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Anti-Pakistan rumour mill in full gear on social media

COAS vows to eliminate mafias with support of nation

Social media is being used to create an environment of chaos, despair, and panic; Fake news being used to portray state in decline; Says provinces major beneficiary of Green Initiative, farmers & agri research to also benefit

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir has said that social media is rife with fabricated claims against the state of Pakistan as he came down hard on anti-national elements.

"Social media is being used to create an environment of chaos, despair, and panic. Through fake news, an impression is being created that the state is losing its [writ]," the army chief said in an address to the National Farmers Convention in Islamabad on Friday.

In his address to the farmers, the army chief further said that "rumours" and "negative impressions" were being spread about Pakistan.

"But you should know that only two states were established on the bases of the Kalima: the state of Madina and Pakistan," COAS Munir said,

emphasising divine backing to the country.

APP adds: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir on Friday said that a major part of the income of Green Pakistan Initiative would go to the provinces, while the rest would be kept for farmers and agricultural research.

The role of the Pakistan Army in it was only to serve the people and farmers, he said while addressing the National Farmers' Convention, according to official sources.

The Army Chief said that agriculture and cattle rearing was the occupation of almost every Prophet, for it involved discipline, suffering, growth, and patience, resulting in immense rewards.

"Rumours and negative things are being said about Pakistan, but you should know that two states were

established in the name of Kalma, State of Tayyaba and State of Pakistan, this is not a coincidence," the COAS said.

Pakistan, he said, was rich in resources. "It has glaciers, rivers, mountains, and fertile land from which the world's best rice, fruits like mandarin orange and mango, granite, gold and copper are produced."

In the sixties, the COAS said, Pakistan was the fastest growing country in Asia, "but we forgot the three golden principles of Quaid-i-Azam - faith, unity, discipline, due to which it suffered degradation." The Army Chief added that the aim of the Green Pakistan Initiative was to work on agriculture first on a priority basis. Agriculture malls would be organized in all districts where all kinds of agricultural facilities would be available to the farmers, the COAS said.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and Chief of the Army Staff, Syed Asim Munir participating in the National Farmer's Convention

Does caretaker govt wants to derail election: IHC

ISLAMABAD (Online): Islamabad High Court (IHC) has allowed meeting between PTI founder and PTI chairman under the supervision of Superintendent Adiala Jail. The court remarked permission for consultation in connection with the general election is basic right. The caretaker government should be impartial in the election. Opposing consultation between PTI chairman and PTI founder by the care taker government raises question on its neutrality. Additional Attorney General (AAG) and Superintendent Adiala jail appeared in the court. Counsel Shoaib Shaheen took the plea in the court consultation is needed for distribution of 700 tickets of PTI. The court expressed annoyance over opposing the maintainability of the petition by AAG remarking was the additional note issued by Supreme Court not enough for you. Do you want to get write a note by me too against you after SC.

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FO spox confirms India's request to extradite Hafiz Saeed

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan has received a request from the Indian authorities, seeking extradition of Lashkar-e-Taiba founder Hafiz Saeed, the Foreign Office spokesperson said Friday.

Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch stated this in response to media queries regarding India's request to extradite Hafiz Saeed.

The spokesperson said the request had been made by India in a so-called money laundering case.

"It is pertinent to note that no bilateral extradition treaty exists between Pakistan and India," she added.

Nomination papers of Murad rejected

PESHAWAR (APP): The nomination papers of former communication minister and PTI leader, Murad Saeed for constituency NA-4 Swat have been rejected by the Returning Officer on Friday.

Local leader of PTI, Suhail Sultan Advocate while confirming the rejection of Murad Saeed's nomination papers, said the reason behind the denial of the nomination paper would soon be made public.

Murad Saeed was earlier elected as MNA from the same constituency in 2018 and later performed as federal minister for communication.

IHC allows PTI leaders to hold election meetings with Imran in jail

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday granted PTI leaders and lawyers permission to visit ex-premier Imran Khan who is incarcerated at Adiala Jail and hold election meetings in the run-up to the February 8 polls.

The order was passed by Justice Miangul Hasan Aurangzeb on a petition filed by Imran seeking permission to hold meetings with party members Asad Qaiser, Junaid Akbar Khan, senators Aurangzeb Khan and Dost Mohammad Khan, and Ishtiaq Meherban, among others, to strategise ahead of the elections.

Banks to remain open on Saturday, Sunday for tax collection

KARACHI (APP): The State Bank of Pakistan on Friday directed all banks to keep their branches open on Saturday and Sunday for collection of taxes, duties and other government receipts. "The branches of all banks that are open on Saturday shall observe extended working hours till 5:00 p.m. Saturday, December 30, 2023 and till 8:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 31, 2023 for collection of taxes through alternate delivery channels and over-the-counter facilities," an SBP press release said.

The central bank also advised NIFT to arrange special clearings at 3:00 p.m. on Saturday and at 5:00 p.m. on Sunday to ensure same day clearing and settlement of payment instruments.

PM Kakar says Agriculture holds immense importance for socio-economic dev. at grassroots level

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Friday said that agriculture held immense importance for socio-economic development of the country at the grassroots level.

The prime minister, addressing the National Farmers' Convention as the chief guest, appreciated the collaborative work of ministries and departments for achieving various milestones under the umbrella of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) and stressed the need to expedite various initiatives, according to a press release issued by the PM Office's Media Wing.

Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir was the Guest of Honour on the occasion. The event was attended by federal ministers, agricultural experts and senior government officials.

The COAS said that the dividends of all initiatives by SIFC would help Pakistan come out of the economic crisis.

farmers were the backbone of the country's agriculture sector.

"It's your untiring hard work, toil and determination that plays a pivotal role in ensuring food security for millions of Pakistanis. You make us and the entire nation proud," he added.

He said that the climate change and water scarcity were realities that challenged Pakistan's food security and necessitated use of technology and close government-public collaboration as being done under SIFC.

"Pakistan is endowed with immense potential and abundant resources. Together, we will navigate through these challenging times, by the grace of Allah, and attain our goals across every sector, InshaAllah," he added.

The COAS said that the dividends of all initiatives by SIFC would help Pakistan come out of the economic crisis.



KARACHI: Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf giving away efficiency shield to the winning unit of Pakistan Navy for best performance during Fleet Efficiency Competition Parade 2023 held at Pakistan Navy Dockyard

Pakistan Navy conducts fleet annual efficiency competition parade

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Navy Fleet Annual Efficiency Competition Parade was held here at Pakistan Navy Dockyard upon the culmination of the operational year.

Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf graced the occasion as Chief Guest that marked the culmination of a rewarding and eventful operational year for Pakistan Navy ships, submarines and aircrafts, a Pakistan Navy news release said.

Upon arrival at the venue, the chief guest was received by Commander Pakistan Fleet Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi and a smartly turned-out contingent presented the Guard of Honour.

The Chief of the Naval Staff expressed complete satisfaction and confidence over the operational preparedness of the Pakistan Navy Fleet. He acknowledged and praised the dedication and professionalism of officers and men in successfully achieving operational objectives and milestones for the year 2023.

The Admiral commended PN Fleet's efforts and contributions towards maritime security. The chief guest also mentioned the modernization plan of the Pakistan Navy wherein various platforms are being inducted in the Fleet. He underscored that induction of these platforms will immensely contribute towards capability enhancement of the Fleet.



LARKANA: Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari showering flowers at the grave of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for IT and Telecommunications Dr Umar Saif is being briefed by Chairman PTA Major General (Retd) Hafeez-ur-Rehman on the affairs of the department at PTA headquarters.

Dr. Umar Saif says Scope of national roaming facility to be extended to National Highways, Motorways

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Dr Umar Saif, said on Friday that the national roaming facility's scope would be extended to motorways and national highways to facilitate travellers.

During his visit to the headquarters of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Dr. Umar Saif said, "The government is taking all possible steps to promote the telecom sector in the country."

Chairman PTA, Major General @ Hafeezur Rehman, Member Compi-

ance & Enforcement PTA, Dr. Khawar Siddique Khokhar, and senior officers of MoIT&T and PTA were present on the occasion.

Senior officers briefed the minister about the functions of PTA, regulatory initiatives, and the overall performance of the telecom sector.

The minister was informed that the PTA has consistently facilitated the thriving telecom industry in Pakistan, providing state-of-the-art telecom, broadband, and ICT services. The challenges faced by the sector and the regulator's ongoing efforts to address them were also discussed.

Four killed in road accident near Khuzdar

KHUZDAR (APP): At least four people were killed in a road accident that occurred near Karkh area of Khuzdar district of Baluchistan province, Rescue and TV Channel reported on Friday.

According to details, two rashly driven vehicles collided with each other near Karkh area, resulted in killing of four persons on the spot. Police and Rescue team rushed to the site, and shifted the bodies to a nearby hospital.

Police are investigating the matter. According to details, Rescue sources said that two overspeeding vehicles collided, as a result, four people lost their lives on the spot, private news channels reported.

The bodies and injured were shifted to the hospital.

Senate session adjourned due to lack of quorum

ISLAMABAD (Online): The Senate briefly met at the Parliament House in Islamabad Friday with President Officer Rubina Khalid in the chair.

At the outset, lack of quorum was pointed out upon which the chair adjourned the House to meet again on Monday at 2:30 p.m.

Shehbaz conveys Nawaz Sharif's 'important' message to MQM-P

KARACHI (INP): In a much-anticipated meeting, the president of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Shehbaz Sharif, conveyed the 'important' message of Nawaz Sharif to the Mutahida Quami Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) leadership in Karachi on Friday.

According to the details, the PML-N president, Shehbaz Sharif, along with other party leaders reached the Markaz of MQM-P in Bahadurabad, Karachi.

The MQM-P leadership including Khalid

Maqbool, Farooq Sattar, Mustafa Kamal, Aminul Haque, and others welcomed the PML-N leaders in Karachi.

The meeting was attended by prominent leaders of both political parties including Mustafa Kamal, Dr. Farooq Sattar, Aminul Haque, Nasreen Jalil, Javed Hanif, Anees Qaim Khani, and other provincial committee members.

Sources claimed that the former PM will also hold a separate meeting with the Convener, Deputy Convener, and Senior Deputy Convener later.



KARACHI: Former Prime Minister and Muslim League (PML-N) President, Shehbaz Sharif along with Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Convener Mutahida Quami Movement (MQM-P) talking to media persons at MQM-P Bahadurabad Head Office

Conducting free, transparent election our main goal: Jamali

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Caretaker Minister for Home and Tribal Affairs Mir Zubair Jamali on Friday said that our main goal and first priority of the caretaker government was to conduct clean and transparent elections in the province.

However, giving guidelines for the election and determining the framework is the responsibility of the Election Commission in which we will provide our support, he said.

He expressed these views while addressing the participants of the five days training workshop on women empowerment and wrong reporting during the election here.

Senior journalist Shahzad Zulfikar, Ms

Fauzia Shaheen and students receiving training were also present on this occasion.

In response to a question, the minister said that the society would progress only when women walk side by side with men and the role of women during elections has always been there.

On this occasion, Ms. Fauzia Shaheen said that all measures were being taken to empower women and would continue such program for making train them, people should have the right to elect public representatives.

At the end of the ceremony, the minister distributed certificates among the students who gained the training.



QUETTA: Caretaker Home Minister Captain (retd) Mir Zubair Jamali photographed with participants of a workshop organized by Women Media Center

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent

Wasted harvests

That an agricultural country is facing food shortages sounds almost like an oxymoron. But Pakistan is a country where truth is stranger than fiction. In our truth, the world's eighth largest producer of agricultural output is failing to achieve food security. On Wednesday, medical experts came together to attend the 26th Annual Sustainable Development Conference organized by the SDPI, and suggested that a change in dietary preferences and reduction in food waste can help the country reduce its ever-evolving problems of food insecurity and malnutrition. On the 2023 Global Hunger Index, Pakistan ranks 102 out of 125 countries and has a level of hunger that is 'serious'. And it is rather alarming that the country has done nothing to improve its situation. While it is true that Pakistan is a poor country that relies mostly on food imports to meet the basic needs and that after the 2022 floods the country faced multifaceted challenges including the loss of crop and the financial inability to have a smooth flow of imports, policymakers show a complete lack of will when it comes to doing something on our own to meet the targets of food security. Pakistan needs external financing to rebuild the areas destroyed by the floods, but nothing in the world encourages the country to sacrifice its green, fertile lands for housing schemes, allowing power-hungry capitalists to increase their assets. Cutting down mango orchards to develop posh housing societies, for example, is clearly in the hands of the Pakistan government, and policymakers here willingly approve such plans, with complete disregard to the ecological impacts such projects may have. It is extremely shocking that a year after the floods, a 50 per cent increase in the child undernutrition rate has been reported, which means that around 44 per cent of children under five are now stunted. Post the floods, unbridled inflation snatched away the little purchasing power that most people had. Not only did price hikes affect the poor, but the well-off also started feeling the pinch of inflation and ultimately watered down their donation activities, hitting the poor and the working class hard.

Elections and elitism

By Hussain H Zaidi

As the nation gears up for national elections, the question that dominates media and political discourse is: which party will carry the day? Will it be the current favourites – the PML-N? Or will the PTI, which is currently under a cloud, have the last laugh? Or will master politician Asif Zardari pull a rabbit out of the hat? While this question is important, particularly for the political parties, their supporters, movers and shakers (both actual and self-styled) and bookmakers, it boils down to answering which among the elite will rule 240 million plus people. A more fundamental question for the people at large is whether the forthcoming elections usher in an improved lot for them. The fact that the country has remained in the grip of hyperinflation over the past two years, which has put both low- and middle-income households in a spot, will make the state of the economy a major contributor to the electoral outcome. That said, the economic question is much wider – the price spiral being only part of it – and pertains to moving towards a more egalitarian, or let's dispense with euphemism, a less elitist society. As a rule, the leading political parties in Pakistan have their heads in the cloud when facing the problem of egalitarianism or elitism. Yes, in manifestos and speeches, they do virulently attack elitism. Yet, while in the saddle, they do little to attenuate it, as their economic policies aim at making the affluent better off through tax relief and subsidies. Since democracy is a people-centred political system, one would expect that in a democracy elitism would be conspicuous by its absence. However, in both theory and practice, democracy and elitism are not mutually exclusive. The elite theory popularized by Italian social scientists Pareto and Mosca argues that all societies, regardless of the form of government, are governed by one or more political elites. Pakistan has often been

described as an elitist state. The essential narrative is that the national economy was captured by a small elite, which both manipulated the market and controlled the state. The result was a vicious combination of inefficient resource allocation (market failure) and inequitable income distribution (government failure). The elite has been so powerful that a change in government, or even a transition from despotism to democracy and vice versa, failed to hold it in check. Instead, successive governments strengthened, as well as in return benefited, from elite capture. Their policies on the one hand promoted cronyism and rent seeking and on the other neglected social sector and human resource development so that the elite's preeminent position remained unchallenged. The already scarce resources were allocated primarily to grand infrastructure-related projects in the name of development. Such projects served as a source of rent for the businesses and commissions and kickbacks for the people in power. The PTI has been a strong exponent of this narrative. However, during its four years in power, its support for the elite wasn't any less. The bottles might have changed but the wine was the same. Even if successive governments didn't by design promote elitism, it can't be denied that for one reason or another, social welfare has taken a backseat in public policies. Besides, welfare policies have had a very narrow focus – viz income transfer to the people at the bottom of the economic heap. A case in point is the Benazir Income Support Programme. While cash transfers may help the recipients survive another day, they are an extremely weak instrument for promoting public welfare or even poverty alleviation. The ultimate test of a poverty alleviation programme is that the number of its beneficiaries shrinks over the years and the programme eventually phases out. Cash transfers serve elitism in that they perpetuate the culture of

dependence on the elite, as the recipients by and large have neither the incentive nor the opportunity to become socially useful economic agents. Though in normal circumstances cash transfers make little economic sense, these are an important means of garnering political support and winning elections. Human resource development (HRD) is an important means of increasing public welfare in the long run. This is especially true of a labour-abundant country like Pakistan, which will always find it tough to realize its growth potential without adequate HRD. However, HRD has remained a neglected area in Pakistan. Not surprisingly, Pakistan is presently ranked 161 among 191 nations on the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), which comprises three broad indicators: life expectancy at birth, expected and mean years of schooling, and per capita national income. The country is placed under the 'Low Human Development' category, the lowest category. Although between 1990 and 2021, Pakistan's HDI value has gone up from 0.400 to 0.544, it is still well behind the average score for the world (0.732), developing countries (0.685) and South Asia (0.632). The HDI doesn't directly take into account income distribution. However, countries' HDI performance is adjusted for inequality in income distribution and other relevant indicators. Pakistan's current inequality-adjusted HDI value is 0.380 compared with the world average of 0.590, developing countries' average of 0.538, and the South Asian average of 0.476. Pakistan's coefficient of human inequality is 29.2 compared with the world average of 19.4, developing countries' average of 21.4, and South Asian nations' average of 24.3. The coefficient is measured on a scale of 0-100. Zero means perfect equality, while 100 means perfect inequality. - Courtesy The News

Why the silence?

By Zubeida Mustafa

Recently, at a history conference on academic freedom held at SZABIST, a session was devoted to analysing the culture of silence that has come to prevail in our academia. It was attributed to the penchant of the powers that be to clamp down on the free expression of opinion by scholars who want to expose the unpleasant truths of our history. If they choose to defy censorship guidelines, the consequences can be dire for them. It was also pointed out correctly by a speaker that traditionally our society silences children; they are discouraged from asking questions and are not permitted to speak up before their elders. Another panellist blamed the teachers for failing to create interest in the students in what was being taught in the classroom. As a result, the students had no desire to acquire knowledge. Unfortunately, no one spoke of the self-imposed culture of silence created by the government's language policy in the education system. There is overemphasis on the use of the English language, despite the teachers' lack of proficiency in it. The government's decision to make English compulsory for all schoolchildren and also allow its use as the medium of instruction in private schools has created a dichotomy. Worse is the recent — not publicly announced — move of the Sindh government to introduce English as the medium of instruction in all public-sector schools in Karachi's District South. These unwise policies are destroying education in Pakistan while creating fissures in our already class-ridden soci-

ety. Inequality and injustice are on the rise driven by a fractured education system. All this is shaping social attitudes. English is 'good'. Urdu (or any local language) is 'bad'. Those who study in 'English-medium schools' are good and get jobs. Those who go to a school that does not claim to use English as the medium of instruction are scum of the earth, worthy of marginalisation. Is it then surprising that all are now chasing English for their survival and, paradoxically, self-destruction? How does this phenomenon create a culture of silence? It robs the youth of their confidence. I experienced this a fortnight ago when invited by the Urban Resource Centre to distribute certificates to some students who had completed the 18th Community Architect Training Course. This is a valuable service the URC renders to communities by training young men and women to map their dwellings and improve ventilation and sanitation, while arranging their visits to various localities where they meet the denizens of the real Pakistan. Nearly 292 people have been trained so far. I was asked to give a lecture on double standards in education. Instead, I decided to have a discourse based on the participants' own school experiences. Each of them gave an identical account of their school education. They had all studied in a school that claimed to be 'English medium'. The teachers spoke in Urdu but the students had to read, write and learn from textbooks that were in English. After they had introduced themselves they fell silent. They appeared smart but no one questioned this hybrid

style of pedagogy that is accepted by all concerned with education in Pakistan. This bizarre pedagogy produces tragic results. The children do not learn English. Neither do they learn the subjects they are taught in it. Yet it is foolishly believed that a dual purpose is served. This absurd pedagogy, a post-colonial product, has five results. 1) It does not teach a student how to express his own thoughts in any language. 2) The child resorts to rote learning. 3) The concept is not clearly understood by the child. 4) In the process, the children forget their own language and 5) they are dumbed. When they see children from elite schools speaking "fur fur in English" (the dream of a child from Lyari in Karachi, herself struggling with the language), they internalise the loss of self-esteem they suffer. A few days later, I telephoned a number of these certificate holders to ask them why they didn't speak up when I had wanted them to. It was then — after they had listened to my talk — that they became vocal. One said that the silence I witnessed was a normal pattern at such events. Another said that once she had an argument with someone on the language issue and had been humiliated by the speaker (not at the URC). As a result, she chooses silence. The culture of silence is so deeply ingrained in children that even in the comfort zone of the URC, where there are no language restrictions, students fail to shed the inhibitions they imbibed in early childhood. It actually affects their psyche. Their sense of dignity is violated and they develop an inferiority complex. Should good education be doing that?—Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

SBP emphasizes on role of fiscal policy, effective administration for price, financial stability

Independent Report
KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), on Friday, emphasized the role of fiscal policy and effective administration for price and financial stability, particularly rationalization of government spending, increasing revenue collection, strengthening food and energy supply chains, and enhancing productivity. The central bank, in its Governor's Annual

Report (GAR) for the fiscal year 2022-23 issued here, also vowed to continue taking decisions to prevent high inflation from becoming entrenched and keep inflation expectations anchored to achieve the medium-term target of 5-7% by the end of FY25, with FY24 inflation moderating to 20-22 per cent on account of the impact of contractionary monetary policy, improvements in

domestic supplies, softer non-energy global commodity prices, and the high base effect. However, the Report added that "this outlook hinges on the absence of adverse shocks stemming from geopolitical tensions and unforeseen climate events, and unfavourable movements in global commodity prices." The GAR 2022-23 is published Under Section 39 (1) of the State Bank of

Pakistan Act, 1956 which requires the governor to submit to the Parliament an annual report regarding the Bank's objectives, the conduct of monetary policy, the state of the economy and the financial system. The GAR stated that fiscal year 2023 was extraordinarily challenging, with a host of external and domestic shocks, amplified by lingering structural weaknesses.



KARACHI: Deputy Governor SBP calls on Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries & Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz at Governor House.

Weekly inflation up by 0.37 percent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed an increase of 0.37 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on December 28, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

The SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 311.14 points as compared to 310.00 points during the past week, according to the PBS data.

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 43.25 percent.

The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16=100 covers 17 urban centers and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs 17,732, increased by 0.40 percent and went up to 306.04 points from last week's 304.83 points.

The SPI for consumption groups from Rs 17,732-22,888, Rs 22,889-29,517, Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175 it increased by 0.41 percent, 0.38 percent, 0.39 and 0.35 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 15 (29.41 percent) items increased, 09 (17.65 percent) items decreased and 27 (52.94 percent) items remained stable.

The items, which recorded a decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week (WoW) included potatoes (8.66 percent), tomatoes (1.01 percent), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (0.61 percent), cooking oil 5 liter (0.44 percent), eggs (0.40 percent), mustard oil (0.24 percent), gurr (0.19 percent) and garlic (0.15 percent).



LAHORE: Activists of Ricksaw Union holds protest in the favor of their demands outside press club in Provincial Capital.

WAPDA generates 34 bln units hydel electricity in 2023

ISLAMABAD (APP): The outgoing year 2023 has been a satisfying year for hydropower and water sectors in Pakistan as WAPDA generated about 34 billion units of low-cost, clean and green hydel electricity, which is 2.2 billion units more than that of the last year. The country witnessed increased generation of hydel electricity, while under-construction WAPDA projects in water and hydropower sectors also achieved major milestones in 2023, according to a press release on Friday. This increased hydel generation helped national exchequer save about Rs. 106 billion, if same quantum of electricity was to be generated through expensive, imported fossil fuels. Most importantly, WAPDA hydel electricity costs only Rs. 3.51 per unit; and it constitutes about 30% of the total electricity provided to the National Grid. WAPDA owns and operates 22 hydel

power stations including Neelum Jhelum with cumulative generation capacity of 9459 Megawatt (MW). According to the generation details of 2023, Tarbela generated 12.9 billion units, Tarbela 4th Extension 4.4 billion units, Ghazi Barotha 6.8 billion units, Mangla 4.7 billion units, Neelum Jhelum 1 billion units, Warsak 0.8 billion units, Chashma 0.9 billion units, and rest of WAPDA hydel power stations cumulatively generated 2.5 billion units. Year 2023 also augured well for under-construction WAPDA projects. Despite the cosmic crunch, construction work on eight WAPDA projects continued unabated. WAPDA achieved the landmark of river diversion at Dasu Hydropower Project in February 2023, while diverted River Indus at Diamer-Basha Dam through test-run. WAPDA is likely to achieve the milestone of river.

Senate body on petroleum discusses suspension of gas supply of Sindh industrial sector

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Petroleum, chaired by Senator Mohammad Abdul Qadir, on Friday discussed the issue regarding the suspension of gas supply of Sindh industrial sector, resulting in a substantial 28% production loss. Officials from the Ministry for Energy (Petroleum Division) while briefing the committee said that each year the country was witnessing a depletion of more than 10% of gas reserves at various gas fields, with a simultaneous increase in its demand. This year, Sui Southern Gas Limited (SSGL) was grappling with a reduction of approximately 90 MMCFD compared to the previous year. Secretary of the Ministry for Energy (Petroleum Division), Mohsin Agha, highlighted the sustained decline over the past 8 to 10 years, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive plan to scrutinize the policymaking. The committee members conducted an in-depth analysis of supply statistics and gas depletion over the years, urging Ministry for Energy officers

(Petroleum Division) to address discrepancies for conclusive results. Furthermore, ministry officials provided insights into LPG rates, clarifying that OGRA (Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority) determines prices for producers, the margin of Marketing Companies (MCs), and consumers. Pricing is based on various parameters, including the monthly determination of the producers' price per metric ton according to the Saudi Aramco Contract Price (40% Propane; 60% Butane). The distribution margin is fixed at Rs. 35,000 per metric ton, equivalent to Rs. 413 per cylinder. Additionally, a petroleum levy on indigenous production stands at Rs. 4,669 per metric ton, translating to Rs. 55 per cylinder. The officers explained that GST, previously at 17% and now increased to 18% since February 2023, applies to these parameters. They clarified that the compilation of these figures makes up the consumer price. The Secretary of the Ministry for Energy (Petroleum Division) added that active exploration of

indigenous sources is underway, addressing infrastructure constraints in efforts to stabilize gas prices. Chairman of OGRA, Masroor Khan, provided the committee members with insights into the reasons behind the increase in oil and gas prices. Senator Saadia Abbasi highlighted that the rise in cylinder prices is attributed to taxes imposed on people. Similarly, Committee Chairman Mohammad Abdul Qadir suggested that officers explore and utilize gas transportation via seaports and large ships to mitigate price increases, ultimately benefiting the larger population struggling with rising costs. The Chairman of OGRA mentioned that their FBR mechanism already operates at the sea border. However, operating on large ships is currently not feasible, and efforts are underway to determine how to increase LPG operations at Karachi ports. Chairman Mohammad Abdul Qadir recommended that officers from the Ministry of Energy (Petroleum Division) reach out to international companies and encourage them to invest.

CM expresses dissatisfaction at poor condition in Jallo Park, Botanical Garden

Independent Report
 LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi undertook comprehensive visits to three hospitals, as many park, and the CTD headquarters.

In his visit to Jallo Park and Botanical Garden Jallo, Mohsin Naqvi expressed dissatisfaction at broken roads and poor conditions in Jallo Park, demanding a plan for its upgrade. He directed the immediate transfer of park management from the Forest Department to the PHA, emphasizing the need for improvements.

Expressing keen interest in the welfare of children, he inquired about the treatment facilities provided in the Children's Hospital emergency and

directed immediate enhancements, including fixing new tiles on the main corridor floor. He sought new counters' designs from IDAP within 24 hours adding that new tiles and counters fixing should be completed within ten days. Furthermore, he inspected ongoing construction at the Punjab Institute of Cardiology, issuing directives to expedite the laying of biogas pipes underground within 24 hours. He also emphasized the need for optimal arrangements in the waiting area for attendants and ordered the relocation of the generator to a suitable place.

Turning his attention to the General Hospital, CM reviewed the

upgradation work on all four floors of the Emergency Block. He emphasized the importance of safe and standard wiring for biogas and AC pipes, as well as infection-free operation theatres. Noting some sluggishness in construction activities, he ordered to accelerate the pace of work.

CM Naqvi's visit to Shalimar Garden involved a detailed review of its overall condition. Riding a rickshaw, he affirmed his commitment to restoring the garden to its original historical state. The CM ordered the removal of illegal constructions around the garden, tasking the deputy commissioner Lahore with the responsibility.



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi holding hand of child in a pleasant mood after reviewing upgradation project during his visit to Children Hospital.

Minister says: Education networking system to be improved in merged tribal area

Independent Report
 PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Newly Merged Districts Affairs, Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Dr. Aamer Abdullah has said that private education system and the government educational institutions would be improved to impart quality education to the tribal youth in the merged areas.

He said this while holding a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the network of private educational institutions "Dar Arqam Schools System Pakistan" and Chairman of Al-Ghazali Education Foundation, Waqas Jafari who called on him at his office in the Civil Secretariat here Friday.

The meeting discussed in detail ways and means for the improvement of the education systems in the merged tribal areas. The

caretaker minister along with the delegation discussed various proposals regarding the improvement of the education system in the province, especially in the merged districts. Provincial President of Al-Khidmat Foundation Pakistan Khalid Waqas Chamkani was also present.

The minister and the head of private educational institutions deliberated on the possibilities of expanding the network of the above-mentioned schools in the merged districts and also discussed the matters of public private partnership proposal for some government educational institutions in the same districts. In the meeting, the minister said that the provincial government was considering several useful proposals to maintain the high quality of 10 governor model schools, established in the merged districts and to run them in a better manner.



GARHI KHUDBUX: Peoples Party (PPP) Leader, Aseefa Bhutto Zardari is laying floral wreaths and offers Fateha for the peace of departed soul of the PPP Founder, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto, at Bhutto Mausoleums in Garhi Khuda Bux.

DIG Sukkur vows to improve traffic situation

SUKKUR (APP): Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Police, Sukkur, Abdul Hameed Khoso on Friday issued instructions to immediately improve upon the traffic situation in the district on an emergency basis following

days of traffic congestion which has created severe issues for commuters. In this connection, the DIG has asked the SSP Sukkur to submit a detailed report on the reasons and solutions for improving the flow of traffic on the main roads of the town,

and those routes which are frequently used by commuters.

He also instructed the traffic police Incharge on turns and all other roads of the city's congested traffic zones to improve the flow of traffic.

Minister inaugurates vehicle inspection and licensing App

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Transport Ibrahim Hassan Murad on Friday inaugurated the Vehicle Inspection and Licensing App in a ceremony held here at the Punjab Transport Company's office. The ceremony was attended by Secretary Transport Ahmad Javed Qazi, CEO Punjab Transport Company Faiq Ahmed, enforcement inspectors and officers from the transport department. Ibrahim Murad congratulated the IT and the transport department teams, expressing optimism that the app would lead to a 90% reduction in axle-load traffic violations. The minister highlighted the

department's goal to eliminate paper-based challans, stating that with the efficient team, the journey towards e-challans had begun. The Vehicle Inspection and Licensing App aims to curb fake and bogus challans complaints, marking a significant step towards digital transformation. The minister emphasized real-time information retrieval had become possible, heralding a new era in transportation. Secretary Transport Ahmad Javed Qazi said that the app would also facilitate savings in challans printing and enhance transparency in the inspection process.

KP decides to open bank accounts for prisoners

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has made the decision to open bank accounts for prisoners across the province.

According to official sources on Friday, the recently released Welfare Fund Rules 2023 by the KP home ministry stated that prisoners will now have their own personal bank accounts to support their families.

Negotiations are currently in progress with the Bank of Khyber (BoK) for the establishment of these accounts, as mentioned in the official statement. The government outlined a distribution plan where 10% of the prisoners' income will go to the government, 30% to the prisoners themselves, and 60% to the Welfare Fund. Additionally, prisoners will be permitted to engage in various activities.

Sec Health describes year accomplishments of Health Dept

PESHAWAR (APP): Health Secretary Mehmood Aslam Wazir on Friday in his annual performance message said the Health Department has achieved many accomplishments in the year 2023. He said that this year, the department has effectively contained the dengue cases to 747 without any fatalities.

He said by activating seven closed hospitals, medical services are now provided on a double shift basis, both in the morning and evening, compared to the previous practice of offering services only during daytime hours.

Speaking about the impediments related to fake, unregistered, and spurious drugs, Health Secretary Mahmood Aslam Wazir revealed the establishment of the province's first mobile drug lab in Pakistan.

Jameel elected as the new Chairman KDA

ABBOTTABAD (APP): The Kaghan Development Authority (KDA) marked a significant milestone as the newly constituted board on Friday convened its inaugural meeting at the Commissioner's Office in Abbottabad and elected its new chairman.

In the online session members of the board including Lieutenant General @ Ayaz Saleem Rana, Masroor Ahmed, Arif Islam Khan, Senior Bureaucrat Jameel Ahmed, Commissioner Hazara Division Syed Zahir-ul-Islam, Director General Shabir Khan, and Raqeb Khan were present. Senior retired Bureaucrat Jameel Ahmed was unanimously elected as the new Chairman of the KDA during the proceedings. Shabir Khan, Director General KDA welcomed the newly appointed members, expressing confidence in Chairman Jameel Ahmed and assured cooperation.



TANDO ADAM: Grooms and brides during a mass marriage ceremony held in a local garden, organized by the Odera Lal Welfare Association. A total of 250 couples participated, including 125 Muslims and 125 Non-Muslims.

International News

Russia launches massive missile attack on Ukraine, 12 dead

Monitoring Desk
 RUSSIA: Russia on Friday unleashed one of its biggest missile attacks on Ukraine of the war so far, killing 12 civilians, wounding dozens more and hitting residential buildings in Kyiv, the south and west of the country, officials said.

Ten people in Kyiv were trapped under rubble at a warehouse damaged by falling debris, the city's military administration said. A maternity ward was damaged in the city of Dnipro, but no casualties were reported, the governor said.

"Today, millions of Ukrainians awoke to the loud sound of explosions. I wish those sounds of explosions in Ukraine could be heard all around the world," Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said, calling for Kyiv's allies to step up their support.

The vast end-of-year aerial assault comes as uncertainty is swirling over the scale and staying power of future Western military and financial support for Kyiv nearly two years into the war with Russia.

"Russia attacked with everything it has in its arsenal... Approximately 110 missiles were fired, most of which were shot down," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Telegram messenger.

Air Force Commander Mykola Oleshchuk suggested the strike was Russia's largest aerial barrage since the February 2022 invasion, describing it on Telegram messenger as "the most massive attack from the air".

Army chief General Valeriy Zaluzhnyi said the attack targeted critical infrastructure and industrial and military facilities. There was no immediate comment from Russia.

The energy ministry reported power outages in the regions of southern Odesa, northeastern Kharkiv, central Dnipropetrovsk and central Kyiv.

Ukraine has been warning for weeks that Russia could be stockpiling missiles to launch a major air attack on the energy system. Last year millions of people were plunged into darkness when Russian strikes pounded the power grid.

Five people were killed in the central region of Dnipropetrovsk where missiles hit a shopping centre, a privately-held home and a six-storey residential building.

One person was confirmed dead at a warehouse in Kyiv, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said, revising down an earlier toll of two. Residential buildings and an uninhabited building were also hit, a senior military official said.



Rescuers work at the site where a residential building was damaged during a Russian missile and drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Odesa, Ukraine



RAFAH: An injured Palestinian man comforts a relative outside the Kuwait hospital, in the southern Gaza Strip, following an Israeli army strike that left at least 20 dead and 55 wounded

Iran executes four accused of sabotage, links to Israel's Mossad

Monitoring Desk
 IRAN: Iran executed on Friday four people, including a woman, whom it accused of being "saboteurs" with links to Israel's Mossad intelligence service, the Mizan news agency affiliated to the judiciary said.

The executions took to five the number of people put to death this month in a decades-long shadow war that has seen Iran accuse Israel of attacks on its nuclear effort, charges the latter has

never confirmed or denied. "Four members of a sabotage team associated with the Zionist regime ... were executed this morning following legal procedures," the news agency said, accusing them of "extensive" actions, guided by Mossad officers, targeting Iran's security.

Friday's executions in West Azerbaijan province followed Iran's mid-December execution of a fifth accused Mossad agent in the

southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan.

The semi-official Tasnim news agency identified the four executed on Friday as Vafa Hanareh, Aram Omari, and Rahman Parhazo, along with the woman, named Nasim Namazi.

They were the principal convicts in a case that involved 10 offenders, it added, but it was not immediately clear if the rest would also face execution.

Maine elections official disqualifies Trump from presidential primary ballot

Monitoring Desk
 WASHINGTON: Maine disqualified Donald Trump from the state ballot in next year's U.S. presidential primary election, becoming the second state to bar the former president for his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, a Democrat, concluded that Trump, the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, incited an insurrection when he spread false claims about voter fraud in the 2020 election and then urged his supporters to march on the Capitol to stop lawmakers from certifying the vote.

"The U.S. Constitution does not tolerate an assault on the foundations of our government," Bellows wrote in a 34-page ruling.

The decision can be appealed to a state Superior Court, and Bellows suspended her ruling until the court rules on the matter.

Trump's campaign said it would quickly file an objection to the "atrocious" decision.

Lawyers for Trump

have disputed that he engaged in insurrection and argued that his remarks to supporters on the day of the 2021 riot were protected by his right to free speech.

The decision came after a group of former Maine lawmakers said that Trump should be disqualified based on a provision of the U.S. Constitution that bars people from holding office if they engaged in "insurrection or rebellion" after previously swearing an oath to the United States.

The former lawmakers—Kimberley Rosen, Thomas Saviello and Ethan Strimling—said in a statement that Bellows "stood on the side of democracy and our constitution in her decision to bar former President Donald Trump from Maine's ballot."

Rosen and Saviello are both former Republican state senators. Strimling is a former Democratic state senator.

The ruling applies only to Maine's March primary election, but it could affect Trump's status for the November general election.

North Korea's new reactor at nuclear site likely to be operational next summer

Monitoring Desk
 SEOUL: A light-water reactor at North Korea's main nuclear complex will likely be formally operational by next summer, South Korea's defense minister said, amid suspicions that the North may use it as a new source of fissile materials for nuclear weapons.

Concerns about North Korea's nuclear program deepened recently as the UN atomic agency and foreign experts said they've detected signs indicating that North Korea had begun operating its light-water reactor at the Yongbyon nuclear complex.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said last week that his agency had observed increased levels of activity at and near the reactor and since mid-October, a strong water outflow from its cooling system. He said the reactor is "a cause for concern" because it can produce plutonium — one of the two key ingredients used to manufacture nuclear weapons, along with highly enriched uranium.

The South Korean Defense Ministry said Friday

that Defense Minister Shin Wonsik told local reporters a day before that his country had also spotted similar cooling system-related activities associated with the reactor last summer.

Shin said the reactor appears to be in the stage of a trial operation and that it's expected to be officially operational around next summer.

North Korea has long produced weapons-grade plutonium from its widely known 5-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon. The light-water reactor would be an additional source of bomb fuels, and observers say its bigger capacity could allow it to produce more plutonium. Yongbyon has a uranium enrichment facility as well.

There are questions about the reactor's reported operation, as light-water reactors are best-suited for electricity generation. Shin noted there has been no country that has used light-water reactors to produce weapons-grade plutonium. However, many observers say North Korea could adapt one at Yongbyon to

produce weapons-grade plutonium.

"(North Korea's) commissioning of a new light water nuclear power plant raises serious concerns, including safety," the US Mission to the UN in Vienna said Saturday in a message posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "(North Korea's) unlawful nuclear & ballistic missile programs continue to pose a grave threat to international peace & security."

Grossi also noted the North's operation of the light-water reactor violates UN Security Council resolutions.

The IAEA and foreign governments rely on satellite imagery and other methods to monitor activities at Yongbyon and other suspected nuclear facilities in North Korea. The North kicked out IAEA inspectors from the country in 2009.

Outside estimates on the size of North Korea's nuclear arsenal vary, ranging from 20-60 to more than 100. Experts say North Korea can add six to 18 bombs each year.



RAWALPINDI: Inter Ministerial Committee on AJ&K being chaired by Minister for Defence, Lt. Gen (Retd) Anwar Ali Hyder co-chaired by Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Chaudhary Anwar-ul-Haq held at Ministry of Defence in Rawalpindi.

Inter-Ministerial Committee meeting reviews AJK-based mega development projects

MIRPUR (AJK) (APP): A meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Friday discussed issues related to the AJK-based mega projects Neelum Jhelum Hydropower Agreement, Mangala Dam Up-Raising project, Production Cost of Electricity, Reconstruction of Rathoa Hariyam Bridge and other matters were discussed thereabout.

The meeting, held in the federal metropolis, was jointly chaired by Prime Minister Azad Jammu Kashmir Chaudhary Anwar ul-Haq and Federal Defense Minister Gen. (ret) Anwar

Haider Ali, attended, among others, by senior minister Col. (Retd) Waqar Ahmad Noor, minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Mian Abdul Waheed, Finance Minister Abdul Majid Khan. The meeting participants expressed their resolve to solve all the issues amicably. The committee headed by Federal caretaker Defense Minister General (ret) Anwar Haider Ali, decided to form working groups on all the issues, which would submit the report to the central committee after completing the recommendations as per ToR.

PML-N takes GDA along to form four-party alliance against PPP in Sindh

KARACHI (INP): The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) have reached an agreement to collaborate and support each other in the upcoming general elections.

This development came during a meeting between PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif and GDA chief Pir Pagara, with PML-N leaders Khawaja Saad Rafique and Ayaz Sadiq also in attendance.

During the meeting, the two sides reached an agreement on a four-party seat adjustment formula.

This four-party alliance, according to sources, comprises the Muttahida Qaumi Movement

(MQM), Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F).

The primary objective of this electoral alliance was to challenge the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in its political stronghold of Sindh, reportedly.

Former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif was currently leading a PML-N delegation to Sindh to form electoral alliances. During the meeting, Shehbaz Sharif and Pir Pagara affirmed their commitment to collaboration, pledging to jointly participate in the forthcoming elections and extend mutual support as necessary.



NASERABAD: Member Chief Minister Inspection Committee Aslam Tareen presiding over a meeting of officers.

Secretary Religious Affairs says: Govt. fully committed to facilitate Hajj pilgrims

ISLAMABAD (APP): Highlighting the government's commitment to facilitating pilgrims, Secretary Religious Affairs Atta-ur-Rehman outlined the government's concerted efforts to enhance facilities for all pilgrims embarking on this sacred journey. Talking to Pakistan Television News on Friday, he stated that as the balloting for Hajj 2024 was announced, the Ministry was gearing up for the preparation of Hajj 2024. According to details, 69,438 applications were received under the Regular Hajj Scheme, and 63,805 of them were successful in the balloting. "A waiting list of 5,633 unsuccessful applicants has been prepared based on their cities of departure," he added. Speaking on national TV, the secretary mentioned that, for the first time ever, short Hajj is being facilitated by Pakistani

authorities. In a move aimed at enhancing the pilgrims' experience, the Secretary emphasized the introduction of short-term Hajj facilities within Pakistan. Notably, each pilgrim will receive a suitcase with a network SIM with a QR code, enhancing security and preventing the misplacement of luggage. Moreover, he said the Ministry plans to provide complimentary Pakistani flag-themed abayas for all women pilgrims, along with a free 7GB data card, further enhancing the Hajj journey experience. Unlike previous years, the training period has been doubled, focusing more on practical training than lectures. Pilgrims will undergo training in camps with an emphasis on social interactions and community engagement, addressing issues during the training, he added.



HUB: Members of Civil Society are holding protest demonstration against prolong sui gas load shedding in city, at Hub press club.

Caretaker govt introducing 'Contract Base Smartphones Policy' from Jan 15: Dr. Umar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker IT and Telecommunication Minister Dr Umar Saif Friday disclosed that his ministry with the coordination of all other stakeholders of telecom companies from January 15, 2024 will launch a 'Contract based smart phone policy' in which people travelling to other countries will get latest model phones on easy installments, which will benefit economy.

Talking to a private news channel, IT minister said that our aim to incentive responsible financial behavior and ensure that

smart phone accessibility continues to expand, adding, we need a robust mechanism to protect investors from defaults, suggesting measures such as blocking mobile phones and, potentially, national identity cards of defaulters. Minister said that under this policy, telecom companies will have the opportunity to directly offer smartphones to customers through installment plans, thereby expanding the benefits of mobile broadband, especially among low-income segments in Pakistan. Replying another

question, he also announced that his ministry from January 7 to 10 has been introducing a 'Standardized Quality measurement Tests' across universities in Pakistan to ensure job opportunities for fresh graduates.

Ministry have made significant decisions to revamp IT education in universities in collaboration with HEC, the National Computing Accreditation Council, the Examination Testing Council, the Pakistan Software Export Board, and the Pakistan Software Houses Association.

ANP to continue struggle despite threats: Aimal

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial President Awami National Party (ANP), Aimal Wali Khan on Friday said that his party would not budge from its stance against extremism and continue its struggle for the rights of Pashtuns, said a statement issued by Bacha Khan Markaz.

Reacting to a threat alert, he said that ANP is firm on its resolve and ready to face any hurdle in its struggle for the rights of Pashtuns. He said that these threats are not new for the party as ANP workers faced numerous such attacks with valour abiding by Bacha Khan's golden principles of non-violence.

He said that ANP had always raised its voice against leniency towards militancy and added that during their government PTI granted pardons to elements that were involved in the killing of innocent and guiltless people.

Ishaq Dar says: PML-N not to forge broader electoral alliance with any party

ISLAMABAD (Online): PML-N election cell head Senator Ishaq Dar has said his party will not forge broader electoral alliance with any one in general election and seat to seat adjustment will be made at limited scale.

"Party tickets will be finalized far before January 12 and mass election campaign will be started following the distribution of tickets, he said this while talking to media men in parliament house on Friday. Our party has worked on distribution of tickets forcefully, he said adding PML-N has taken interviews from over 2200 candidates. A 33-member board of PML-N took interviews. The top leadership will decide finally about distribution of tickets after consultation.

Senate session adjourned again to meet on Monday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The second convening of the 334th Senate session was adjourned again on Friday after the Upper House lacked quorum, right after the recitation of the Holy Quran when Senator Kamil Ali Agha of Pakistan Muslim League pointed out the quorum to the Presiding Officer before commencement of the proceedings.

Senator Rubina Khalid was the Presiding Officer who chaired the session, directed for the head count of the senators, right after the pointing out of quorum, to confirm the exact number of members of the House to continue the Senate proceedings.



QUETTA: Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP) Candidate for NA-263, Jamal Khan Tarakai interacts with Naseer Shahwani, Leader Balochistan National Party (BNP), at Returning Office.

Free, fair elections prerequisite for peace, prosperity in Pak: Siraj

LOWER DIR (INP): Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Sirajul Haq has said that free and fair elections are prerequisite for peace, stability and prosperity in the country. Addressing various corner meetings in his constituency, NA-6 in Lower Dir on Friday, he advocated for a single-day polling process across the entire country, rejecting any proposals for delay or postponement in specific areas based on weather conditions or security concerns.

Sirajul Haq contended that forming a weak government without a genuine mandate after the elections would be insufficient to address the challenges confronting the country.

He expressed concern that the nation stands on the

brink of multiple crises and emphasized the necessity of a strong democratic government to navigate through these challenges.

Highlighting the shared responsibility of both former democratic and martial law governments for the current problems faced by the people, the JI chief criticized these ruling entities as family and relative-centric, prioritizing personal interests over the welfare of the public. The actions of these former rulers have damaged the economy and weakened institutions, resulting in the deterioration of the rule of law and accountability in the country, he said. Expressing skepticism about those who have frequently formed governments in the past and are now claiming to resolve the issues.



QUETTA: Patron-in-Chief of Pishin Chamber Muhammad Asif Tareen meeting with Consul General of Iran Hassan Darvesh.

Asif Tareen says: Despite Intl pressure and differences, ties b/w Pak-Iran exemplary

Independent Report QUETTA: The positive thinking of Council General of Iran Hassan Darvishand is admirable. Better relations and development between Pakistan and Iran are equivalent to the development of the entire region.

Patron-in-Chief of Pishin Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) Balochistan and Executive Member of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry Muhammad Asif Tareen said in his statement issued after meeting with Council General of Islamic Republic of Iran Quetta that Pakistan and Iran are two brotherly Muslim countries. Despite the international pressure and differ-

ences, the religious tolerance, friendly relations, trade, cultural harmony between the two countries are proof of the best neighbor and friendship, which both nations feel proud of.

He added in his statement that the Council General of Iran Hassan Darvishand's positive thinking is admirable.

Better relations and development between Pakistan and Iran are equivalent to the development of the entire region. Pishin Chamber will work with the Pakistan-Iran business community together with the Council General and it is hoped that the Council General of Iran Hassan Darvishand will share his thoughts, understanding and abilities.

Humanitarian crisis worsens in Gaza as Israel's aggressive attacks continue: UN

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Israel's expanding ground offensive across the Gaza Strip is sending new waves of displaced people - at least 100,000 so far - into Rafah, the enclave's overcrowded southern city, where locals are already underfed and desperate under continuing bombardment, UN humanitarian officials said Friday.

"A traumatized and exhausted population" is being "cramped into a smaller and smaller sliver of land," UN emergency relief chief Martin Griffiths warned on social platform X on Friday.

Efforts to deliver medical supplies and fuel to the hospitals still functioning in

and around Rafah have been increasingly disrupted by hungry people stopping convoys in search of food, the World Health Organization said this week.

Twelve weeks into Israel's campaign against Palestinians, more than 21,000 people in Gaza have been killed and there is little relief in sight. According to media reports, talks in Cairo, and an Egyptian ceasefire proposal, appear to be in early stages, and Hamas says it will not return Israeli hostages until the fighting stops.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, visiting Gaza this week, said the war "isn't close to finished". UN calls for urgent

aid scale-up amid new mass exodus to Rafah.

UN humanitarian affairs coordination office OCHA cited reports from Gaza's health authorities that half of all the pregnant women seeking safety in shelters in the Strip suffer from thirst, malnutrition and a lack of health care, there is a lack of vaccinations for newborns and one in every two displaced children faces dehydration, malnutrition and disease.

Some 1.9 million Gazans, or 85 per cent of the enclave's population, have been internally displaced since the start of Israel's retaliation following Hamas' attacks in southern Israel on October 7.

According to OCHA, the latest wave of displacement was prompted by an intensification of hostilities in the southern town of Khan Younis and central Gaza's Deir al Balah, as well as evacuation orders issued by the Israeli military.

Some 10 days ago Rafah was already estimated to be most densely populated area in Gaza, exceeding 12,000 people per square kilometre, OCHA said, which is more than in New York City. Despite a UN Security Council resolution adopted last week calling for a scale-up in aid deliveries to the enclave, access to people in need has remained overwhelmingly insufficient.



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed visiting Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar Swami Narain Mandir Light House.

Multi-storey towel factory gutted by fire in Karachi

ISLAMABAD (APP): A big fire broke out in a multi-storey towel factory in Karongi industrial area in Karachi on early hours of Friday, no casualty was reported so far.

According to details, rescue 1122 said that four fire tenders took part in the firefighting operation in reaching the place where the blaze had erupted due to lack of proper access and the building being full of smoke, private news channels reported.

The primary focus of this probe will be to identify the root causes of the fire, which remained unknown so far, rescue sources added.

A contingent of law enforcers also reached the site to help the fire brigade put out the flames.

The blaze caused loss of millions of rupees as equipments, towels and cloth in the factory were reduced to ashes.

JUI-F unveils names of candidates on women reserved seats

PESHAWAR (APP): Jamiat Ulema e Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) has announced the names of its candidates on women reserved seats for the National and provincial assemblies on Friday.

The names of Shahida Akhtar Ali, Naema Kishwar, Hina Bibi and Sadaf Yasmin have been finalized for women reserved seats from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while Zarim Bibi from Sindh, Aliya Kamran Murtaza, Aasiya Nasir, Safia Hafeez and Safia Mufti Fazalur Rehman have been finalized from Baluchistan.

Similarly, the names of Hina Owais, Aiman Abdurazaq Abid Lakho will be the party candidates on women reserved seats in Sindh Assembly while Aatika Ameer Hamza, Javeria Sadiq and Rabia Nadeem have been finalized for Punjab Assembly.

PTI takes ECP to LHC over women reserved seats issue

LAHORE (INP): The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has formally challenged the Election Commission's decision to withhold the list of reserved seats for women in the Lahore High Court.

On Friday, PTI applied to the Lahore High Court, challenging the Election Commission's stance on not disclosing the specific seat allocations.

In the filed petition, PTI asserts that the Peshawar High Court has already suspended the Election Commission's decision to nullify the intra-party election.

DC Loralai reviews measures for upcoming anti-polio drive

QUETTA (APP): Deputy Commissioner (DC) Loralai Sajjad Aslam Baloch chaired a meeting of the Polio Committee to review measures for the anti-polio campaign to be launched on January 8. The meeting was attended by DHO Dr. Malik Aman Kadezai, PPHI Dr. Muhammad Faheem Utmankhil, and other relevant officers, besides WHO representatives.

In the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner was briefed about the steps to be taken in connection with the anti-polio campaign from January 8 to 15 and the details of the situation during the previous campaign. Addressing the meeting, DC said that the world has eradicated polio from its country while Pakistan was still struggling to eliminate the polio disease.

For the elimination of this fatal disease, all intelligent people should work together as Jihad so that we can eradicate polio from our country like other countries, he noted.

He said until we do our duties sincerely and

honestly, we could end these deadly diseases saying that the time demands that we have to work hard to save our coming generation from lifelong disability. In this regard, he also urged the people to ensure their cooperation with the coming house-to-house teams of the Health Department and support the government's efforts by administering polio drops to the children. The DC said that we were responsible for our children's better health, bright future and making them a useful citizen, try to create awareness so that they not only vaccinate their children against polio but also other children against this deadly disease.

He said that there should never be laziness or irresponsibility saying that the teams working during the campaign and other people working as volunteers should try to reach every child who needs to be vaccinated against polio so that we can achieve success by playing our positive role in creating a polio-free society.



QUETTA: Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) Leader, Mubin Khan talking to media persons after submitting his nomination papers to participate in upcoming General Election 2024, in Quetta.

Ulema, Mashaykh observe 'Children's Protection Day' nationwide

ISLAMABAD (APP): Religious scholars and leaders representing various schools of thought, on the call of Pakistan Ulema Council, on Friday observed 'Children's Protection Day' nationwide.

The Ulema and Mashaykh, in their Friday sermons, urged urge the public to ensure administration of polio vaccine their children, thereby safeguarding them from potential lifelong disabilities. PUC Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, Allama Ziaullah Shah Bukhari, Pir Naqibur Rahman, and others, in their sermons, said it was imperative to emphasize that the administration of polio drops was entirely lawful as they had no adverse impact on human structure and did not induce weakness in children.

They said, "Islamic Shariah also advocates avoiding risks to oneself and one's children. Thus, it becomes a parental responsibility to get administered polio drops, and those who neglect this duty may, un-

fortunately, subject their children to the consequences of polio. Such negligence would be viewed unfavorably by Allah and society." The scholars and leaders asserted that opposition or resistance to polio vaccination in Pakistan was rooted in ignorance. Those who spread propaganda against the vital campaign were, in essence, jeopardizing the health of children, they added.

Historically, they said polio was prevalent in different parts of the world, including America, Great Britain, European countries, and India. "However, these nations dedicated relentless efforts to control and eventually eliminate the disease. Today, they stand free from its grip. Regrettably, Pakistan still grapples with polio," they maintained. They said international health organizations were diligently working to eradicate the disease by administering vaccinations to children and Islamic scholars actively supported such initiatives.