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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, in his address, emphasised that the

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

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 Muttahida Qaumi 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 after this meeting.



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

SSP bans display of illegal weapons, aerial firing on New Year

QUETTA (APP): Senior Superintendent Police (SSP) Hub Mir Manzoor Ahmad Buledi on Friday imposed a complete ban on display of illegal weapons and aerial firing in Hub district, on New Year.

Talking to media, SSP said that some people would try to play with lives of people by aerial firing for enjoying New Year.

He said that instructions have been issued to all police stations to control incidents of aerial firing in the area.

He said strict action would be taken against those violating law and order.

He further stated that

police team have taken action against the criminals. He said that Windar Police team led by SHO conducted a successful raid on hideout of outlaws and arrested three organized group found involved in snatching a Mazda truck from the driver at gunpoint. Police have also arrested suspects identified as Muhammad Ismail, Muhammad Ramazan and Naem Abbas, for involvement in changing vehicle engine and chassis numbers and selling it by making fake documents.

The SSP said that a special campaign would also be launched against underage drivers.



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

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 Hassan 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 Ishfaq 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.

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 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 Syed 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 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 Compliance & Enforcement PTA, Dr. Khawar Sidique 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.

Faizabad Dharna case: Faiz Hameed summoned by commission to record his statement

ISLAMABAD (Online): Former DG ISI Gen (Retd) Faiz Hameed has been summoned by commission to record his statement in Faizabad Dharna case.

According to sources Faiz Hameed has been summoned by the commission in TLP Faizabad Dharna case for the second time.

The call up notice was sent to former DG ISI through ministry of defence.

According to sources he will record his statement

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.

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The call up notice was sent to former DG ISI through ministry of defence. Commission is likely to finalize its report in the second week of January.

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 caretaker 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.

He further remarked does the care government want to derail the election. He gave these remarks while hearing the petition filed by chairman PTI and other lawyers in connection with permission for meeting and consultation with PTI founder Friday.

It has been requested in the petition that permission be given to chairman PTI Gauhara Khan to make consultation with PTI founder.

The court ordered that meeting between chairman

PTI and founder PTI be arranged under supervision of superintendent Adiala jail.

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The court ordered that meeting between chairman



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 marked 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.

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 Zulfiqar, 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



KARACHI: Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf reviewing the parade during Fleet Efficiency Competition Parade 2023 held at Pakistan Navy Dockyard in Karachi

No compromise on biometric attendance of officers, employees: AJK PM

MIRPUR (AJK) (APP): Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwar-ul-Haq has said that there will be no compromise on the biometric attendance of officers and employees and strict action will be taken against the violators.

Addressing a meeting of Mirpur divisional and district administrations including police officers here late Thursday, the AJK PM directed the authorities at the helm of affairs to ensure full attendance of employees in their offices.

He said that punctuality and attendance of employees across the hierarchy were imperative to establish good governance in the state.

The officers, he said, must observe discipline and rules, stay on duty and check the attendance of their subordinates by themselves three times a day.

"If the officers fulfil their responsibilities, their subordinates will never dare to be absent from work", he said. He said that the officers and employees who get

salaries from the public exchequer must devote their full time and energy to serve the people of the state.

About introducing e-governance in the state, he said e-governance has been instrumental in ensuring transparency in government matters. "The government has saved 3 billion rupees by introducing e-tendering in the Highways department alone", the AJK PM said, adding that the amount would be spent on the welfare of the public.

He said that after the biometric system, the government was planning to introduce an e-filing system.

He said that departments having extra vehicles should immediately deposit them in the transport pool, otherwise action will be taken against them.

He said that there was a dire need to bridge the gap between the government, the bureaucracy and the citizens. "The entire state machinery has to play its role in accordance with law", he said, add-

ing that the civil servants must take care of people's self-esteem.

He said that fool-proof security arrangements should be made to maintain law and order. "Proper checking at all entry points should be fully ensured by following security SOPs," he said.

He said that the government was struggling hard to provide maximum facilities for the people.

Government Ministers, including Col. Retired Waqar Ahmad Noor, Chaudhry Arshad Hussain, Chaudhry Azhar Sadiq, Mian Abdul Waheed, Chaudhry Qasim Majeed, Yasir Sultan, Nisar Ansar Abdali and other government officials were also present on the occasion.

Meanwhile, during his visit to Lakeside City, the AJK Prime Minister met members of different delegations who called on him and listened to their grievances. He assured them that the government would use all available resources for the welfare of the people.



QUETTA: Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) Leader, Naseebullah Bazai submitting his nomination papers to returning officer to participate in upcoming General Election 2024

Chinese education group launches three Sino-Pak dual diploma programs

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chinese company TANG Int'l Education Group unveiled three China-Pakistan dual diploma programs at Aligarh Institute of Technology (AIT), Karachi.

The Institute will collaborate with Fujian Polytechnic of Information Technology, China for the programs and provide training under CTE Model (Chinese + Commerce Culture + Training + Employment).

"Under the three 3-year diploma programs, 70 AIT students will have the chance to study in China on

fully-funded scholarships", Eng. Mansoor ul Hassan Siddiqui, Regional Director of TANG Pakistan, told Gwadar Pro.

He said that the admission process has been completed and the program will start soon.

The newly-launched programs cover the disciplines of IoT, Mechatronics Technology and Electronics.

Earlier, TANG has launched three Sino-Pak dual diploma programs at AIT in electrical, mechanical and computer science technologies.

Pak-China Gandhara exhibition commences in Shenzhen, China

BEIJING (APP): A three-month-long Pakistan-China joint exhibition showcasing Gandhara cultural relics commenced at the Shenzhen Museum of History and Folk Culture in Shenzhen, China.

The exhibition themed Gandhara Heritage Along the Silk Road, jointly organized by the Shenzhen Museum, the Department of Archaeology and Museums of Pakistan and the Palace Museum, will be open to the public until March 24, 2024.

A total of 203 cultural relics, including 173 artifacts from seven museums in Pakistan and 30 artifacts from the Palace Museum, are showcased at the exhibition, China Economic Net (CEN) reported.

The artifacts from Pakistan primarily stem from archaeological excavations, consisting of Buddhist sculptures, architectural components of Gandhara stonework and various gold and silver objects, fully demonstrating the diversity of Gandhara art style.

The Buddhist sculptures from the Palace Museum were mainly sourced from the ancient Gandhara region and made their way into Tibetan palaces through the ancient Silk Road, highlighting the long history of cultural and artistic exchange between China and Pakistan.

Government releases Rs140 bln to power plants on IMF condition

ISLAMABAD (INP): Following the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) condition, Pakistan has released Rs140 bln to the government-run power plants to address circular debt in the energy sector, an official document of the finance ministry said on Friday.

As per details, Pakistan has to slash the circular debt of the energy sector by Rs400 billion during FY2023-24 as per the International Monetary Fund's condition.

The finance ministry document showed that Rs57 billion has been released to Karachi-Electric to address the circular debt issue. Pakistan is likely to

release Rs260 bln to the power sector and Rs65 bln to the gas companies in 2023-24, the sources said.

Pakistan is currently in the IMF's SBA program and trying its best to meet the requirements of the next staff-level agreement.

Earlier, the Pakistani government gave assurance to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on maintaining the power sector's circular debt at Rs2.31 trillion.

The Power Division presented the details before the Senate Standing Committee for Power today. The caretaker federal government assured the IMF to maintain the circular debt of the power sector.

ECP extends nomination paper scrutiny for reserved seats in 2024 Elections

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has extended the scrutiny duration for nomination papers related to women's reserved and minority seats in the National and Provincial assemblies for the 2024 general elections.

According to the Election Commission notification, the Commission has extended the scrutiny period for nomination papers of women and minority

candidates until January 13, allowing appeals against decisions on reserved seats until January 16.

The Appellate Tribunal will resolve the appeals by January 19.

According to the ECP schedule, the list of candidates will be displayed on January 20. Candidates will be able to withdraw their nomination papers by January 22. The final list of candidates will be displayed on January 23.

Bilawal visits Bhutto Family martyrs' mausoleum

LARKANA (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Friday visited the mausoleum of the martyrs of Bhutto Family in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh on Friday to pay respects to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto on her 16th martyrdom anniversary.

He laid a wreath at the grave of slain PPP chairperson and former prime minister, offered Fateha, and recited verses from the Holy Quran.

He also laid wreaths at the graves of PPP's founder

chairman Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Begum Nusrat Bhutto, Mir Murtaza Bhutto, Mir Shahnawaz Bhutto, and Shireen Amir Begum and offered Fateha.

Bilawal Bhutto on the occasion paid tribute to all the martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for democracy, and also prayed for national security, supremacy of democracy and economic stability. Former Sindh minister Sardar Muhammad Bux Khan Mahar, Ghulam Mustafa Leghari and others were present on the occasion.

Saghar urges UN to take notice of Indian atrocities in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (INP): The APHC-AJK chapter Convener, Mehmood Ahmed Saghar, has urged the United Nations and other international human rights organizations to take notice of Indian atrocities in IIOJK.

Mehmood Ahmed Saghar in a statement in Islamabad deplored that the Indian forces were continuing genocide of the Kashmiris to turn the Muslim-majority territory into a minority.

He said India cannot change the internationally-recognized disputed status of Jammu and Kashmir

through its cruel tactics and urged New Delhi to abandon its oppressive policy towards Kashmir and give the Kashmiris their inalienable right to self-determination. Mehmood Ahmed Saghar said old false cases are being reopened against the Hurriyet activists to intimidate and harass them.

He said it is high time that the world community must intervene and force India to stop its state terrorism in IIOJK and settle the lingering Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN resolutions and Kashmiris' aspirations.

Australia beat Pakistan by 79 runs to win second Test and series

SYDNEY (INP): A fired-up Pat Cummins bagged five wickets and 10 for the match to earn Australia a nail-biting 79-run win in the second Test and clinch the series against Pakistan on Friday.

Set 317 to win, the visitors put up a stellar fight, but were dismissed for 237, with the last five wickets falling for just 18 runs.

Cummins was the chief destroyer, taking 5-49 to go with his first innings of 5-48 — only the second 10-wicket haul of his Test career. Just when it looked like the match

would go down to the wire on the final day, the pacer stepped in to remove batter Mohammad Rizwan and claim his 250th Test wicket.

Mitchell Starc chipped in with 4-55 as the tail collapsed after Shan Masood (60), Agha Salman (50) and Babar Azam (41) gave them a fighting chance.

It was always going to be a tough task, with the highest-ever successful fourth innings run chase at the Melbourne Cricket Ground the 332-7 England managed in 1928, with no other team getting past 300.

Opener Abdullah Shafique departed for four during a tricky session before lunch, caught by Usman Khawaja in the slips off Starc following a period of intense pressure.

Iman-ul-Haq survived

the initial blitz, but was no match after the break for Cummins, who sent down a probing ball that nipped back and trapped him low for 12.

Masood was given out low by the umpire on 12, but it was overturned on review and he quickly got back in his stride. He took a nasty ball to the ribs that needed treatment, but was undeterred and raced to a gutsy 50 before Cummins again came to Australia's rescue, enticing an edge to Steve Smith.

Plenty was resting on the shoulders of Azam as the side's premier batter and he looked in good nick. But after reaching 41, Josh Hazlewood got a ball to jog back and it clattered into his off stump.

Rizwan also looked dangerous on his way to 35 before Cummins again

worked his magic, with Alex Carey collecting a catch behind the stumps after the ball went off the batsman's glove. Cummins then removed Aamer Jamal and Shaheen Shah Afridi in quick succession before Starc cleaned up.

Pakistanis padded up after the hosts were all out in their second innings for 262, after resuming on 187-6.

Mir Hamza was the best of the bowlers with 4-32, while Afridi took 4-76. Carey slammed 53 to help Australia build their overnight lead and quieten chatter about his form after losing his place in the one-day side to Josh Inglis.

He resumed on 16 after Australia had bounced back from 16-4 thanks to an attacking 96 from Mitchell Marsh and Smith's gutsy 50.



KARACHI: Peoples Party (PPP) Co-Chairman, Asif Ali Zardari wraps PPP Muffler on Raza Haroon and Anees Advocate after they joined the PPP along with their colleagues, at Bilawal House

PTA, HEC to raise awareness to prevent blasphemous activities on social media

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the Higher Education Commission (HEC) have agreed to enhance coordination for raising awareness among masses to prevent blasphemous activities on internet and social media.

Chairman PTA Major General (Retd) Hafeez ur Rehman and Chairman HEC Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed during a meeting on Friday also concurred on disseminating the message among administration, faculty, and students of all universities.

The aim was to encourage them to play an effective role in the noble cause of eradicating this menace from society, said a press release.

Both sides expressed strong enthusiasm for deep collaboration and

maximising outcome through joint academic ventures. Major General (Retd) Hafeez ur Rehman highly appreciated the initiative of HEC and said that PTA is fully committed to address the challenges related to responsible use of cyberspace.

In this regard, PTA has held consultative meetings with esteemed religious scholars of the country and is engaged with multiple international organizations like UNICEF, TikTok and Telenor Pakistan for the purpose.

The collaboration between HEC and PTA will pave the way to reduce circulation of unlawful content, activities over the internet and engaging youngsters in utilizing cyberspace for productive online activities.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed appreciated the multiple steps taken by the PTA especially promoting safe, responsible and productive use of the internet. Recently received SAMENA international LEAD award acknowledges PTA's commitment in ensuring child and youth safety online.

He further highlighted the flagship initiatives of HEC including 'Pakistan Education Research Network' (PERN) and establishment of 100 smart classrooms at universities which could be utilised in promoting awareness amongst all stakeholders especially youngsters for responsible & productive usage of cyberspace. Both sides agreed to continue efforts and support on issues concerning national interests.

Former opposition leader Raja Riaz's assets increase by Rs 15 million

FAISALABAD (INP): The nomination papers of former opposition leader Raja Riaz Ahmed have revealed a significant increase in his assets over the past year. According to the documents, his wealth jumped by Rs. 15 million between 2022 and 2023, bringing his total declared assets to Rs. 4.87 crore, says in media reports.

The details show that Riaz owns 205 kanals of agricultural land, a paper mill, and income of Rs. 1.08 million for the 2023 fiscal year. He has also paid income tax of Rs. 303,000 in 2023, compared to Rs. 117,000 in 2022 and just Rs. 3,000 in 2021.

Interestingly, the papers also reveal that Riaz enjoys a taste for travel, having undertaken three trips to Europe in the past three years. His most recent trip, an eight-day jaunt, cost him a hefty Rs. 17 lakh.

Tennis star Aisam-ul-Haq declares to contest PTF presidential election

ISLAMABAD (INP): The nomination papers of tennis star Aisam-ul-Haq has declared his candidacy for the presidency of the Tennis Federation. The current president, Saleem Saifullah, has indicated he will not seek re-election.

An important federation meeting on Sunday will determine the plan of action for the upcoming election. The Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) has reached out to the Sports Board and Pakistan Olympic Association for their involvement in the elections.

The presence of Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) and Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) representatives is crucial for the presidential elections.

Aisam-ul-Haq has confirmed his interest in the PTF presidency, stating that with the confidence and full support of stakeholders, he is eager to contribute to the improvement of tennis.

Haris Rauf should be in Pakistan Test side, says Shahid Afridi

LAHORE (INP): Former Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi said fast bowler Haris Rauf should be playing in the three-Test series against Australia, where conditions would suit him, instead of the Big Bash League (BBL).

White-ball specialist Rauf, who has played only one Test and nine first-class matches in his career, turned down an offer to be part of Pakistan's tour of Australia and opted instead to compete for the BBL's Melbourne Stars.

Players stand to earn more from franchise cricket than international cricket, with Australia's Big Bash League a particularly enticing prospect for Pakistan's cricketers, who are banned from the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL).

After a brief stand-off with Pakistan's

cricket board (PCB), Rauf was given permission earlier this month to make a limited appearance in the BBL, in which the 30-year-old has played four matches and taken six wickets.

"I think Haris should be part of this side instead, rather than (the BBL)," Afridi, who led the country in Test cricket, one day internationals and T20 between 2009 and 2016, told reporters on the sidelines of the second Test in Melbourne on Friday.

"In these conditions, the kind of pace he has, he would have performed well and enjoyed himself on the kinds of pitches Australia prepared in Perth and here."

The third and final Test of the series will be played at the Sydney Cricket Ground from Jan 3.



KARACHI: Huge smoke and fire flames rising from burning Agha Steel Mills after fire eruption incident, as rescue operation is underway, at Bin Qasim Town in Karachi



ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Human Rights & Women Empowerment Ms. Mushaah Hussain Mullick addressing International Kashmir Conference on "The Role of Women Youth & Diaspora on Kashmir" at Kashmir House.

Inside story of interviews of candidates in PML-N parl. board meeting comes to open

LAHORE (Online): The inside story of interviews of candidates from Islamabad in the meeting of PML-N parliamentary board has come to open. According to sources interview of the candidates from NA-46 were taken first and PML-N leadership directed to keep interview and reply brief. First interview was taken from Anjam Aqeel a candidate from NA-46. PML-N president asked from Anjam Aqeel the reasons behind his defeat in previous 3 elections. He stated he lost election 2018 as he was thought to be darling of PTI.

He was further questioned why he lost election 2013. He said he would tell all the reasons in separation. Second interview was taken from Zeeshan Naqvi/Zeeshan Naqvi said he was proud of it that he was present in Islamabad airport to welcome him. Nawaz Sharif smiled over Zeeshan Naqvi words. Naqvi said people from Multan and Karachi became MNAs from Islamabad after winning election. Nawaz Sharif questioned from Naqvi who were those people.

Naqvi replied Javed Hashmi from Multan and Asad Umar from Karachi. Zeeshan Naqvi apprised him of the situation about NA-46. First interview was taken from Raja Waqar Mumtaz from NA-47. Raja Waqar Mumtaz reminded Maryam Nawaz of reception camp on her return from Murree saying he is the worker who has always accorded enthusiastic reception to PML-N Quaid and Maryam Nawaz on their return from Murree. Begum Kalsoom Nawaz had started Tehreek-e-Nijat from his home.

Indian troops continue CASOs in Rajouri, Poonch districts

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indian troops continued their violent cordon and search operations (CASOs) in different districts of Jammu region in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. According to Kashmir Media Service, the cordon and search operations, led by Indian army and Central Reserve Police Force,

continued on the ninth consecutive day, today, in Poonch and Rajouri districts. Indian troops barge into the houses and terrorize the inmates in Surankote and Thanamundi areas of the districts. The cordon and search operations were also going on in different areas of Samba and Kishtwar districts.

Rights activist Imaan Mazari ties the knot

ISLAMABAD (INP): Human rights activist and legal wizard Imaan Zainab Mazari has tied the knot in an intimate ceremony with lawyer Abdul Hadi. Imaan Mazari shared the news of her marriage with Abdul Hadi in a post on X (formerly Twitter). Her husband also took to X and announced the wedding in the same breath.



ISLAMABAD: Former Senator Lt General (R) Abdul Qayyum addressing during "International Kashmir Conference" at Kashmir House in Federal Capital.

Zong 4G and HANDS initiate collaborative effort to make Digital education accessible for youth

ISLAMABAD (APP): Zong 4G Pakistan's Leading Telecommunication Company has partnered with the Health and Nutrition Development Society (HANDS) to set up a revolutionary Digital Lab at the FAS School in Noor Muhammad Goth near Karachi. As a part of Zong 4G's Sustainability Program, this partnership aims to provide students in marginalized areas with top-notch technological systems to empower their digital skills and provide access to the digital world. The school previously faced challenges in delivering digital access to children but is now optimistic regarding the positive impact

scope to guarantee the provision of high-quality education for more students. HANDS is a non-profit organization working effortlessly to improve healthcare and education systems, alleviate poverty, and build infrastructure in Pakistan. Both Zong 4G and HANDS are motivated to bridge the digital gap in Pakistan by providing students with unrestricted digital access to foster knowledge imperatives and help them excel in the digital world. The school previously faced challenges in delivering digital access to children but is now optimistic regarding the positive impact

of the newly established digital lab in facilitating a more seamless and enjoyable educational experience for students. In reference to the recent collaboration, the official spokesperson for Zong 4G articulated, "Zong 4G views the support and development of educational institutions in Pakistan as a primary commitment. Aligned with our Sustainability Program, the initiative is designed to advance societal well-being in the country. Through this partnership with HANDS, we aim to enhance digital education, making the digital realm more accessible for students."

AIOU admissions for Spring 2024 semester to commence from Jan 15

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is commencing the admissions for the Spring 2024 semester (first phase) across the country, including AJK and GB, on January 15, 2024. The admissions in this phase include Matric (General), Matric Dars e Nizami (Sanwiya Ama), F.A (General), F.A Dars e Nizami (Samwiya Khasa), I.Com, certificate courses, BS (face to face), MPhil, and PhD programs, said a press release issued here Friday. The AIOU has expanded its educational network to cater to the needs of overseas Pakistanis and international students.

Pakistan missed 2023 global deadline to regulate Trans-fats across all foods

ISLAMABAD (APP): As 2023 comes to a close, it is apparent that Pakistan has missed the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2023 deadline to eliminate industrially-produced Trans Fats (iTFAs) from all food sources. Despite efforts by the Nutrition Wing of the Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination earlier this year to regulate iTFAs in specific food sources such as banaspati ghee, bakery wares, and bakery shortenings with the help of Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA), public health experts stress that this progress, while a positive step forward, remains insufficient. "Many commonly consumed sources of transfats such as packed snacks, dairy products,

street foods, and several types of ultra-processed foods remain outside the realm of iTFA standards," stated Munawar Hussain, Country Coordinator Pakistan at the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHA) as part of a press statement issued by the TRANSFORM Pakistan Campaign. "It is imperative that Pakistan does not allow the matter of regulating iTFAs to linger any further, and all efforts should be made to ensure that trans-fats across all dietary sources are regulated in accordance with WHO guidelines at earliest."

Earlier this year, Pakistan Youth Change Advocates (PYCA), with support from GHA and the Ministry, collaborated with civil society actors such as the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) and Heartfile to launch the TRANSFORM Pakistan campaign. Afshar Iqbal, Director of Media

and Communications at PYCA, highlighted their efforts, stating, "Through the TRANSFORM Pakistan Campaign, we aim not only to raise mass awareness about the ill effects of iTFAs in our dietary sources but also to work with all relevant stakeholders to expedite the regulation of trans-fats across all food items in Pakistan. We are grateful to our national and international partners, collaborators, and the Ministry of Health for their support in advancing this critical cause." Mukhtar Ahmed, Executive Director of CPDI, shed light on the civil society's role in regulating iTFAs, saying, "Civil society is in close communication with the Ministry of Health, PSQCA, and provincial food regulatory bodies.

IHC says Islamabad DC does not have authority to issue 3MPO

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court has said that the deputy commissioner of the federal capital does not have the authority to issue 3MPO. IHC Justice Babar Sattar Friday announced a reserved decision on the petitions filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leaders Shehryar Afridi and Shandana Gulzar challenging their arrests under 3MPO. The court allowed the pleas of Afridi and Shandana Gulzar against the MPO order and declared the Act PO 18, 1980 of the 3MPO illegal. While announcing the reserved verdict, Justice Babar Sattar said that

Islamabad Deputy Commissioner does not have the authority to issue 3MPO. The power of 3MPO should be vested only in the Federal Cabinet. Later, talking to the media outside the Islamabad High Court, PTI lawyer Babar Awan said that the IHC had said that action should be taken against those who made arrests under 3MPO. He said that the powers given to the Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner under the martial law order are wrong. The court has declared the 3MPO order invalid. Only the Federal Cabinet can pass orders within Islamabad, Awan added.



ISLAMABAD: Member Provincial Assembly and Chairman GB Reforms Committee Amajad Hussain Adv calls on to CM GB Haji Gul Bar Khan at his Office.

NHMP urged commuters to adopt cautions, dense fog causes major highways closures

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a stark manifestation of winter's grip, dense fog has shrouded key roadways, prompting authorities to enforce closures from Sher Shah to Shamkot, Abdul Hakeem to Pindi Bhattiyan, and several other significant stretches. As of 28th December, the veil of mist extends its reach, significantly impacting visibility and necessitating strategic road closures. Motorists across the affected regions are facing substantial disruptions as fog-induced closures grip the road network. The primary affected areas span from Sher Shah (KM 00) to Shamkot (KM 54), Abdul Hakeem (KM 89) to Pindi Bhattiyan (KM 290), and Thokar Niaz Baig (KM 00) to Kotmomin (KM 162). These closures, attributed to the persistent fog, are a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of commuters. Notably, the

Islamabad main toll plaza has become a focal point for closures, impacting both north and southbound lanes. From Kot Momin (KM 163) to Lillah (KM 214), a critical section is closed for heavy-duty vehicles (HTVs), intensifying the challenges faced by freight transport. The situation is exacerbated along the stretch from Faizpur (KM 1147) to Rajana Interchange (KM 965), where both north and southbound lanes are closed. A noteworthy development is the diversion of northbound traffic from Rajhana (KM 965), redirecting vehicles to alternative routes. Meanwhile, visibility concerns persist along various segments, with fog reducing sight range significantly. From Kassarow Bridge (KM 1045) to Musafir Khana (KM 817), drivers are contending with visibility as low as 50-100 meters. The same goes for the stretch from Kharian

Cantt (KM 1410) to Chak Akka (KM 1446), where visibility drops to 50-60 meters. In a particularly challenging scenario, the stretch from Jinnah Terminal Beat-12 (KM 1245) to Sanpal Chowk Beat-16 (KM 1045) witnesses extreme conditions, with visibility fluctuating between 20-100 meters. Similarly, the route from PS Kamoke (KM 1305) to Kala Shah Kaku (KM 1276) reports visibility as low as 10-50 meters, emphasizing the need for utmost caution. As commuters navigate these weather-induced challenges, authorities advise strict adherence to closure guidelines, urging individuals to prioritize safety over expediency. It remained critical for travellers to stay updated on real-time road conditions and exercise patience in the face of these unforeseen challenges posed by nature's wintry grip on the region's transportation arteries.

Saeed Ghani says: PPP not forming any alliance with PTI, national unity must on 'CoE'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Sindh former minister Saeed Ghani Friday made it clear that Pakistan People's Party is not forming any political alliance with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in coming elections and urged political parties for unity on the 'Charter of Economy' to take the country out of current crisis. Talking to a Private news channel, PPP leader said his party did not believe in politics of hate, ego, and division, adding, that we will participate in the coming election in line with its manifesto outlined. "PPP leadership does not believe in the politics of confrontation rather it is pursuing the politics of reconciliation", adding, that seat adjustment is a routine matter of elections. He recalled that Shaheed Mohtarma

Benazir Bhutto always advocated the need for politics of friendship and reconciliation. Replying to a query, he stressed that the upcoming generations need a better economy and Pakistan still can prosper, adding, that participating in elections is the right of every political party equally. To another question, he said that PPP leadership has unveiled a 10-point election manifesto with an emphasis on welfare schemes, adding, that if elected to power, PPP will double salaries, provide 300 free solar power units for the poor, free healthcare, construct 3 million houses for flood affectees and broaden BISP scope. He said PPP had initiated the Benazir Income Support program which was being recognized globally.

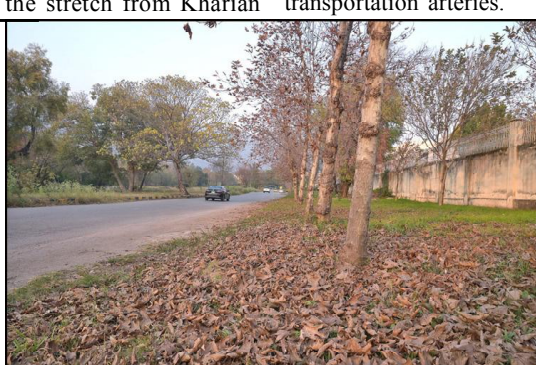
14 outlaws including 7 professional beggars held; drugs & weapons recovered

Independent Report ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police apprehended 14 outlaws including seven professional beggars from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered drugs and weapons from their possession, a public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directions, the Golra police team arrested an accused namely Tanveer Abbas and recovered 15 liters of alcohol from his possession. The

Sangjani police team arrested two accused namely Muhammad Faizan and Umair Shoukat involved in illegally refilling gas cylinders. Similarly, the Khanna police team arrested two accused namely Muhammad Aqib and Noman Ilyas and recovered 410 gram heroin and one 30 bore pistol from their possession. The Humak police arrested an accused namely Muhammad Sarwar and recovered 519 gram heroin from his possession. The Bhara Kahu police team arrested an accused namely Muhammad Hassan and recovered 510 gram hashish from his possession. Cases have been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway.

HEC extends deadline for registration till Jan 03

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC), has extended the deadline, till January 03, 2024, for registration in the Centralised Test being held for Computer Science and IT graduates—leading to apprenticeship in top IT companies of Pakistan. The test date shall however remain intact i.e. January 07, 2024, said a press release on Friday. The students enrolled in the 7th semester of Computer Science/IT related disciplines offered in recognised public and private sector universities and affiliated / constituent colleges are encouraged to register through Virtual University (VU) link <https://www.vu.edu.pk/GraduateTest/>. The decision to extend the registration deadline was made in a virtual meeting of Vice Chancellors/Rectors and Heads of Departments of Computer Science/IT of all public and private sector HEIs in order to ensure that maximum number of eligible students.



ISLAMABAD: A view of dry leaves at the roadside greenbelt in Federal Capital.

UNWTO recognizes Pakistan as top tourist destination in 2023

ISLAMABAD (APP): A strategic online outreach, along with launching of the "Salam Pakistan" tourism brand in August 2023, contributed significantly to attracting a diverse range of visitors from across the globe. He highlighted the collaborative efforts of PTDC, provincial tourist departments and private sector operators, emphasizing the role of global events in expanding international partnerships. Minister of State on Tourism, Wasi Shah, extended congratulations to the team of PTDC and industry partners, expressing optimism for a stronger performance in 2024 despite existing challenges. With the recovery reaching 115% and projections of international receipts reaching USD 1.3 billion by year-end, Pakistan stands as a beacon in tourism resurgence, showcasing its potential on the global stage.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has acknowledged Pakistan's outstanding performance in tourism, marking a remarkable 92% recovery to pre-pandemic levels in 2023. The country experienced a 115% surge in foreign tourist arrivals compared to the previous year, signaling a robust comeback post-Covid-19, said a press release. Attributing this success to concerted efforts in tourism promotion, Managing Director-PTDC Aftab Rana said that the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) last year actively engaged in six major global events such as World Travel Mart London, ITB Berlin, New York Travel and Adventure Show, Arabian Travel Mart Dubai, Seoul Travel Mart Korea and Travel Mart in Vietnam, fostering essential B2B connections with foreign tour operators.



A Group of Students and Faculty Members of Air University, Islamabad Visiting Senate Museum At Parliament House, Islamabad

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent
Saturday December 30, 2023

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. While countries around the world are taking initiatives to cut down food waste, Pakistan wastes 26 per cent of its total food production, something the country evidently cannot afford to do so. Pakistan has to redraft its food production and distribution policies and ensure that no person sleeps on an empty stomach. The overreliance on imported food products should be discouraged and high-quality local alternatives should be offered to people. Tackling food insecurity should be the top priority of our government, and everyone has to play their part in achieving this target.

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 con-

trolled 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 gov-

ernments 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 devel-

opment (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 inequal-

ity-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. There are two major impediments to upending elitism. The first is to put in place a supportive public policy framework, which targets egalitarian economic growth. Several politico-economic factors discourage framing such a policy: The government may lose a considerable part of its political capital, as the lobbies which helped a party come into power through hefty financial contributions and now want their share of the pie may resist such a move. There is also, in the short run at least, often a trade-off between economic growth and equality. Egalitarian considerations may put the brakes on growth. — Courtesy The News

Federalism and local governments

By Sara Malkani

There is a fear in some quarters that attempts to strengthen local government constitute a 'rollback' of the 18th Amendment provisions expanding provincial autonomy. This was expressed in a statement on Dec 4 by the PPP's Senator Raza Rabbani, who said that the purpose behind such moves "is to make provincial governments redundant". On the other hand, PML-N's Ahsan Iqbal has said that strengthening local government is the ultimate goal of the devolution process. According to Ahsan Iqbal, the "spirit of the 18th Amendment" requires that power be taken down further to the grassroots". Why do the two parties express such different understandings of the principle of federalism believed to be encapsulated in the 18th Amendment? The 18th Amendment expanded the range of domains over which provinces have exclusive decision-making powers. The 18th Amendment also inserted Article 140-A in the Constitution which requires that provincial governments 'devolve' powers to local governments. Differences per-

sist over the extent to which the 18th Amendment grants local governments the right to take independent decisions untrammelled by a central or provincial authority. These differences stem in part due to a conceptual confusion regarding the meaning of federalism, one that is very common in political discourse across Pakistan. US political scientists Malcolm Feely and Edward Rubin define federalism as a compromise between different political units, each with distinct political identities, to come together under a larger unit while retaining autonomy over specific domains of governance. What is the rationale behind federalism? It is an arrangement that allows groups with different political identities, and relatedly, different political goals and priorities, to come together under a central authority while retaining exclusive control over some spheres. These sub-units claim a certain degree of autonomy against the central authority as a matter of right. In Pakistan's constitutional framework, what are the autonomous sub-units that constitute the federa-

tion? To answer this question, we should look to the constitutional history of Pakistan to identify the sub-units with a distinct political identity that have come together to form the federation. One belief, supported in my view by historical and political realities, is that it is the provincial sub-units that constitute Pakistan's federation. Provincial autonomy was a significant political priority for the framers of the 1973 Constitution in the wake of the violent dismemberment of the country in 1971 due to discontents of the largest political sub-unit (East Pakistan). Each provincial unit in present-day Pakistan also has claim to a distinct political identity based on the ethnic and linguistic majorities residing in the province. Under this view, provinces may assign decision-making power to local bodies over some domains, but provinces will retain the right to override decisions of local governments. If provinces are recognised as the sub-units constituting the federation with a claim to limited autonomy as a matter of right, they will not be subject to any requirement

from a central authority that they relinquish powers to another unit within their territorial domain. Another competing view is that local governments should be deemed the autonomous sub-units with overriding powers in some spheres. To assess this claim against the definition of federalism proposed here, we would have to ask whether local bodies constitute distinct political identities with a claim to autonomy against the central and provincial authority. Local bodies in Pakistan — cities, towns, villages, etc — do not typically claim a distinct political identity. Rather the political identity of these local bodies is, in general, subsumed by the identity of the province in which they are located. In light of the nature of federalism in Pakistan, Article 140-A of the Constitution should be interpreted in a way that retains the autonomous power of the provinces and gives them power to override decisions of the local government. This is not, however, how the Supreme Court interpreted Article 140-A in its judgement of 2022 where it held that provincial governments cannot

take away powers of the local government by "executive fiat". The Supreme Court declared that provisions in the Sindh Local Government Act of 2013 allowing the provincial government to "take over the management and control of any institution or service" maintained by a local body contravene Article 140-A of the Constitution. There is a strong case to be made that this interpretation of local government powers goes against the rationale behind federalism in Pakistan, which is to recognise the autonomy of provinces to run many of their own affairs and to override the decisions of both the central authority and any local government authority within their territorial control. The nature of federalism, given the history of the country and its constitutional framework, runs contrary to claims by some political constituencies that autonomous local governments embody the true spirit of the 18th Amendment. Interestingly, arguments advanced most often in support of local government autonomy do not, in fact, rely on federalist principles.

A common argument is that devolution of powers to local bodies encourages political participation as it brings democracy to the grassroots. This is not an argument in favour of federalism — rather it is an argument for decentralisation. In fact, local governments can be very empowered in non-federalist systems. Unitary states, such as France, have powerful local governments as an essential feature of their administration. However, this does not make France a federalist state because the central authority retains overriding powers to set policy goals for the entire country while giving some freedom to local governments to implement policies. Neither decentralisation nor greater political participation at the grassroots are necessary features of federalism. The heated and persistent disagreements over the extent of local government autonomy reflect an absence of clarity about the nature of federalism in Pakistan. While there are many arguments in favour of empowering local governments, federalism is not one of them. Courtesy Dawn

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 over-emphasis 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 society. 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 conce-p--ts are not clearly understood by the child. 4) In the process, the children forget their own language and 5) they are dumb. 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

Pro-people leadership

By Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

This year, I had the honor to visit Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, where an impressive ceremony was organized in connection with the 16th martyrdom anniversary of Ms Benazir Bhutto, the first woman prime minister of Pakistan and the Islamic world. Given the upcoming general elections, the ceremony became the most pivotal and significant political power show, where people from all corners of the country and abroad, including her spouse Asif Ali Zardari, son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, gathered to pay tribute to her great personality. On the occasion, an ambitious 10-point election manifesto was also presented with an emphasis on the formation of a 'pro-people' government. Jiye Bhutto's slogans were echoing everywhere, especially 'Dilan Teer Bajan' were motivating the participants; every visitor was being warmly welcomed in the reception campus decorated with the three colored flags of the PPP. Colourful banners of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter Benazir Bhutto highlighted the universal fact that pro-people leaders never die. In my political career of more than two decades, although I participated in numerous political meetings and gatherings, spending some quality time at Garhi Bakhsh among party workers having diverse backgrounds was my real asset.

On the occasion, I also availed the opportunity to discuss the current political situation with various personalities, during which I explained the predictions of Vedic Astrology that the Raj Singhans (throne) of Islamabad is awaiting a politician whose root number relates with 8 and 2, and zodiac horoscopes further predict Leo is the luckiest sign in the year 2024. Therefore, the victory in the upcoming elections to be held on the eighth day of the second month of the year 2024 with root number 8, is predicted for Asif Ali Zardari, whose zodiac sign is Leo; birth date is July 26 with the root number 8, and birth year is 1955 with the summation of 2. Historically, Garhi Khuda Bakhsh is a village in the Larkana district of Sindh province, which was founded by Khuda Bakhsh Bhutto, the ancestor of the Bhutto family. However, today it is famous for being the final resting place of the Bhutto family who sacrificed their lives for Pakistan. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the first elected people's prime minister of Pakistan, his spouse Begum Nusrat Bhutto, her daughter Ms Benazir Bhutto, her sons Mir Murtaza Bhutto, Shah Nawaz Bhutto and other family members are buried here. Ms Benazir Bhutto, during her tenure in the 1990s, decided to transform the site into a grand mausoleum. A competition was held to finalize the design of the building whereas all the affairs were supervised by Ms Bhutto personally. She men-

tioned in her well-known book 'Daughter of the East' that she and her sister Sanam Bhutto did not want any member of the Bhutto family to face difficulty in the future to find the last resting place. When Ms Benazir arrived in Karachi in October 2007 and a horrific terror attack occurred, she made arrangements to bury all unidentified martyrs, declaring them as Bhutto, in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh graveyard and ensured her presence there on a priority basis. Her practical love for Bhutto's supporters and party workers deserves to be written in golden letters in history. In an unfortunate terror attack at a jalsa in Rawalpindi, she lost her precious life just after two months and shifted here permanently to Garhi Khuda Bakhsh. While visiting Benazir Shaheed's last resting place in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, I prayed for the peace of her soul. At that moment, I started recalling with tearful eyes the entire tireless struggle Mohtarma did for the betterment of people, even the sacrifice of her precious life is an unforgettable event in our national history. Numerous hurdles were put in her way, but Shaheed Rani always promoted parliamentary politics in accordance with the constitution. Although Benazir Bhutto Shaheed is not present among us today, the huge presence of people in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh shows that Benazir Shaheed lives in the hearts of millions of people forever. — Courtesy The News

CM launches SPPRA's e-procurement system

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Bakar has said that the traditional procurement methods have their own set of challenges that can hinder efficiency, increase costs and sometimes compromise transparency. Therefore the provincial government is launching an e-procurement system to address the challenges, he said.

The chief minister said that it was important to recognize the effort that had gone into developing and implementing this e-procurement system and digitizing and automating different tasks can reduce the time it takes to complete procurement cycles and minimize errors.

This he said while speaking at the launching ceremony of the 'e-Procurement System' viz E-Pak Acquisition and

Disposal System (EPDS) at a local hotel here Friday. The program was attended by Minister for Law and Chairman Sindh Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (SPPRA) Omar Soomro, DG Federal PPR Maqbool Gondal, DG SPPRA Zubair Parvez, Director SPPRA Shadiya Jaffer and secretaries of various departments.

He said that the provincial government's top hierarchy and people from the civil society had come together to celebrate an important milestone in our quest for efficiency, transparency and innovation.

"Today marks the beginning of a new chapter as we have unveiled our e-procurement system, an advanced platform that will revolutionize the way we manage our public procurement procedures.

As the world rapidly evolves, technology

continues to reshape various industries, therefore, embracing innovation is not just an option, but a necessity, the CM said and added our decision to implement e-procurement demonstrated our commitment to staying ahead of the curve, leveraging technology to improve our operations and ultimately delivering better outcomes for our stakeholders.

The chief minister lauded the initiative undertaken by the SPPRA, supported by the World Bank and Federal PPR. "This initiative aims to enhance transparency, equity, and competitiveness in public procurement processes.

The Sindh Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (SPPRA) successfully launched its state-of-the-art Electronic Procurement System (e-procurement).



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.

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

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.

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

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 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 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.

'Ladla' allowed to run election campaign from jail: Attuallah Tarar

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Attuallah Tarar has said that the 'Ladla', the favourite, has been allowed to run the election campaign from jail.

Talking to the media on Friday, he said that a new movement of 'Ladla-ism' had been going on for a week.

"The trial of the cipher case has been stopped. No one is to question you whether you do good or bad. A former prime minister was ousted to

launch the 'Ladla'. It is justified if the PML-N is stripped of the election symbol and it becomes illegal if the PTI is deprived of the 'bat' symbol," he added.

The PML-N leader warned that no one would abide by the law if facilitation was not stopped in the country. About the distribution of party tickets, he said that there are differences in the party over the issue; however, the party will accommodate all aspirants.

PEF, VU sign MoU to extend cooperation

LAHORE (APP): A significant milestone was achieved in the realm of education as the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) and the Virtual University of Pakistan joined hands through signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), here on Friday.

The MOU was signed by Shahid Farid, Managing Director of Punjab Education Foundation and Prof. Dr. Arshad Bhatti, Rector of Virtual University. Deputy Managing Director (Operation) Samina Nawaz, Director Research and Coordination Dr. Nauman Jamil Khan, Dean

of Virtual University Dr. Mohsin Javed, and other officers participated in the signing ceremony.

The primary objective of this MOU is to extend IT courses to secondary-level students enrolled in PEF schools. Under the guidance of Virtual University, students affiliated with PEF will receive specialized training in digital literacy, freelancing, and social media marketing.

This initiative aims to equip students with the skills needed to excel in the digital age, empowering them to explore opportunities for online earning.

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.

The DIG Sukkur also directed to strictly enforce traffic laws and to ensure that heavy vehicles follow the times at which they can ply on the main roads like Bander Road, Minara Road, Station Road, Barrage Road, and Workshop road of the town.



LAHORE: People sitting around fire to keep themselves warm in cold weather in the City.



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries & Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz calls on with Caretaker Chief Minister Sindh Justice (Rtd) Maqbool Baqar at CM House.

Quaid Azam's legacy is to serve the nation with honesty: Ahmed Shah

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Caretaker Minister for Information, Minorities Affairs and Social Protection Muhammad Ahmed Shah has said the legacy of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was to serve the nation with honesty and sincerity as he had emerged as the great leader of Muslims in the entire subcontinent with honesty, determination, dedication, passion and commitment.

He said this while addressing a seminar titled "Jinnah: A Timeless Legacy," organised by Sindh Madressatul Islam University in connection with the 147th birth anniversary of the Founder of Pakistan at SMIU's auditorium on Friday.

Sec Health describes year accomplishments of Health Dept

PESHAWAR (APP): Health Secretary Mahmood 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.

hunger, education, health and social issues. He maintained that whatsoever our youth play their role in society, that must be related to the thoughts of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah because he guided us in every sphere of life. "Every citizen of the country is equal, hence they must keep open window of their mind to get fresh breeze and light, and that comes from the ideology of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah," the minister said.

He also thanked the Vice Chancellor of SMIU Dr. Mujeeb Sahrai for organising a seminar on the Father of the Nation and inviting him to address it.

Vice Chancellor Sindh Madressatul Islam University Dr. Mujeeb Sahrai said Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a great visionary.

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.

GCUF invites applications for admission

FAISALABAD (APP): The Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF) has invited applications for admission in BS Environmental Science, MPhil Environmental Science and PhD Environmental Science programmes.

A spokesman for the university said on Friday that the candidates could apply online on university website <https://admissions.gcuf.edu.pk/> up to January 4, 2024 whereas test and interview would be held on January 6.

More information could be obtained from university website or through telephone number 041-9201566, he added.

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 that with e-challans, transparency and 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.

Christmas cheques distributed among families

SIALKOT (APP): The District Baitul Mal Committee distributed Christmas cheques worth Rs 20,000 each among 20 deserving families. Chairman District Baitul Mal Committee Shakeel Ahmed, Vice Chairman Malik Ahsan Ali and Deputy Director Social Welfare Sharif Ghuman besides members distributed the cheques.

On this occasion, Chaudhry Shakeel congratulated the Christians who received the cheques.

He said that the District Bait-ul-Mal Committee was ensuring the distribution of relief funds among the deserving people on merit.



MULTAN: Students of Bahawalpur Medical and Dental College (BMDC) are holding protest rally for acceptance of their demands, in Multan.

KU conference illuminates best practices in biological research

KARACHI (APP): The National Biosafety Framework (NBF) serves as the cornerstone for effective biorisk management in any country, ensuring the safe handling, transport and use of biological materials.

These views were expressed by the Chairperson of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Aga Khan University Hospital, Professor Dr Erum Khan during her scientific talk at the inaugural session of the two-day conference on "National Biosafety Framework: The Missing Link in Biorisk Management in Pakistan" held at the Jinnah Auditorium of Dr A. Q. Khan Institute of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering of the University here Friday.

The conference was organized by the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) Pakistan

National Chapter and KU-KIBGE in collaboration with the Pakistan Biological Safety Association (PBSA) and Pakistan Academy of Sciences.

She said that biorisk management encompassed a spectrum of activities aimed at preventing accidental or intentional release of biological agents that could pose a threat to human health, agriculture and the environment.

Professor Dr Erum Khan mentioned that a robust NBF would facilitate compliance with international standards, fostering collaboration and information exchange with the global scientific community. This, in turn, would enhance Pakistan's capacity to address emerging infectious diseases and bioterrorism threats, she expressed.

She said that establishing and implementing a comprehensive biorisk management framework.

Jameel elected as the new Chairman KDA

ABBOTTABAD (APP): The Kagan 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 Bureauocrat Jameel Ahmed, Commissioner Hazara Division Syed Zahir-ul-Islam, Director General Shabir Khan, and Raqeeb Khan were present.

Senior retired Bureauocrat 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.

While addressing the meeting the newly elected Chairman thanked all the board members.



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

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.



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



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

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.



LAHORE: A worker is busy in cutting the woods at woods stall to meet the customers demand after gas load shedding during the coldest weather of winters in Provincial Capital.

No shortage of wheat in country: Dr. Kausar

ISLAMABAD (Online): Caretaker Minister for National Food Security and Research Dr. Kausar Abdullah Malik has said that there is no shortage of wheat in the country.

Addressing the National Kissan Convention in Islamabad Friday, he said Pakistan is capable enough to export essential food items like wheat and rice in near future.

He said the government is taking practical steps to increase

the productivity of wheat and reduce the productivity gap.

The Minister said agriculture is the backbone of the country's economy and all obstacles in this regard will be removed on priority basis. He said with gaining the production potential, Pakistan can easily become agriculture surplus country.

Assuring the farmers, Kausar Abdullah Malik said all efforts are being made to facilitate the farmers of the country.

PSX stays bullish, gains 398 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Friday continued with a bullish trend, gaining 398.81 points, a positive change of 0.64 percent, closing at 62,451.04 points against 62,052.24 points the previous trading day.

A total of 590,592,624 shares valuing Rs.16.844 billion were traded during the day as compared to 676,243,466 shares valuing Rs. 20.278 billion the last day.

Some 359 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 207 of them recorded gains and 130 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of

22 remained unchanged. The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Ltd with 141,792,931 shares at Rs.5.26 per share, Fauji Foods with 28,270,145 shares at Rs.11.14 per share and Worldcall Telecom with 27,871,949 shares at Rs.1.41 per share. Nestle Pakistan witnessed a maximum increase of Rs.203.00 per share price, closing at Rs. 8,203.00, whereas the runner-up was Rafhan Maize with a Rs.198.00 rise in its per share price to Rs.9,998.00.

Unilever Pakistan Foods witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs.99.00 per share closing.

Caretaker Minister presides meeting on TDAP, Steel Mills

KARACHI (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce, Industries & Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz on Friday presided over meeting to discuss matters relating to Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) and Pakistan Steel Mills here at Governor House.

The meeting was attended by Federal Secretary Commerce Sualah Farooqi, TDAP Chief Executive Zubair Motiwala and other officials of PSM and TDAP.

During the meeting, Dr. Gohar Ejaz was briefed about circumstances which led to the destruction and closure of the Mill.

The caretaker minister said that PSM could be revived if government and SIFC play their responsible and lawful role keeping in view, the PSM's "Key Performance Indicators" (KPI) audited from 1982 to 2023.

TDAP officials under the leadership of C. E. TDAP Zubair Motiwala briefed the caretaker minister about "4th Pak-Africa Trade Development Conference" (PATDC) and Single Country Exhibition (SCE) in Cairo, Egypt to be held next month.

The 4th edition of PATDC & SCE will see participation from MENA region including Jordan.



FAISALABAD: A farmer cutting green fodder for animals at his farm field.

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 unit, 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 policy-making.

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.

Further more, 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.

Rs 43.9m fine imposed on food outlets

SARGODHA (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) imposed a fine of Rs 43.9 million on various food outlets over violations during the current year in the division. According to a spokesman for the PFA, the authority launched a crackdown against elements involved in adulteration of food items.

The food safety teams checked 31,769 food points and fined 3,430 units in Sargodha division.

He said that the production units of 60 food outlets was shut down for poor hygiene arrangements. Cases were registered against 85 people for adulteration while sewerage water grown vegetables on 104 Kanal were also destroyed, the spokesperson said.

Steps begins to establish modern Business Facilitation Center: Ehsan Bhutta

MULTAN (APP): Secretary Industries and Investments Punjab, Ehsan Bhutta said that steps had been taken to establish a modern Business Facilitation Center in the city under the directions of Punjab government.

Over 17 departments will provide their services under one roof in the facilitation center.

He expressed these views during his visit to city here on Friday. The Secretary Industries inspected the proposed place for the center and took briefing. Director Development Robina Kausar and Assistant Commissioner City Seemal Mushtaq were also present on the occasion. Ehsan

Bhutta said that immediate facility would be provided by setting up federal and provincial departments under one roof in Business Facilitation Center. He further said that the Center would be connected online to various cities including Lahore.

Secretary Industries said that NOCs would be issued to the business community and citizens immediately. Deputy Commissioner Rizwan Qadeer said that the district administration had allocated a place for a Business Facilitation Center at SP Chowk while the Building Department had been given the task of setting up the Center immediately.



LAHORE: Labourer busy in ginning cotton at his workplace.

Businesses more confident about future despite insecurity: Survey

ISLAMABAD (INP): Largely negative about their ongoing prospects, the country's business owners have started gaining confidence, and their expectations for a better future have risen 42% from the previous quarter, shows a latest survey.

"Relatively fewer business owners are pessimistic about future conditions and the direction of the country compared to Quarter 2," according to a Gallup Pakistan Survey with business owners in the third quarter of 2023 for

the Gallup Business Confidence Index report Friday.

It said business insecurity though persists because of the prevailing economic and political crises, businesses are more upbeat about their future.

"Inflation, utility bills and political instability cause growing concern among the business community, but overall fewer businesses express hopelessness compared to the previous quarter," it said. Asked about their expectations for future business conditions, the

businesses were surprisingly optimistic and 61% expressed positive expectations while 38% expect things to worsen.

The net future business confidence score has improved by 42% since the spring and is now at 22%, according to survey report.

The businessmen's perceptions about the direction of the country have also improved since the previous two quarters with 26% of respondents saying Pakistan is heading in the right direction.

The Direction of the Country score has

increased to -47% that is 30 percentage points more than a quarter ago.

The overall confidence of the business community, however, was low since economic crises have been looming since 2022.

The economic insecurity in the country has worsened since the beginning of this year, but the business situation score has improved regardless by 25 percentage points. Similar to the second quarter survey results, inflation was the problem cited by most of businesses.



Senator Muhammad Abdul Qadir, Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Petroleum presiding over a meeting of the Committee at Parliament House Islamabad.

Energy Seminar highlights transformative impact of "Energy" project

PESHAWAR (APP): The Center for Intelligent Systems and Network Research (CISNR) at UET, with the support of GIZ Pakistan, recently hosted an impactful seminar.

This pivotal event on the project titled "Energy Efficiency through Digitization."

The seminar drew over 130 participants, having presentations from CDA, PDA, Tehsil Municipal Administration, Water Sanitation Services Company and others.

It served as a focal point for discussions on energy savings, policy recommendations, carbon credits, and exemplary case studies from partner municipalities under the project. Muhammad Irfan, Project Manager at GIZ, commended CISNR's exceptional work in energy management and AIoT.

Deputy Manager Ayaz Durrani from WSSC Abbottabad shared a compelling case study on how the implementation of

Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) technology led to the detection of billing anomalies, resulting in substantial cost savings.

This highlighted the practical impact of technological integration in utility management.

Meanwhile, Deputy Director Abdul Qadir Afridi of the Peshawar Development Authority (PDA) emphasized a significant shift in their energy management approach. He highlighted the transformation from a lack of awareness to successfully implementing an integrated energy team across critical sectors such as water supply, street lighting, and buildings.

This evolution signified a crucial step toward comprehensive energy management within their municipality. These case studies collectively highlighted the practical successes and transformative potential of technolog.

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 center, 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

Minister says: Turkey detains 29 people with suspected Islamic State ties planning attacks

Monitoring Desk
ISTANBUL: Turkish authorities have detained 29 people suspected of having ties to militant group Islamic State in operations across nine provinces, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said on Friday.
Suspects captured in "Operation Heroes-37" on Friday were planning to attack churches and synagogues in Istanbul, Yerlikaya said on social media platform X.
Citing security sources, Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency said three other suspects linked to the 29 detainees had been captured in the operations as well. It said the three were senior members of Islamic State, and added that one was planning an attack on the Iraqi Embassy in Ankara.
Anadolu did not provide any further details on the suspects or the operations.
Authorities have ramped up operations against Islamic State and Kurdish militants in recent weeks, after Kurdish militants detonated a bomb near government buildings in Ankara on Oct. 1.

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—Kimberly 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.
The ruling likely will add to pressure on the U.S. Supreme Court to resolve questions about Trump's eligibility nationwide under the constitutional provision known as Section 3 of the 14th Amendment.
The court's 6-3 conservative majority includes three justices nominated by Trump.
Trump has been indicted in both a federal case and in Georgia for his role in trying to overturn the 2020 election, but he has not been charged with insurrection related to the Jan. 6 attack. He leads opinion polls by a large margin in the race for the Republican nomination.
Colorado's top court disqualified Trump from the state primary ballot on Dec. 19, making him the first candidate in U.S. history to be deemed ineligible for the presidency for engaging in insurrection.
Trump has vowed to appeal the Colorado ruling to the Supreme Court and criticized ballot challenges as "undemocratic." The Colorado Republican Party filed its own Supreme Court appeal on Wednesday.

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.

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.
The official IRNA news agency posted a video clip nearly eight minutes in length, that showed the men confessing to their alleged co-operation with a Mossad officer in neighbouring Turkey, who used two names, Tony and Arash.



Russian plane lands on frozen river due to pilot error

Electricity in air for one Cuban couple's 2-wheeler wedding procession

Monitoring Desk
HAVANA: Wedding processions on wheels are nothing new along Havana's famous seafont drive, the Malecon, but this week electric motorcycles and scooters joined a tradition that in the past has included horse-drawn carriages and vintage U.S. cars. The procession for one couple on Wednesday was a sign of the times in Communist-run Cuba as residents get resourceful amid an economic crisis that has all but paralyzed public transport, sent taxi prices through the roof and led to long lines to buy gasoline.
The bride, 21-year-old Daniley Aguiar, said the couple were big fans of the electric vehicles, called "motos", and so the unique procession was "something I always wanted to do."
Her groom, Reinier López, 27, said putting together a wedding on a budget was not easy given the daily challenges of shortages, inflation and deteriorating services.
Electric two-wheelers have taken off with a buzz in recent years on the island, with help from the government.
Imported vehicles are heavily taxed, with the exception of electric motorcycles, scooters, mopeds and bicycles and the government has a joint venture to assemble them in country with China's Tianjin Motor Dies Co Ltd.
The government reported around 100,000 electric two-wheelers were on the road at the start of 2023, compared to just a few five years ago.

Three dead as Storm Gerrit batters Britain

NORTH YORKSHIRE (INP): Three people died on Thursday after their car fell into a river in northern England, local police said, as Storm Gerrit battered much of the UK.
Emergency services headed to the River Esk near the town of Glaisdale shortly before midday (1200 GMT), after reports that a vehicle had fallen into the river. "The vehicle was recovered from the river by the fire service just after 3:00 pm. Sadly, the three men inside have died," North Yorkshire Police said.
Another man who had tried to help them was recovered unharmed, it said, adding that the weather conditions were "making driving hazardous". Several regions of the UK, particularly Scotland and northern England, have been badly hit by Storm Gerrit since Wednesday, which has brought heavy rain and snow.

UK house prices fall in 2023, to stay subdued next year: Nationwide

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: British house prices fell by 1.8% in the 12 months to December, recording the biggest decline over the course of a year since 2008 during the global financial crisis, mortgage lender Nationwide said on Friday.
A poll of economists had pointed to a drop of 1.4%. In month-on-month terms, prices in December were flat compared with November.
Britain's housing market, which enjoyed a boom during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been hit by higher borrowing costs after the Bank of England pushed up interest rates in its battle to tame inflation.
But a fall in mortgage rates in recent weeks has led to signs that the market might have bottomed out.
"Housing market activity was weak throughout 2023," said Robert Gardner, chief economist at Nationwide, noting the impact of higher borrowing costs and that house prices had fallen by almost 4.5% from an all-time high recorded in 2022.
December's 1.8% year-over-year drop in house prices was the steepest since a 15.9% decline in December 2008, Nationwide data showed.
A "rapid rebound" in housing activity or prices next year appears unlikely, he added.
"If the economy remains sluggish and mortgage rates moderate only gradually, as we expect, house prices are likely to record another small decline or remain broadly flat (perhaps flat to down 2%) over the course of 2024," Gardner said.

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: A Soviet-era Antonov-24 aircraft carrying 30 passengers landed on a frozen river near an airport in Russia's far east on Thursday because of pilot error, transport prosecutors said.
The Polar Airlines An-24 landed safely on the Kolyma River near Zyryanka in the Yakutia region, the prosecutors said.
"According to preliminary information, the cause of the aviation incident was an error by the crew in piloting the aircraft," a spokesperson for the Eastern Siberian transport prosecutor said in a statement.

Muslim mutton shop owner shot dead in Bihar

PATNA (INP): Unidentified bike-borne assailants in broad daylight killed a Muslim mutton shop owner in Bihar state in India.
The victim, identified as Afroz Khatri, an owner of a mutton shop in Rambagh Chowk area of Muzaffarpur, was shot dead while he was heading towards his shop when the assailants fired two bullets in broad daylight, resulting in his death on the spot.
The motive behind the attack remains unclear and no suspects have been identified yet. A video of the incident, showing two bike-borne men shooting Afroz Khatri, has gone viral.
The brazen daylight brutal murder of the mutton shop owner triggered anger among residents, leading to protests with the body placed in the centre of the road.
Speaking to the media, one of the victims' relatives, Alam, revealed that Afroz Khatri owned a mutton shop at Masjid Chowk. "He was walking towards his shop from home when he was surrounded by two assailants who shot him dead," he deplored.

Two Russians get prison terms for poetry against Ukraine campaign

MOSCOW (INP): A Moscow court on Thursday sentenced two men to several years in prison for taking part in the recital of verses against the Ukraine campaign during an anti-mobilisation protest last year.
Artyom Kamardin, 33, received a seven-year sentence for reciting a poem, and Yegor Shtovba, 23, was sentenced to five and a half years for attending the protest.
The two were seen behind a glass partition in a heavily-guarded courtroom.
Just before his sentencing, a smiling Kamardin recited a poem that refers to poetry as "gut-wrenching" and often disliked by "people accustomed to order".
After the sentence was read out, there were cries of "Shame!" from supporters in the courtroom, some of whom were later detained by police outside the court building.
Russian authorities have detained thousands for simple acts of protest against the offensive in Ukraine, with criticism effectively outlawed.
Kamardin has claimed that during his detention he was raped by police officers and forced to film an apology video as officers threatened his partner.
On the eve of his arrest in September 2022, he had recited his poem "Kill me, militia man!" on a Moscow square where dissidents have been gathering since the Soviet era. Kamardin also shouted offensive slogans against the imperial "New Russia" project aiming to annex the south of Ukraine.
Both were convicted of "inciting hatred" and "calling for activities threatening state security".
Kamardin told the court he did not know his actions broke the law and asked for mercy.
"I am not a hero, and going to prison for my beliefs was never in my plans," he said in a statement, posted on his supporters' Telegram channel.



In Liberia, more than 40 people were killed while 83 injured when a fuel tanker crashed and exploded in Totota town. In a statement, Chief Medical Officer Francis Katch said a tanker overturned and burst into flames.



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.

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 have been introduced a 'Standardized Quality measurement Tests' across universities in Pakistan to ensure job opportunities for fresh graduates.

Ministry has 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.



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

QUETTA: The positive thinking of Council General of Iran Hassan Darvesh 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 Darvesh'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 Darvesh will share his thoughts, understanding and abilities.

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 Ratho 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'd) Anwar

Haider Ali, was attended, among others, by senior minister Col. (Ret'd) 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'd) 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 Quami 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.

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 Rafa, 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 "crammed 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 the 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 Korangi 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, Naeema Kishwar, Hina Bibi and Sadaf Yasmin have been finalized for women reserved seats from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while Zarin 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, Aaveria 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.

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 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, unfortunately, subject their children to the consequences of polio. Such negligence would be viewed unfavorably by Allah and society."

The scholars and lead-

ers 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 mentioned.

They said international health organizations were diligently working to eradicate the disease by administering vaccinations to children and Islamic scholars actively supported such initiatives. Despite those efforts, they said, certain elements, driven by ignorance or ulterior motives, continued to obstruct the progress in combating polio. The religious scholars and leaders emphasized that vaccines were a form of medicine, and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) regarding the use of medicine.



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.

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 household 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.