monitoring Desk
BERLIN: Germany and its European Union partners are examining whether they could mount a new maritime mission to protect commercial vessels under threat of attack in the Red Sea, a foreign ministry spokesman said on Thursday.

"We as the German government are ready for this. It is important that we as the EU are able to act as quickly as possible in view of the ongoing attacks," the spokesperson said, adding

that a decision on the matter had not yet been taken. The Iran-backed Houthis have attacked or seized a dozen ships with missiles and drones since Nov. 19, trying to inflict an international cost for Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, which followed the militants' deadly Oct. 7 rampage in the south of the country. The United States has been spearheading a new maritime force, known as Operation Prosperity Guardian.

Australia checks Hezbollah claim of citizen killed in Israeli strike

Monitoring Desk
SYDNEY: Australia on Thursday confirmed two of its citizens were killed in an Israeli air strike in south Lebanon and said it was looking at Hezbollah's claims that one of the Australian citizens killed had links to the militant group.

"We will continue to make inquiries about this particular person, with whom Hezbollah has claimed links," Acting Foreign Minister Mark Dreyfus said during a media briefing.

"Hezbollah has claimed this Australian as one of its fighters. Our in-

quiries are continuing." Hezbollah, a Lebanese militant group backed by Iran, is a "listed terrorist organisation" in Australia and it is an offence for any Australian to provide it with financial support or fight in its ranks. Dreyfus said. A Lebanese-Australian man, his wife, and his brother, who was a member of Hezbollah, were killed in the Israeli attack, Lebanese security and local sources told Reuters on Wednesday. The strike late on Tuesday, part of a flare-up of border area hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.

Russia to deploy newest howitzers close to Finland's border: Rostec

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: Russia will soon deploy its newest howitzers to its Northern Military District which borders Finland and Norway, the head of the Rostec state defence conglomerate said in remarks published on Wednesday.

The testing of the new Coalition-SV self-propelled artillery units has been completed and their mass production has already started, Sergei Chemezov, the head of Rostec told the state RIA news agency in an interview. The first pi-

lot batch will be delivered by the end of 2023, he said.

"I think they will appear there (in the Northern Military District) soon, since howitzers of this class are needed to provide an advantage over Western artillery models in terms of firing range," Chemezov said.

In 2021, Russia's President Vladimir Putin changed the status of the Russian Northern Fleet, whose zone of responsibility was chiefly the Russian Arctic, to the Northern Military District, incorporating into it also the Murmansk region.



A protest being held in connection with Presidential elections in Kinshasa, Congo.

Saudi cabinet approves contracting rules for firms not based there

Monitoring Desk
CAIRO: Saudi Arabia's cabinet announced its approval of contracting regulations for firms that do not have regional headquarters in the Kingdom, Saudi state news agency SPA reported. The decision comes just days before Saudi Arabia's January 2024 deadline for companies to move their regional headquarters to the kingdom or risk losing hundreds of billions of dollars in lucrative government contracts.

The statement on the cabinet meeting did not disclose the regulations. It is not clear if they permit the government to award contracts to foreign companies that do not have regional headquarters in Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment outside regular business hours. Finance Minister Mohammed Al Jadaan told Reuters in October that the deadline for a move would be enforced.

UAE airline to launch daily flights to Kabul

Monitoring Desk
DUBAI: Air Arabia announced daily flights to Kabul on Wednesday, becoming the United Arab Emirates' second airline to serve the Afghan capital.

The Sharjah-based budget carrier will fly non-stop to and from Kabul once a day from Jan 10, it said in a statement.

The service is "a testament to our ongoing dedication to providing passengers with value-driven and affordable air travel, as well as new destinations to explore," said group CEO Adel Al Ali.

Last month flydubai, another low-cost Emirati airline, became the first international carrier to resume flights to Afghanistan since the chaotic withdrawal of US forces in 2021.

Kabul's airport was trashed during the mass evacuation of civilians, and a suicide bombing on its perimeter killed more than 170 people.



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

Erdogan resembles Netanyahu with Hitler

Monitoring Desk
ANKARA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was no different from Adolf Hitler and likened Israel's attacks on Gaza to the treatment of Jewish people by the Nazis.

NATO member Turkey, which supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has criticised Israel's air and ground assault on Gaza, called it a "terror state" and said its leaders must be tried in international courts.

Sharpening his rhetoric, Erdogan said Turkey would welcome academics and scientists facing persecution for their views on the conflict in Gaza, adding Western countries supporting Israel were complicit in what he called war crimes.

"They used to speak ill of Hitler. What difference do you have from Hitler? They are going to make us miss Hitler. Is what this Netanyahu is doing any less than what Hitler did? It is not," Erdogan said.

"He is richer than Hitler, he gets the support from the West.

South Korea sanctions 8 North Koreans over arms trade, cyberattacks

Monitoring Desk
SEOUL: South Korea imposed sanctions on eight North Koreans linked to nuclear and missile development through arms trade, cyberattacks and other illegal activities, Seoul's foreign ministry said on Wednesday.

The sanctions came days after North Korea fired a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which South Korea and the United States strongly condemned as a grave violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The newly blacklisted people include Ri Chang

Ho, head of the Reconnaissance General Bureau involved in overseas hacking operations, and Yun Chol, who helped supply nuclear materials while working at the North Korean Embassy in China, the ministry said.

"The eight were involved in generating profits for the North Korean regime and financing nuclear weapons and missiles development by earning foreign currency through illegal cyber activities or stealing technology and trading sanctioned goods including weapons," it said in a statement.



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators block traffic on the road that leads to John F. Kennedy airport in New York City.

Ten dead in Australia thunderstorms, thousands without power

Monitoring Desk
SYDNEY: Ten people were killed in Australia after severe thunderstorms battered the country's east over the Christmas holidays, authorities said on Wednesday, with tens of thousands of properties still without power.

Wilder weather lashed the states of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland on Dec. 25 and 26 bringing large hailstones and torrential rains. Strong winds blew off roofs and brought down trees in some of the worst-affected areas.

Three men were killed after a yacht with 11 on board capsized near Green Island in Moreton Bay, Queensland state Police Commissioner Katarina Carrol told reporters. Two women were found dead near the town of Gympie, about 180 kms (112 miles) north of the state capital of Brisbane, after they were swept away in flooded stormwater drains, police said. A nine-year-old girl was found dead after going missing in a stormwater drain in Brisbane's south.

US allies reluctant on Red Sea task force

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden hoped to present a firm international response to Yemen's Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping by launching a new maritime force, but a week after its launch many allies don't want to be associated with it, publicly, or at all.

Two of America's European allies who were listed as contributors to Operation Prosperity Guardian - Italy and Spain - issued statements appearing to distance themselves from the maritime force.

The Pentagon says the force is a defensive coalition of more than 20 nations to ensure billions of dollars' worth of commerce

can flow freely through a vital shipping chokepoint in Red Sea waters off Yemen.

But nearly half of those countries have so far not come forward to acknowledge their contributions or allowed the US to do so. Those contributions can range from dispatching warships to merely sending a staff officer.

The reluctance of some US allies to link themselves to the effort partly reflects the fissures created by the conflict in Gaza, which has seen Biden maintain firm support for Israel even as international criticism rises over its offensive, which Gaza's health ministry says has killed more than 21,000 Palestinians.

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

Monitoring Desk
NEW YORK: Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei led prayers on Thursday at the funeral of Sayyed Razi Mousavi, a senior Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) adviser killed in what Iran said was an Israeli air strike in Syria.

State television said Khamenei paid tribute "to this martyr's tireless struggle and called for his companionship with the guardians of God."

Mousavi was one of the most experienced and effective commanders of the resistance front.

Four children and their mother murdered in France

Monitoring Desk
PARIS: Police in France on Tuesday arrested a man suspected of murdering his wife and four children in a knife attack early on Christmas Day, a public prosecutor said.

Their bodies were found on Monday night in a bloodied apartment in the town of Meaux, 40 km (25 miles) northeast of Paris.

Local prosecutor Jean-Baptiste Bladier said the mother and two daughters had been stabbed so many times it was impossible to determine.

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

Monitoring Desk
BEIJING: President Xi Jinping vowed to resolutely prevent anyone from "splitting Taiwan from China in any way", the official Xinhua news agency reported, a little more than two weeks before Taiwan elects a new leader.

China views democratically-governed Taiwan as its own territory, despite the strong objections of the government in Taipei, and has ramped up military and political pressure to assert its sovereignty claims.

Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary elections on Jan. 13 and how the island handles relations with China is a major point of contention on the campaign trail.

At a symposium com-

memorating the 130th anniversary of the birth of former Chinese leader Mao Zedong, who in 1949 defeated the Republic of China government in a civil war which then fled to Taiwan, Xi said "the complete reunification of the motherland is an irresistible trend".

"The motherland must be reunified, and inevitably will be reunified," Xinhua cited Xi as telling senior officials from the Communist Party.

China must deepen integration between the two sides, promote the peaceful development of relations across the Taiwan Strait, and "resolutely prevent anyone from splitting Taiwan from China in any way", he said.

Over 40 feared dead in gasoline tanker blast in central Liberia

Monitoring Desk
MONROVIA: More than 40 people were feared dead when a tanker truck exploded after crashing in central Liberia, the country's chief medical officer told local media on Wednesday.

The tanker carrying gasoline crashed and tipped into a ditch along a road in Totota, about 130 kilometres (80 miles) from the capital Monrovia.

Dr Francis Katch told local broadcaster Super Bongese TV it was difficult to determine the number of victims because some had been reduced to ashes but he estimated that more than 40 people were killed in the incident.

"We have our team going from home to home to check those that are missing," he told AFP. Police earlier put the death toll at 15 and said at least 30 people were injured as locals gathered at the scene.

"There were lots of people that got burned,"

said Prince B. Mulbah, deputy inspector general for the Liberia National Police. Another police officer, Malvin Sackor, said that after the crash, some locals had begun to take the leaking gas when the tanker exploded, killing some and wounding others. He said that the police were still gathering the total number of injured and killed.

An eyewitness from Totota, Aaron Massaquoi, told AFP that "people climbed all on top of the truck taking the gas, while some of them had irons hitting the tanker for it to burst for them to get gas."

"People were all around the truck and the driver of the truck told them that the gas that was spilling they could take that," Massaquoi said.

"He told them not to climb on top of the tanker and that they should stop hitting the tanker.... but some people were even using screwdrivers to put holes on the tank."

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

Monitoring Desk
SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un urged his party to "accelerate" war preparations including its nuclear programme, state media said Thursday.

The comments came just a week after Kim warned Pyongyang would not hesitate to launch a nuclear attack if "provoked" with nukes. Kim made the comments at the North's ongoing year-end party meeting, where he is expected to unveil key policy decisions for 2024.

Kim asked the party to "further accelerate the war preparations" across sectors, including nuclear weapons and civil defense, Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency reported.

He also stressed that the "military situation" on the Korean peninsula had become "extreme" due to "unprecedented" anti-North confrontations with Washington.

Seoul, Tokyo and Washington have ramped up defence cooperation in

the face of a record-breaking series of weapons tests by Pyongyang this year and recently activated a system to share real-time data on North Korean missile launches.

Earlier this month, a US nuclear-powered submarine arrived in the South Korean port city of Busan, and Washington flew its long-range bombers in drills with Seoul and Tokyo.

The North has previously described the participation of US strategic assets—such as B-52 bombers—in joint drills on the Korean peninsula as the "intentional nuclear war provocative moves of the US". Pyongyang this year successfully launched a reconnaissance satellite, enshrined its status as a nuclear power in its constitution, and test-fired the most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in its arsenal.

Kim earlier this week defined 2023 as a "year of great turn and great change" in which Pyongyang saw "eye-opening victories".

China's military lashes out at US after breakthrough talks

Monitoring Desk
BEIJING: China's defence ministry lashed out at the United States on Thursday, a week after their top military officials resumed high-level talks, criticising its continued meddling in the Asia Pacific region and saying it maintained a "Cold War" mindset.

Both sides had pledged at the talks to work towards restoration of contacts to avert miscalculation and misunderstanding, with the U.S. calling for "more work" to ensure military communications stayed open and reliable.

But a Chinese defence ministry spokesman took a more hawkish tone at the year's last regular press conference.

"The United States continues to strengthen its Asia-Pacific deployments, this is full of a Cold War mindset," the spokesman, Wu Qian, said on Thursday.

"Its goal is for its own selfish gains and to maintain its hegemony. Its na-

ture is to stoke confrontation."

US officials had hoped last week's talks, when top U.S. General Charles Brown and his Chinese counterpart, General Liu Zhenli, held a videoconference in the first such event in more than a year, could bring a broader restoration in military ties.

Those talks followed a pact in San Francisco last month between the leaders of both countries to resume such ties, which Beijing had snapped after a visit to self-ruled Taiwan in 2022 by Nancy Pelosi, then speaker of the House of Representatives.

The video call yielded "positive and constructive outcomes", Wu said.

But Beijing expected Washington to "take concrete actions on the basis of equality and respect to promote the sound and steady development of China-US military-to-military relationship", he added, with specifics to be announced later.

ECC directs NPMC to check hoarding, ensure price stability

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet, here Thursday directed National Price Monitoring Committee (NPMC) to continue regular coordination with the provincial governments for measures to ensure price stability and to check hoarding and profiteering.

The meeting of the cabinet committee was presided over by Caretaker Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue, and Economic Affairs, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, according to press statement issued by finance ministry.

The decision followed a briefing by Pakistan Bu-

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

a long term plan to clear the Rs.2 trillion liabilities of pension dues.

Meanwhile, summary for approval of TAPI project as Qualified Investment Incentive Package under the Foreign Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act, 2022 (FIPPA) was discussed at length. The forum observed that it was a much-needed project and should be launched without delay, however observed that the proposal for inclusion of the project under the FIPPA Act required further deliberations and examination of the legal aspects, incentives and concessions.

The committee also approved the principles for

settlement of capacity deduction issues of imported coal based projects and subsequent execution of side agreement with Port Qasim Electric Power Company.

Meanwhile, in a meeting, the Cabinet Committee on State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) gave the approval of publication of consolidated report of the State-Owned Enterprises for FY 2019-2020, 2020-2021 & 2021-2022.

Among others, the meeting was attended by the Minister of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Sami Saad; Minister for Energy, Muhammad Ali; Minister for Communications.



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



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

Naval Chief advises cadets to focus on character building

KARACHI (APP): Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf on Thursday attended the 61st parents' day ceremony held at Cadet College Petaro as Chief Guest and lauded the education and learning standards of the College.

While addressing the gathering the Chief Guest appreciated the quality of infrastructure, facilities, faculty, and learning environment at Cadet College, a Pakistan Navy news release said.

He emphasised that such efforts will surely contribute in prosperity and progress of country as education is the only way out to progress.

He also commended

the collaborative efforts of Govt of Sindh, Commander Karachi, college administration and faculty for all out efforts to augment educational standards at the college.

Furthermore, he advised the cadets that besides education they should also focus on character building.

Principal Cadet College Petaro, Commodore @ Mushtaq Ahmed welcomed the guests and presented the annual college report.

In his address, the principal highlighted the remarkable performance achieved by the cadets in academics, sports and co-curricular activities.

He also mentioned

about some of the development works completed during this year and progress on undergoing works at Cadet College Petaro.

Later, Chief Guest gave away the prizes to the award winners and congratulated them for their outstanding performance.

Moreover, he appreciated cadets for immaculate turn out during annual parade, horse-riding, tent-pegging, gymnastic, P.T show, physical fitness and their skills displayed in exhibition.

A large number of civil and military officials, parents and other dignitaries attended the ceremony.

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

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

The minister said that Hajj quota for Pakistani pilgrims this year is 189210 while around 5633 surplus

applications against the Hajj quota were received, he added. He said that our endeavours to reduce the cost of Hajj package also brought results and we have succeeded to reduce Rs 100,000 from the total expense of Hajj package.

Aneeq Ahmad said that mobile phone sims will also be provided to Pakistani pilgrims free of cost with 7GB data and unlimited calls facilities to enable them get in touch with their loved-ones. Besides, a 30kg suitcase with QR code and "Abaya" with Pakistani flag on its back for the female pilgrims will also be provided, he added.



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

Pak condemns banning a Kashmiri Political Party

ISLAMABAD (Online): Pakistan condemns the decision of Indian occupation authorities to declare Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarrat Alam faction) [MLJK-MA], as an "unlawful association", for a period of five years. The party is led by a prominent Kashmiri leader, Mr. Masarrat Alam Bhatt, who remains imprisoned for a period exceeding 20 years.

The MLJK-MA is the fifth Kashmiri party banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front, Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir, Dukhtaraan-e-Millat, and Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party have already been outlawed.

World Bank raises concerns about Pak economic policies

ISLAMABAD (INP):- The World Bank has declared Pakistan's economic model ineffective, citing concerns that the country is trailing behind its counterparts due to a dysfunctional economic system that primarily benefits the elite class.

Naji bin Hussain, the Country Director for Pakistan at the World Bank, emphasized that the current economic development in Pakistan is unsustainable, with the benefits of growth disproportionately favoring a select few, says in media reports.

In the World Bank's report, Hussain highlighted the need for addressing deficiencies in the agricultural and energy sectors, emphasizing that the economic growth should be broadened to have a more inclusive impact.

The report also expressed concerns about the environmental challenges faced by Pakistan. According to Hussain, policy changes are imperative to ensure sustainable economic development, especially in light of the growing realization that substantial past poverty reductions are stalling and poverty rates are on the rise again.

The World Bank Country Director pointed out that the current system,

cost of debt, and income sources in Pakistan are not sustainable. He urged a shift towards focusing on financial stability, improving distribution, involving the private sector, and exploring alternative, cost-effective methods of electricity generation in energy reforms.

Hussain emphasized the need for unity in Pakistan for a brighter future, calling for reforms in government spending, a move towards a free economy, and improved growth that enhances the overall quality of life. He highlighted the importance of creating a conducive business environment, particularly for small businesses.

This is not the first time the World Bank has raised concerns about Pakistan's economic policies. The report also touched upon issues related to the privatization process in the country. The World Bank expressed apprehensions that political interference and legal complications could hinder the privatization process. Notably, the privatization program has faced setbacks since the Supreme Court's 2007 verdict in the Pakistan Steel Mills and Recodec judgments, tarnishing Pakistan's international image.

Mainly cold, dry weather forecast for Balochistan

QUETTA (APP): The Met Office has forecast mainly cold and dry weather with mostly cloudy conditions in most parts of the province during the next 24 hours.

According to the Met Office, the minimum temperature in Quetta was recorded at -0.5 degrees centigrade and -2.5 degrees centigrade in Kalat on Thursday.



HUB: Secretary Health Balochistan "Abdullah Khan and others offering Dua after inaugurating latest Gynae Labour KMC room in collaboration with WHO.

Abudllah says: Multi-purpose schools to build in Balochistan for improving medical education

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Secretary Health Abdullah Khan on Thursday said that multi-purpose schools would be built in different districts of the province and a monitoring system to be created to check the performance of private schools so that the quality of medical education could be further improved.

He expressed these views while visiting the examination centre for various courses of paramedics in Hub.

Secretary Abdullah Khan reviewed the examination processes including exams for Medical Technician, Dispenser, X-ray Assistant, Lab Assistant, OT Assistant, Pharmacy Assistant, Dental Assistant and Eye Assistant courses are being conducted in the Hub.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Munir Ahmed Musani, DHO Dr. Ghani Baloch, DMS Dr. Asa, Staff Officer Secretary Health Shaukat Baloch and Assistant Secretary Balochistan Medical Faculty Asad Ali were also present on this

occasion.

Assistant Secretary Balochistan Medical Faculty Asad Ali briefed the Secretary of Health about the examination and procedure in the Hub under Balochistan Medical Faculty. The Secretary said that paramedics were very important in the health sector to improve the field of paramedics and allied health sciences, the curriculum would be enhanced.

Meanwhile, Secretary Health Abdullah Khan also visited Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Jam Ghulam Qadir Hub.

The secretary said that the process of including Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Jam Ghulam Qadir Hub in the province Health Card would be completed as soon as possible, which could provide facilities to the patients under the Health Card.

He said that the health card would help in improving the service delivery in the hospital and could also assist in the upgradation of the hospital.

Election 2024: MQM-P 'ready' for talks on seat adjustments with PML-N

KARACHI (INP): With the February 8 general elections inching closer, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) has finally agreed to negotiation on seat adjustments with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on five National Assembly seats, revealed well-placed sources on Thursday.

The two parties have been in contact with each other in connection with a proposed electoral alliance for the past couple of weeks as PML-N is making all-out efforts to return to power for the fourth time in the country.

Currently, Sindh has become the epicentre of political realignments with former allies the PML-N and PPP trying to make new alliances to strengthen their position in the upcoming polls.

PML-N and MQM-P would hold negotiations for seat adjustments on NA-229 Malir-I, NA-230 Malir-II, NA-231 Malir-III and NA-243 Karachi Keamari-II constituencies, the sources added.

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

ISLAMABAD (Online): PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif is facing difficulties in distribution of party tickets because difference of opinion among party senior leaders has come to open on this matter.

Nawaz Sharif has shortlisted 2 candidates from every constituency of National Assembly (NA) and 3 candidates from every constituency of provincial assembly.

Some senior leaders of PML-N want to give 50 percent tickets to new members. On the other hand some leaders are opposed to ignore old associates. Some members opposed to give tickets immediately to those who have left PTI and joined PML-N.

Ishaq Dar, Hamza Shahbaz, Saad Rafiq and Rana Sana Ullah are insisting to take along old associates.

As per sources PML-N Quaid is facing difficulties in giving tickets to candidates due to inner differences in the party.

Despite warning by PML-N Quaid, the candidates who have come to give interview are continuing to level allegations against each other.

Nawaz Sharif has shortlisted the candidate before issuing tickets.

According to sources senior leaders of party have expressed reservations on some names short listed by PML-N Quaid.

Ishaq Dar, Hamza Shahbaz, Saad Rafiq and Rana Sana Ullah are insisting to take along old associates.



QUETTA: Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Leader, Khadija Shah arrived for court case hearing, at Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Quetta.



CHAGAI: Saudi Ambassador Nawaf Al-Maliki, Commissioner Rakshan and other tribal elders receiving Governor Tabuk upon arrival at airport.

Court set Jan 4 to indict PTI founder in Toshakhana reference

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

Caretaker Minister Home assures to resolve issues of oil tankers association

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial Minister for Home, Captain (Retd) Mir Zubair Jamali has stated that the issues being faced by the oil tankers association would be resolved.

The association was made by the caretaker Minister during meeting with the delegation of Oil Tankers Association here on Thursday.

The leader of the Association Mir Shams

Shahwani led the delegation.

During the course meeting, the oil tankers association talked about the issues of transporters.

The members of delegation informed that our 4,000 vehicles have been stopped by the Laghari Ittehad at the Chaman border.

They told that our vehicles are parked at the border despite lapse of over two months.

No difference between PML-N, PPP & PTI, two sides of same coin: Siraj

LAHORE (INP): Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami Emir Sirajul Haq has said that there is no substantive difference between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), as these former ruling parties are essentially two sides of the same coin.

Addressing a press

conference at Mansoorah on Thursday, he said many so-called leaders who are part of these parties were opportunistic, turn coats and acted as migratory birds that align themselves with whichever party is poised to come into power. The party chief alongside JJ Secretary General Amirul Azim, also launched the JJ election symbol "Scale" on the occasion.



QUETTA: Voice for Baloch Missing Persons Leader, Nasrullah Baloch along with Mama Qadeer addresses to media persons during press conference, in Quetta

Speakers pledge to support menstrual hygiene advocacy for wellbeing of women, girls

By Mian M Tahir Bashir LORALAI: Shedding light on the imperative issue of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), Deputy Commissioner of Loralai, Sajjad Aslam, expressed the pressing need to prioritize the well-being of women and girls. He shared his views as a chief guest at the groundbreaking media workshop on 'Communicating Menstrual Hygiene Management', held here as a collaborative effort spearheaded by The MHMWG Secretariat, Balochistan, in partnership with UNICEF Pakistan's education programme.

While representing the district government, Mr Aslam shared unwavering commitment to supporting initiatives aimed at cultivating awareness about MHM and its importance within

our society.

Dr. Tahira Kamal Baloch, Chairperson of the Menstrual Hygiene Management Working Group (MHMWG) Balochistan, the occasion, underscored the profound link between advancing MHM and education. She commended the UNICEF for its commendable initiative to join forces with MHMWG for media engagement on MHM, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 6.2 (Clean Water and Sanitation). This strategic alliance seeks to leverage local and national media to establish a platform for constructive dialogue on MHM, aiming to contribute significantly to societal development.

Recognizing MHM as a pivotal subject crucial for

enhancing the overall health and hygiene of women and girls, she emphasized on the need of a collective resolve to promote MHM to empower them to realize their fullest potential across all fields. Mr. Shafiq Aziz, a seasoned communication specialist and trainer, shared critical insights into the MHM landscape in Pakistan during the workshop. Underlining the pivotal role of media in shaping societal awareness and influencing policies, he stressed the importance of advocating for MHM-friendly schools, educational reforms, and tax initiatives to improve access to MHM products. Mr. Aziz also informed participants about a policy brief on MHM prepared by UNICEF Pakistan.

Mr Rashid Abbas,

and Ms Robina Hameed while representing UNICEF's education programme, underscored the significance of collaborative endeavors, especially involving the media, to champion MHM rights. She highlighted the instrumental role of UNICEF's education programme in promoting girls' education in Balochistan, emphasizing that MHM advocacy is integral to encouraging girls to attend schools.

Ms. Shahana Tabbasum from MHMWG, Balochistan offered invaluable insights earlier into MHM, emphasizing its role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Underscoring the media's crucial role as a stakeholder in fostering healthy debates on critical social issues,



QUETTA: Secretary Livestock Tayyab Lehri and Provincial Chief of FAO Waheed Mehdi signing a MoU regarding provision of equipment for prevention of Congo virus.