

# Independent

dailyindisb@gmail.com Chief Editor: Syed Farooq Shah www.dailyindependent.com.pk Gwadar

Ph: 2841470/2841473 Vol: XVI No. 213, Jamadi-us-Sani 23, 1445 AH Saturday January 06, 2024, Pages 04, Price Rs.15



QUETTA: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki expressing his views during a briefing on eve of his visit to Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan Institute of Cardiology Quetta (ICQ)

## Senate adopts resolution calling to postpone elections

Non-binding resolution moved by Senator Dilawar Khan highlights concerns over security situation, cold weather; Caretaker government, PML-N oppose the move; Political parties slam resolution

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Senate on Friday adopted a resolution calling for the postponement of general elections scheduled for February 8 in order to facilitate the effective participation of people across the country in the electioneering process in view of security and harsh weather conditions. The resolution, moved by independent Senator Dilawar Khan, was passed by the House with a majority vote. However, there was low attendance. Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi and Senator Afhan Ullah Khan of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) opposed the resolution. Senator Dilawar, while presenting the resolution, urged the chair to postpone the agenda for taking up the matter of serious concern. He read out the resolution, which maintained that the Constitution of Pakistan "upholds the right to vote for every citizen of Pakistan."

## PM asks envoys to identify avenues for Pakistan's int'l economic collaborations

Reiterates Pakistan's continued support for Kashmiris' right to self determination

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Friday asked Pakistan's envoys in the United States and the United Kingdom to identify the new avenues for Pakistan's economic collaborations at international level. The prime minister, in a meeting with Pakistan's Ambassador in the US Masood Khan and Ambassador in the UK Dr Muhammad Faist, instructed them to constantly highlight the Kashmir cause as well as Pakistan's stance on Palestine issue. The envoys briefed the prime minister about the performance of their respective missions and also got the prime minister's instructions on Pakistan's

## Caretaker CM praises high standard ICQ; terms no less than any private hospital

Mir Ali Mardan Domki assures provision of grant for purchase of items required for PET scan and nuclear medicines in ICQ

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki has categorically stated that the Institute of Cardiology Quetta (ICQ) is a state-of-the-art hospital of Balochistan, and it's high standard is no less than any most expensive private hospital of the country. He said that the ICQ is determined to provide quality healthcare facilities to the poor patients of the province. The caretaker Chief Minister was on visit of the Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan ICQ on Friday. During the visit, he visited different sections of the Institute. Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister assured that the grant would be ensured for purchase of the items required for the PET scan and nuclear medicines in the Institute. He also assured to release the funds already approved for construction of the road from Kach More to the Institute. Moreover, the facility of transport would also be provided to the patients for movement from and to the Institute of Cardiology. Similarly, the street lights would also be installed from Kach More to the Institute, the caretaker Chief Minister assured further. While on the other hand, the orders are being issued for mobile patrolling after establishing police check post at the Kach More. He assured that the solarization of Institute of Cardiology would also be done to resolve the electricity issues there.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Permanent Representative in UN Mr. Munir Akram calls on caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

## No directives from PM, cabinet for delay in elections: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs, Murtaza Solangi on Friday said that there were no directives from the Prime Minister or the federal cabinet for delay in general elections.

Talking to the media outside the Parliament House, the minister said that he did not get a chance to give arguments in the resolution on the postponement of the elections in the upper house. According to Article 218(3) of the Constitution, it was the power of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), to conduct elections, give a date or change the date for elections, he said. "We cannot interfere in the affairs of a constitutional body," Murtaza Solangi said. Acknowledging the problems mentioned in the resolution were the real problems, he said adding that these problems had existed before in the history of Pakistan's Parliamentary politics and elections. The minister maintained that it was the government's responsibility to look into the issues of harsh weather and other matters including providing security. "So far, no signal has been received from any quarters regarding postponement of elections," he said. Only the ECP, he said had the constitutional authority to postpone the elections.

## 'We engaging with transporters on Yaro-Chaman Highway to reopen route': Jan Achakzai

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Information Minister Jan Achakzai on Friday said that we were actively engaging with the transporters on the Yaro-Chaman Highway to find a solution and reopen the route.

He said that the local administration was working closely with transporters to address their concerns, said a press release. He said that the primary demand of the demonstrators was the release of trucks currently held up in Chaman by another group of protesters in Parlat, who demanding the government to remove the passport requirement. He said that the local administration was working closely with transporters to address their concerns, said a press release. He said that the primary demand of the demonstrators was the release of trucks currently held up in Chaman by another group of protesters in Parlat, who demanding the government to remove the passport requirement.



COLOMBO: Secretary Defence Lt Gen (Retired) Hamood Uz Zaman Khan calls on President of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremesinghe at Presidential Secretariat Sri Lanka.

## All preparations completed by GoB for February 8 general elections, CS briefed

Best arrangements being ensured for security of most sensitive and sensitive polling stations; funds released for repair of 55 polling stations in flood hit areas

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Government of Balochistan has completed all necessary arrangements and preparations for the upcoming general elections in Balochistan as elsewhere in the country on February 8, 2024. This was informed by the concerned high ups at the meeting of secretaries committee held regarding preparations of the general elections in the province, here on Friday morning. The Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan presided over the meeting. The Provincial Election Commissioner, Ejaz Anwar Chohan and other concerned high ups were also present in the meeting. The Provincial Election Commissioner and Secretary Local Government Department briefed the meeting about the preparations of elections in Balochistan. During the course of briefing, it was informed that the provision of IT facilities including Laptop, desktop, printers and multimedia is being ensured to District Returning Officers and Returning Officers in their respective areas. Moreover, the best arrangements are being ensured for security in the most sensitive and sensitive polling stations all over the province. The PEC informed that there would be 5067 polling stations and 15002 polling booths for the elections in the province. The necessary funds have been released for 55 polling stations affected due to the floods in Kachhi, Sibi and Jaffarabad districts. The final list of the candidates would be issued on January 13, he maintained.

## President approves reconstitution of CCI

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr. Arif Alvi on Friday approved reconstitution of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) on the advice of the prime minister.

The president gave the approval under Article 153 of the Constitution. The CCI would be headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan while the chief ministers of the four provinces and three federal ministers would be members of the council. The three federal cabinet members include Federal Minister of Finance and Revenue, Minister of Privatization, and Minister of Law and Justice.

## SC reserves judgment regarding interpretation of Article 62 (1)(f)

ISLAMABAD (APP): A seven-member larger bench of the Supreme Court on Friday reserved its judgment in the case pertaining to the interpretation of Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution and disqualification tenure. The bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Amin Ud Din Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musarrat Hilali heard the case. The bench reserved the verdict after all the respondents concluded their arguments. During the course of proceedings, the CJP observed that the court would announce the short order soon. Attorney General for Pakistan Mansoor Usman Awan and Jahangir Tareen's lawyer Makhdoom Ali Khan gave arguments before the bench. The apex court had taken notice of the lifetime disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) in the appeal of former MPA Mir Badshah Qaisrani against his disqualification.

The apex court had taken notice of the lifetime disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) in the appeal of former MPA Mir Badshah Qaisrani against his disqualification.



LAHORE: Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari cutting the 96th birthday cake of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto at NA 127 Kot Lakhpat Pindi Rajputan.

## FM calls for immediate cessation of human rights violation in IIOJK

From Czechangez Khan-Jadoon ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Minister, Jalil Abbas Jilani, on the Occasion of Right to Self-Determination Day said that the fifth of January is annually observed as the Right to Self-Determination Day for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. On this day in 1949, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) adopted a resolution that guarantees a free and fair plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir, to enable the Kashmiri people to realize their right to self-determination. Following its illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019, India's efforts have been aimed at engineering demographic and political changes so that the Kashmiris are reduced to a disempowered community in their own land. The Indian Supreme Court's recent verdict is yet another manifestation of India's desire to undermine the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people. India is also subjecting the Kashmiri people to systematic human rights violations. It has created an environment of fear to crush dissent in IIOJK.



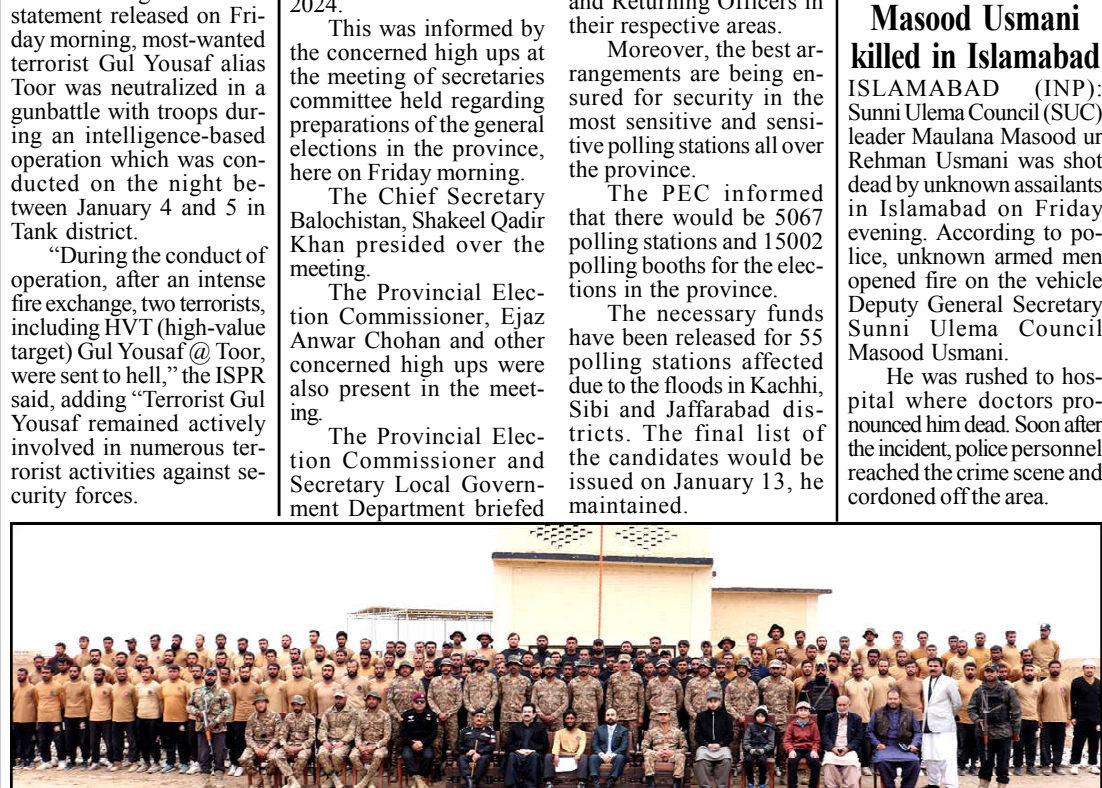
MUZAFFERABAD: Activists of Pashan-e-Hurriyat Jammu and Kashmir holds placards and shouting slogans during protest against the Indian oppression, to mark the Self-Determination Day, in City.

## All out efforts made for increasing capacity of Levies force: Jamali

Independent Report QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial Minister for Home, Captain (Retd) Mir Muhammad Zubair Jamali has stated that Levies force has become professional force in the province and as such all out efforts are being made to increase capacity of the force. He said that Levies force has delivered and thus gained trust of the masses. He said that our jawans have rendered sacrifice of their lives for protection of the life and property of the masses. The Minister Home was addressing the passing out parade of Balochistan Levies force on Friday. The Director General Levies, Naseebullah Kakar and other concerned high ups were present. Addressing the passing out, the Minister said that we are proud of our law enforcement agencies. Our ultimate goal is to establish peace in the province. The peace which pave the way for sustainable peace and overall prosperity of the province and its people, Mir Zubair Jamali maintained. He said that we want to see all institutions while performing like Levies in the province. He said that the provincial government has taken steps for increasing the number of personnel in the Levies force.

## Most-wanted terrorist gunned down in Tank operation

TANK (INP): A most-wanted terrorist with Rs2.5 million reward on his head was gunned down along with an accomplice by security forces during an operation in Tank district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to an ISPR statement released on Friday morning, most-wanted terrorist Gul Yousaf alias Toor was neutralized in a gunbattle with troops during an intelligence-based operation which was conducted on the night between January 4 and 5 in Tank district. "During the conduct of operation, after an intense fire exchange, two terrorists, including HVT (high-value target) Gul Yousaf @ Toor, were sent to hell," the ISPR said, adding "Terrorist Gul Yousaf remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against security forces."



QUETTA: Caretaker Home Minister Captain (retd) Muhammad Zubair Jamali in a group photo with jawans who got special commando training during passing out parade of Balochistan Levies force

## Daily Voice of Masses Independent

### Gathering storm?

Any hopes that the new year would bring some stability to the Middle East have been quickly dashed. Instead, fears are growing that the volatile region's intertwined conflicts will explode into something much larger — and uglier.

The first week of 2024 has been marked by two pivotal acts of violence linked to the ongoing Israeli slaughter in Gaza, as well as the larger confrontation between Iran and the US-Israeli combine. On Wednesday, the Iranian city of Kerman witnessed two bomb blasts near the tomb of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani.

Over 80 mourners who had gathered to mark the anniversary of Soleimani's assassination by the US in 2020 were killed in the Kerman atrocity. The bombings are amongst the highest mass-casualty attacks Iran has suffered in many years.

Only a day earlier, top Hamas leader Saleh Al Arouri, along with other colleagues, was assassinated in a missile strike in Beirut's Dahiyeh neighbourhood — a stronghold of Iran-backed Hezbollah.

It is unclear who is responsible for the Kerman blasts; terrorists belonging to the self-styled Islamic State group have struck Iranian targets in the past, while Israel has also carried out assassination campaigns against Iranian military and government figures.

Amongst these was the murder of a top Pasdaran commander in Syria late last year. With regard to the Arouri assassination, there is little doubt that Tel Aviv is responsible.

Israel usually maintains an air of ambiguity about its murderous foreign operations. But in the current circumstances, it would be playing with fire by trying to provoke its adversaries in Iran, Lebanon and elsewhere in the region into striking back.

If the Iranians or Hezbollah were to react to these attacks, Israel could play the victim card and draw its American protectors deeper into the Middle East quagmire.

The resultant conflict would shake the international order to its core. So far, both Tehran and Hezbollah have marked their responses with restraint. But it will be hard for them to maintain this posture if Israel continues with its provocative behaviour. Though logic would dictate that de-confliction mechanisms be deployed immediately to bring down the temperature, the reality is that a larger conflict may not be a matter of 'if' but 'when'.

Of course, if Israel were to stop its genocidal campaign in the Gaza Strip, things could be controlled. But the extremists at the helm in Tel Aviv do not appear to be interested in this option, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a vested interest in prolonging the conflict to escape domestic censure.

Washington's policymakers must explain if they are okay with their Israeli allies setting the Middle East on fire; there are no signs yet they would rather work towards reining in Tel Aviv.

### Prudent living



Amin Valliani

Presently, many countries are going through a painful cost-of-living crisis. A few years ago, the world faced the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected millions across the globe. Many lost their lives, while others suffered huge economic losses. The global economy has not been able to fully recover from these shocks. In such a situation, families need to be vigilant, especially about how to surmount day-to-day economic challenges.

Economic stability is essential for any family to survive and prosper. Therefore, every family should try and improve its economic status while abiding by the ethics of Islam such as hard work, saving, sharing, and gratitude to Allah, etc.

The economy depends on earthy resources. Islam says: "He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth..." (2:29). This means that there is no dearth of resources on earth. Allah is the Creator and continues to create resources for humanity. The science of economics helps guide us on how resources are to be used. Islam enjoins Muslims to practise moderation, instead of being miserly or becoming spendthrifts. Allah says: "And let not your hand be tied (like a miser) to your neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach (like a spendthrift), so that you become blameworthy and in severe poverty (17:29)".

Similarly, Islam does not like wastage of resources (7:31) but emphasises prudent living,

so that every individual can achieve the goal of quality life. But what is prudent living? It means making wise decisions based on principles and managing practical affairs in an effective manner. Studies have shown that people who lead prudent, conscientious lives can also end up having a longer, healthier life. In other words, families have to look carefully at the economic context which is around them.

Pakistan's economy is currently going through severe uncertainty, facing numerous economic hardships including inflation, high cost of day-to-day needs, severe climate shocks and insufficient public funds to finance development programmes. There will be no surprise if, in the coming months, we see more difficult situations causing further instability and uncertainty in many sectors. Therefore, every family must be prudent in daily spending because it is the right way to prepare for the future.

In crisis situations, people are always left to fend for themselves; very few helping hands come forth. Therefore, families should tighten their belts, strive to live within their means, contain their expenditure, enhance their income and minimise the use of utilities such as electricity, gas and water etc. Above all, families must be disciplined in financial matters.

Leading a simple life is the need of the hour. However, it is difficult to define a simple life. It is subjective, for every individual has his or her own standard of simplicity. Simple life for a businessman is totally different from the one who works manually. But generally, simplicity is the habit of living frugally, wasting little, and being thoughtful with money. People who live a frugal lifestyle do not try to

'keep up with the Joneses' and get trapped into constantly buying more. This is a time of hard work, earning more and reducing the overall cost of living and trying utmost to save money for the future. In a nutshell, every middle-class family has to make plans for careful spending and stop buying that which is not needed. Families have to evaluate their lifestyle and be prudent while spending money on day-to-day commodities. For example, consuming more locally grown vegetables or locally manufactured goods, instead of costly imported items or processed food, can help save money while being good for one's health. In frugality, one has to avoid expenditure on fast food, drinking sugary beverages, smoking, betel nuts, paan and other harmful things.

The condition of those families who have only one breadwinner is more precarious, therefore, they have to be extra vigilant. Similarly, the middle- and working-class households should focus on their health as any health issue at the time of financial crisis can make the situation more cumbersome and unbearable. Moreover, in these difficult times, the government should improve health services at public facilities as lower middle-class people cannot afford costly private healthcare. Without health, no one can visualise a happy and prosperous life. In other words, life becomes extremely difficult if one's health deteriorates.

An unhealthy person remains dependent on others. His mind remains obsessed with his constant pain and agony. Therefore, each one of us needs to monitor and nourish our health throughout life. As the Holy Quran says: "O you who believe! Take care of your own selves" (5:105). — Courtesy Dawn

### Punjab must decide



Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

Election season is when the bourgeois political class makes all sorts of promises and at the same time says nothing at all. Take, for example, the complete neglect by mainstream politicians of Baloch protesters in Islamabad. They are sitting in front of the National Press Club in the federal capital.

Even if the bigwigs can't make time to visit, there's no obvious reason they cannot release a statement of support. Maryam Nawaz had no problem doing photo shoots with missing persons' loved ones a couple of years ago, but being anti-establishment was in fashion back then.

The ethnic peripheries — Baloch, Pakhtun, Sindhi, Seraiki, Gilgit-Baltistani, Kashmiri — have been treated this way for as long as one can remember. The establishment and mainstream politicians evince much interest in the lands, scenic highlands, minerals, coastlines, and freshwater lakes of the peripheries, but couldn't care less for the teeming millions that live there. In fact, the more politically conscious you are and demand access to your own resources, you are considered a threat to development, security, and the state itself.

What about the Punjabi heartland? It is here that consent has been cultivated to sustain Pakistan's militarised structure of power. The PTI's rise and fall suggests that this consent has fractured to some extent at least. But our bourgeois political class, or at least those who are now

the incumbents, are not going out of their way to build on this.

For as far as the eye can see, most bourgeois politicians in Punjab offer to reproduce everyday life for the vast majority — a life mediated by state institutions like the thana, katcheri and patwari, and dictated by high-caste, moneyed classes who own land, business and peddle social influence. They all claim to be better than their competitor, while throwing in 'ideological' rhetoric for good measure.

This is how elections are fought and won, especially one that is shapening up to be as rigged (primarily against the PTI) as this one. But social, economic and political life will change little after Feb 8. And the political and intellectual mainstream will acknowledge our deep, structural crises in keener fashion only when necessary.

The burning of the ethnic peripheries will represent the most acute form of these interrelated crises and will be forced into the public eye again and again, largely because of politically conscious youth that refuse to stay silent about their plight. But what can we expect from the majority of this country's young people who reside in the Punjabi heartland?

It is true that to be young and from the Punjab means that one has better chances at social mobility than if one is young and hails from virtually any other ethnic-national community in Pakistan. But class war plays out in Punjab too, where millions of children are out of school, workers and peasants face dispossession and live in semi-serfdom, and all sorts of health problems play out alongside environmental despoliation.

Other than the very well-off, most Punjabi youth — many who have been taken by the PTI and

Imran Khan — continue to suffer the cumulative economic effects of the pandemic and IMF-imposed austerity, as well as the hyper-financialised and consumption-based economic model that prevails in Pakistan today.

In short, that there is simply not enough gainful and dignified employment available for the number of young people seeking jobs, let alone housing, health, education and recreation. The most coveted option is to leave the country by hook or crook, but even that is an option for a very small percentage of the population.

I believe that a growing number of young people in Punjab do understand that the establishment-centric system offers them only hateful rhetoric, and in fact, subjects many to military-led dispossession. It is also noteworthy that more are speaking about deep injustices in faraway places like Palestine as well as the ethnic peripheries in Pakistan.

The next step is to understand that political commitment is not about following a Pied Piper to the ends of the earth. It is about coming to terms with the causes (rather than the symptoms) of the predicament one faces, and then having the wisdom to make common cause with all others concerned with building a different future.

The future for Punjabi youth — especially those lower down the class ladder — is not as bleak as some others but it certainly is not great. The young Baloch women protesting peacefully in Islamabad for their loved ones have said they seek to make common cause with the ordinary people of Punjab. Our collective future will be shaped by how Punjab's increasingly politically conscious young people respond in the due course of time. — Courtesy Dawn

## Commerce News

### Ample stock of fertilizer available to meet domestic demand: Murtaza Solangi

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs, Murtaza Solangi, Friday informed the Senate that there is an ample stock of fertilizer available in the country to meet the domestic demand.

In response to a calling attention notice moved by Zeeshan Khanzada regarding the problems being faced by the farmers due to the

shortage of urea fertilizer and its soaring rates, he expressed hope that, due to steps taken by the caretaker government in the coming days, there would be a further noticeable reduction in urea prices in the country.

The minister said that urea prices, which had previously exceeded Rs. 5,000 per bag, have now decreased to Rs. 4,451 per bag due to the government's

interventions. Emphasizing the significance of agriculture in the country, Murtaza Solangi highlighted that approximately one-fourth of Pakistan's GDP is attributed to agriculture, with 40% of the labor force linked to this vital sector.

Regarding the steps taken by the government, he informed that around 220,000 tons of urea had been recently imported by the government.



ISLAMABAD: Workers loading onion on delivery rickshaw at vegetable market.

### Business facilitation centres being set up in five big cities: Minister

LAHORE: Caretaker Punjab Minister for Trade and Industry SM Taveer has said that business facilitation centres are being established in five big cities of Punjab after Lahore.

He was presiding over a meeting of the Punjab Small Industries Corporation here on Friday, which reviewed performance of the business facilitation centre. Secretary for Industry and Trade Eshaan Bhutta briefed the minister about progress on business facilitation centres in Faisalabad, Sialkot, Multan, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi. The meeting was told that the business facilitation centre had changed the investment culture in Punjab and now no-objection certificates

(NOCs) were being issued in 10 to 15 days for setting up new factory. Till now, 161 NOCs had been issued from the business facilitation centre, while 86 more were in process.

SM Taveer said that during the current month, caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi would inaugurate five more business facilitation centres. He said that business facilitation centre was a revolutionary step to facilitate the business community and added that officers of 20 departments of federal and provincial governments were performing their duties at the business facilitation centre. He said 106 different NOCs were being provided in the business facilitation centre under one roof.

### Gold rates decline by Rs1,200

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold decreased by Rs. 1,200 and was sold at Rs. 217,000 on Friday compared to its sale at Rs. 218,200 on last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs. 1,028 to Rs. 186,043 from Rs. 187,071 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went down to Rs. 170,539 from Rs. 171,482, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram Silver remained stagnant at Rs. 2,660 and 2,280.52 respectively.

### PSX loses 124 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a bearish trend on Friday, losing 124.26, a negative change of 0.19 percent, closing at 64,514.90 points against 64,639.16 points the previous trading day.

A total of 949,559,318 shares valuing Rs. 19,355 billion were traded during the day as compared to 548,989,972 shares valuing Rs. 15,395 billion the last day.

### Karim urges significant cut in policy interest rate to help to revive economy

ISLAMABAD: Mr. Karim Aziz Malik, Chairman Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Capital Office, Islamabad said that the record high interest rate has made it very difficult for the private sector to get credit from banks for the expansion of existing businesses and make new investments due to which the business activities are suffering badly. He further said that rising interest rates make your business debt more expensive which means

more cash required to cover interest costs. Kareem Aziz Malik urged a significant cut



in the policy interest rate to help to revive the economy.

He said that current 22% interest rate has severely damaged the business environment without achieving its intended objective of controlling inflation.

### Trade deficit shrinks by 34.29%, export growth by 5.17% in 1st half

ISLAMABAD (APP): The country's merchandise trade deficit contracted by 34.29 per cent during the first half of the current fiscal year compared to the corresponding period of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

The Trade deficit from July-December (2023-24) was recorded at \$11.148 billion as against the deficit of \$16.965 billion in July-December

(2022-23), showing negative growth of 34.29 per cent. During the period under review, the exports increased by 5.17 per cent to \$14.981 billion compared to the exports of \$14.244 billion during the corresponding period of last year, according to the latest PBS data.

On the other hand, the imports narrowed by 16.28 per cent and were recorded at \$26.129 billion compared to \$31.209 billion last year.

### Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Three ships namely, lanthe, FSM and Bolan scheduled to load/offload Bitumen, LPG and Gas oil, berthed at Multi-Purpose Terminal, Engro Terminal and Oil Terminal respectively on Thursday.

Meanwhile two more ships, Athenian and AnanyaNaree also arrived at outer-anchorage of the Port Qasim on during last 24 hours load/unload Containers and Rice respectively. A total of eleven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours.

### CNG closed till Jan 31 to ensure uninterrupted gas supply

PESHAWAR (APP): The Deputy Commissioner Peshawar Afaq Wazir on Friday imposed a ban on the operation of CNG pumps till January 31 to ensure uninterrupted gas supply to domestic consumers. A notification issued here said that the DC has imposed section 144 and ordered the closure of CNG pumps within the premises of district Peshawar with immediate effect, adding that anyone to be found violating this order would proceed under section 188 P.P.C.

### Emirates celebrates 25 years of success serving Islamabad and Lahore

ISLAMABAD: Emirates, the world's largest international airline, proudly commemorates its 25th anniversary of operations at Islamabad and Lahore airports. Since its inaugural flights to both cities in January 1999, Emirates has played a crucial role in connecting Islamabad and Lahore to the world via Dubai, while fostering economic growth and cultural exchange.

movement and significantly contributed to the development of the country and region through tourism and trade. The airline's strong presence in Islamabad and Lahore underscores its position as a leading and reliable carrier which is committed to excellence and innovation in the aviation sector.

In its pivotal role, Emirates ensured seamless journeys for millions of passengers on its routes



Over the past quarter of a century, Emirates has been a reliable partner facilitating seamless passenger and cargo

from the key points in Pakistan, with the airline operating a robust schedule of ten weekly flights from each of the two cities.

### Chinese companies increase investment in Pakistan for copper production

ISLAMABAD (Online): Chinese companies in collaboration with their local partners in Pakistan have increased investment for copper production in the recent years.

Copper and articles thereof have seen an increase in export to China from Pakistan as well. In the first eleven months of 2023 increased by 9%, crossed one billion dollars mark, sources from Commerce Ministry told China Economic Net.

Ghulam Qadir, Commercial Counsellor at the Pakistan Embassy in Beijing, told CEN that the Pakistani government is keen to boost copper and associated product

exports to China. He also mentioned that Pakistan's exports of copper to China have increased recently, and he anticipated that the value of these exports will rise as a result of refined copper products.

"Pakistan has been actively seeking foreign investments, particularly from big Chinese companies, to bring in value addition and produce more valuable products for the global market.

Having Chinese companies invest in Pakistan would not only provide a boost to the country's economy but also open doors for advanced technologies and expertise.

## Faculty members of Afghan varsities call on Governor, discuss promotion of education

PESHAWAR (APP): Higher Education Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali has urged the faculty members of Afghan universities to focus on intellectual orientation of students and divert their attention towards research and modern technology.

He was talking to a delegation of faculty members of Afghan universities, which called on him at the Governor House here on Friday. The delegation was comprised of 38 faculty members of Afghan universities who are getting training in IM Sciences Hayatabad with the financial assistance of

Higher Education Commission (HEC). The Governor welcomed the delegation and discussed matters relating to promotion of contemporary education and capacity building of students.

He said that capacity building of Afghan youth would further strengthen peace and led the country on course of progress and prosperity.

He also stressed upon faculty members to provide students with knowledge and education enabling them to tap potential of Afghan natural resources.

Haji Ghulam Ali said that Afghan students should be provided education and technology to remove backwardness and induce development. He also highlighted significance of higher education institutions for development of a nation.

On the occasion, governor was told that one month capacity building course is underway in IM Sciences for Afghan professors, assistant professors and lecturers. He was informed that various courses would be arranged for Afghan professionals in second phase.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Haji Ghulam Ali in a group photo with delegation of faculty members of Afghanistan Universities during their visit to Peshawar.

## CM inaugurates Special Initiative Police Stations of Cantt & Saddar Baroni

**Independent Report**  
RAWALPINDI: Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi here on Friday inaugurated the Special Initiative Police Stations of Cantt and Saddar Baroni.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar, Regional Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khurram Ali, Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chatta, City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani and other senior officers were present on the occasion.

Talking to the media, the chief minister said that police stations across Punjab were being renovated under the Special Initiative Police Station program.

Two days ago, 36 police stations of 36 districts were inaugurated, he said adding, today, in the second phase, 36 more police stations were inaugurated.

The objective of the initiative is to provide the best service delivery in the best environment to the citizens, the CM added.

Mohsin Naqvi appreciated the RPO, CPO Rawalpindi and their team for the excellent work under Special Initiative Police Stations of Cantt and Saddar Baroni.

He directed the authorities to complete the Safe City project and CPO office in one month. The CM also announced to provide Rs 180 million for the completion of the CPO office project. He instructed to complete the Safe City Project and CPO Office Rawalpindi by January 30.

## Punjab Governor says: Book exhibition is good effort to develop habit of reading books among people

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman today inaugurated the 4th Education Expo and Book Fair organized by Idara e Nazria Pakistan at Aiwan Quaid-e-Azam, Lahore.

Speaking to the media after inaugurating the exhibition, Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman said that this book exhibition is a good effort to develop the habit of reading books among people.

Governor Punjab lauded the efforts of officials of Idara e Nazria Pakistan for organizing the

education expo. He said that the young generation is the valuable asset of the country, adding that it is important to provide them with proper guidance in the field of education.

He said that the purpose of education is to impart knowledge to the youth and make them life-long learner. He said that it is very important to inculcate the habit of reading books among the students. He said that in this age of technology, e-books are also available, but there is no substitute for the satisfaction of reading books traditionally.



LAHORE: Activists of Youth Forum for Kashmir holds placards and shouting slogans during protest against the Indian oppression, to mark the Self-Determination Day, in Provincial Capital.

## Punjab health minister announces crackdown on harmful beauty products

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: Caretaker Punjab Minister for Primary and Secondary Health, Dr. Jamal Nasir has announced a crackdown on harmful beauty creams and cosmetics. Operations will be conducted against unqualified individuals administering beauty injections or performing any kind of surgery. Joint teams from the Punjab Healthcare Commission (PHC) and the Drug Control Directorate are being formed for this purpose. The Drug Control will determine the registration status of

beauty creams and cosmetics, while experts from the PHC will assess clinical practices.

This information was shared by the minister in a press conference held here on Friday. He stated that non-standard creams claiming to lighten skin are causing diseases, adding that the use of substandard beauty creams is causing severe damage to the skin of hundreds of individuals. He said that some cosmetics contain dangerous amounts of lead, toxins, and other harmful chemicals, leading to life-threatening diseases such as liver and kidney cancer.



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi cutting a ribbon of Police Station (Saddar) under Police Station up gradation project.

## Govt of Sindh 'first time initiative to provide 55 electric bikes' to female vaccinators

ISLAMABAD (APP): Almost 55 female vaccinators are set to benefit from the historic initiative of the Sindh government to use 'Electric bikes' which will not only align with environmental sustainability goals but also enable them to easily move during the national vaccination drives and ensure that vaccines reach their intended destinations promptly.

This strategic decision aims to overcome logistical challenges, ensuring timely and widespread vaccination coverage throughout the province, said a report aired by a

private news channel. While acknowledging the importance of these vaccinators in their roles, the government of Sindh would provide training sessions to recipients of the electric bikes, said a female vaccinator who hailed the groundbreaking step of the government.

The provision of specific uniforms for these women will also foster a sense of identity but also contribute to a more professional and organized approach to vaccine distribution, said another lady health worker.

## ANF recovers over 243 kg drugs in six operations

**Independent Report**  
RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in its crackdown against drug traffickers conducted six operations across the country and managed to recover over 243 kg drugs and arrested six accused including a foreigner, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday.

He informed that 220 kg hashish was recovered from a trailer near Indus Chowrangi, Karachi area and an accused was arrested. 10 kg hashish was recovered from the bag of an accused rounded up near Zero Point, Gwadar. 8 kg hashish and 4 kg ice were recovered in two operations near Chongi No. 26 Islamabad while two accused were arrested. In fifth operation, 1 kg hashish was recovered near Shershah Toll Plaza Multan and an accused was arrested.

In sixth operation, a capsule containing 17 grams cocaine was recovered from the stomach of an accused, a Nigerian national arrested from Lahore. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are underway.

## Dr. Riaz inaugurates new year's maiden anti-polio drive

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: Advisor to the caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Health, Dr. Riaz Anwar inaugurated the current year's first polio vaccination campaign by administering drops to two children at Police Services Hospital, Civil Secretariat here Friday, with a target of making 2024 as 'year of complete eradication' of the crippling disease from the country.

Officials of Health Department including Deputy Coordinator EOC,

Muhammad Zeeshan, Sarfaraz Khan from WHO and Shadab Younas from UNICEF Communication were present on the occasion.

Talking to newsmen, Dr. Riaz apprised that the polio drive would be carried out in the whole of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in two phases. The first phase will commence on January 8 to 14, next wherein polio drops will be administered in all the districts except Lakki Marwat, Upper and Lower Orakzai district.

## Two killed in jeep-motorcycle collision in Kahota

**Independent Report**  
KAHOTA (APP): Two people lost their lives when a jeep collided with a motorcycle near Kanil, Kahota on Friday here.

According to Police, The incident occurred in the jurisdiction of Kahota police station, two lives were tragically lost as a jeep and a motorcycle collided.

The collision occurred in the Kanil area, sending shock waves through the community and prompting swift action from the local police.

## International News

## Russia used missiles from North Korea to strike Ukraine: White House

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: Russia recently used short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) sourced from North Korea to conduct multiple strikes against Ukraine, the White House said on Thursday, citing newly declassified intelligence.

National security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters the United States will raise the development with the United Nations Security Council.

Kirby called North Korea's arms transfer to Russia a "significant and concerning escalation" and said the United States

would impose additional sanctions against those facilitating the arms deals.

Both Moscow and Pyongyang have denied conducting any arms deals, but vowed last year to deepen military relations.

The use of the missiles drew condemnation from Britain, as well as South Korea, which had reported in November that North Korea may have supplied SRBMs to Russia as part of a larger arms deal that also included anti-tank and anti-air missiles, artillery and mortar shells, and rifles.

"Our information indicates that the Democratic

People's Republic of Korea recently provided Russia with ballistic missile launchers and several ballistic missiles," said Kirby, using the official name of North Korea.

On Dec. 30, he said, "Russian forces launched at least one of these North Korean ballistic missiles into Ukraine," adding that it appeared to have landed in open field. Then on Tuesday Russia launched "multiple" North Korean missiles as part of a broader wave of heavy air strikes, Kirby said. Washington was still assessing the impact of those missiles.



Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi speaks during a funeral ceremony in Kerman, Iran.

## Red Sea attacks are not isolated incidents, UNSC told

**Monitoring Desk**  
UNITED NATIONS: During a UN Security Council briefing on Wednesday afternoon, some member states emphasised the need to address attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

Some states also called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, urging caution to prevent an escalation in tensions.

US ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative, Christopher L. Hill, however, called on member states to "speak with one voice and demand that the Houthi stop their attacks".

He said the threat to

navigation rights and freedom in the Red Sea was a global challenge that necessitated "a global response".

He accused Iran of providing financial and material support to the Houthis and called it "the root of the problem".

The US diplomat called on the Council to speak with one voice and demand that the Houthis stop their attacks on ships.

"We call for a global response from this Council to this global challenge, and we are ready to discuss the situation further with other member states," he said.

## Macron pays tribute to Delors

**Monitoring Desk**  
PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron praised the late Jacques Delors at a service of national tribute on Friday for giving European Union integration some of its greatest leaps forward during his time as European Commission president.

Delors, an ardent advocate of post-war European integration, died on Dec. 27 at the age of 98. He served as president of the European Commission, the EU executive, for three terms - longer than any other holder of the office - from January 1985 until the end of 1994.

## 9 children among 14 killed in Israeli attack on Gaza camp

**Monitoring Desk**  
BEIRUT: Israeli shelling killed 14 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip's south, packed with people who had fled attacks in other parts of the besieged enclave, on Thursday. The dead included nine children, an official said.

All the 14 Palestinians were killed in a strike at Al Mawasi camp, to the west of Khan Yunis.

Gaza residents said Israeli planes and tanks bombed three refugee camps in the centre of the shattered enclave, prompting many civilians to head south.

Israeli shells had landed near tents erected in the area by displaced people, they said.

Footage on Palestinian media showed several bod-

ies wrapped in blankets inside a hospital morgue in Khan Yunis.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said its headquarters in Khan Yunis was hit, killing one person and wounding others.

The Israeli military reported several clashes in Khan Yunis, where it has said previously that it is trying to capture "Hamas leaders hiding there".

In its daily briefing, it said Israeli warplanes killed three Hamas members who had tried to detonate explosives next to ground troops, and Israeli soldiers killed two more. Five Palestinians were killed in an Israeli air strike on a car in Al Nusseirat refugee camp on Wednesday, health officials said.

## Houthi launch sea drone to attack ships hours after US, allies issue final warning

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: An armed unmanned surface vessel launched from Houthi-controlled Yemen got within a "couple of miles" of U.S. Navy and commercial vessels in the Red Sea before detonating on Thursday, just hours after the White House and a host of partner nations issued a final warning to the Iran-backed militia group to cease the attacks or face potential military action.

Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, the head of U.S. Navy operations in the Middle East, said it was the first time the Houthi had used an unmanned surface vessel, or USV, since their harassment of commercial ships in the Red Sea began after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. They have, however, used them in years past.

Fabian Hinz, a missile expert and research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said the

USV's are a key part of the Houthi maritime arsenal and were used during previous battles against the Saudi coalition forces that intervened in Yemen's war. They have regularly been used as suicide drone boats that explode upon impact.

Most of the Houthi's USVs are likely assembled in Yemen but often fitted with components made in Iran, such as computerized guidance systems, Hinz said.

At the United Nations, U.S. deputy ambassador Christopher Lu said at an emergency Security Council meeting on Wednesday that Iran has supplied the Houthi with money and advanced weapons systems, including drones, land attack cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. He said Iran also has been deeply involved in planning the Houthi's attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea.



A general view of a tent camp sheltering displaced Palestinians, who fled their homes due to Israeli strikes, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip.

## Armed men kidnapped 32 migrants in Mexico for extortion, president says

**Monitoring Desk**  
MONTERREY: The armed men who kidnapped 32 migrants in northern Mexico over the weekend aimed to extort money from them and their families in the United States, Mexico's president said on Thursday, one day after the migrants were released from captivity.

He said that the migrants, who were found on Wednesday, were abandoned by their kidnapers in a parking lot in a shopping center in the northern city of Reynosa in the state

of Tamaulipas. "Because there was a strong deployment (from Mexican authorities), they decided to free them, safe and sound," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said in his morning press conference.

The case has highlighted the risks faced by the hundreds of thousands of migrants who cross through Mexico en route to the US border each year, who are targets of extortion and kidnapping by powerful criminal groups.

## India sends warship after hijacking of Liberian-flagged vessel in Arabian Sea

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW DELHI: An Indian Navy warship was moving towards a hijacked Liberian-flagged vessel in the Arabian Sea, and aircraft were closely monitoring the situation, the Indian navy said on Friday.

At least 15 Indian crew members were on board the MV Lila Norfolk, which was hijacked near Somalia's coast and the navy received information about it on Thursday evening, Indian news agency ANI, in which Reuters has a minority stake, reported earlier, citing military officials.

The ship sent a message on the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations portal saying five to six unknown armed personnel had boarded on the evening of Jan 4, the Indian navy statement said.

An Indian warship, the INS Chennai, was diverted and deployed to assist the vessel, the statement said, adding that a naval aircraft overflew the hijacked vessel.

## Sister of North Korean leader derides South Korea's president but praises his predecessor

**Monitoring Desk**  
SEOUL: The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has derided South Korea's conservative president for being "foolish brave" but called his liberal predecessor "very smart" — rhetoric likely meant to help stoke domestic divisions in South Korea.

Her statement Tuesday came as a response to South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's New Year's Day address, in which he said he would bolster South Korea's military capability

and enhance its alliance with the United States to cope with North Korea's evolving nuclear threats.

Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has made such comments numerous times. Kim's sister, Kim Yo Jong, used Yoon's latest remarks as an opportunity to fire off derisive rhetoric against him.

"This person ... has persistently called for 'peace by force' and got hell-bent on the beefing up of the extended deterrence and the South Korea-U.S.

## India's foreign minister signs a deal to increase imports of electricity from Nepal

**Monitoring Desk**  
KATHMANDU: India's foreign minister concluded a two-day trip to Nepal on Friday, during which he signed an agreement to increase the amount of electricity India imports from its neighbor. "I assure you we are committed to extending our steadfast support and work with same earnestness to further realize the potential of the relationship for the full benefit of the people of the two countries."



QUETTA: Beautiful eye catching view of snow covered area during the heavy snowfall of winter season, which more decreases the temperature below in minus degree Celsius, in Ziarat.

## Education development is vital for poverty alleviation in Pakistan: Madad Ali

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Madad Ali Sindh on Friday education development is vital for poverty alleviation in Pakistan that is the reason we are paying attention to education and skill development.

He was addressing as chief guest on the occasion of 20th Annual Convocation-2023 of SZABIST University - Karachi Campus held at Expo Center here. Madad Ali Sindh said that educated and skilled manpower are imperative for growth of any society.

He said that the large proportion of the population get education from the public sector education system, therefore there is a need to impart training to

teachers of the public sector schools.

The Federal Education Minister called upon the political parties to give priority to education development in the next five years. He recalled that the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST) was founded by former prime minister, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto in 1995 and now SZABIST is established as a well-reputed education institute.

He lauded the services of SZABIST in education sector and said more educational institutes like SZABIST should be established.

Earlier, the Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional

Training Madad Ali Sindh and President SZABIST University Madam Shahnaz Wazir Ali opened the Convention and degrees were conferred to 1,750 students including 21 PhD students.

As many as 33 Gold Medals and 26 Silver Medals were awarded to the deserving recipients. Five hundred and twenty students' names have been placed on "Chancellor's Honor List" for securing CGPA equal to or greater than 3.50.

The Convocation Ceremony was attended by large number of people comprising of SZABIST University Board of Governors, faculty, staff, graduates, parents, educationists and other dignitaries.



QUETTA: Central Secretary General JUI Senator Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri talking with central Chairman All Pakistan Mazda Association Mir Jawab Khan during road blockade at Lakpass.

## Bilawal asks woman workers to propagate party manifesto, 10 promises

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari emphasised the role of PPP's women workers, urging them to serve as advocates, ambassadors and voices for the party among the people. Addressing a ceremony, organised by the PPP women wing to celebrate the 96th birth anniversary of party founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Bilawal highlighted awareness among Pakistani women about the country's challenges, including inflation, poverty, healthcare, and educational opportunities.

championing the cause of the poor. Bilawal asserted that the PPP stands apart from other parties, alleging that the PML-N and PTI only cater to the elite.

Highlighting the 10 promises of the PPP, Bilawal called upon party workers to inform masses about the party's vision, emphasising a departure from divisive politics. He outlined the PPP's goals, including establishing free-of-cost healthcare and educational institutions and initiating projects to eradicate hunger.

In his address, Bilawal reiterated the importance of PPP women workers in conveying the party's manifesto to women across the country. He expressed confidence in the PPP's victory, emphasising the need for a rule that prioritises the people, laborers, farmers, students, and women.

## Pakistan secures global recognition as premier tourist destination in 2023

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a significant milestone, the collaborative efforts of the Pakistani government and the Pakistan Association of Tour Operators have propelled the country to be hailed as the best destination for tourism by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2023.

A recent meeting between the delegation of tour operators and the Secretary of Interior marked a pivotal moment in advancing Pakistan's tourism sector, said a public relations officer on Friday.

The delegation, representing the Pakistan Association of Tour Operators, engaged in a constructive dialogue with the Secretary of Interior, addressing key challenges and presenting innovative suggestions for boosting tourism.

A breakthrough emerged as both parties reached a consensus to streamline and expedite the tourist visa procedure, a move aimed at enhancing accessibility for global travellers.

During the meeting, the Home Secretary af-

firming the government's unwavering commitment to play a proactive role in promoting tourism.

Expressing dedication to resolving pertinent issues, the Home Secretary echoed the sentiment that the growth of tourism stands as a top priority on the national agenda.

This commitment to fostering tourism has yielded remarkable results, as evidenced by the recent announcement from the UNWTO.

The international organization's recognition of Pakistan as the best country for tourism in 2023 underscores the nation's newfound status as a premier global destination.

The collaborative synergy between the government and the tour operators has not only addressed existing challenges but has also paved the way for a more welcoming environment for tourists.

The streamlined visa procedures and the dedication of key stakeholders signify a collective determination to position Pakistan as a go-to location for travellers worldwide.

## AG Balochistan to hold open katchehry on January 10

QUETTA: The Accountant General Balochistan, Hasan Saqlan would hold an open katchehry at 11:00 AM on January 10 at the AG office here. According to an official handout issued here on Friday, the Accountant General would hear the issues of Drawing and Disbursing Officers (DDOs), provincial government employees and pensioners. He would also issue on the spot orders for solution of their problems.



QUETTA: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki talking with a patient during his visit to Sheikh Muhammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan Institute of Cardiology Quetta (ICQ).

## Fire in house claims lives of 4 brothers and sister

LAHORE (Online): As many as four brothers and sisters were burnt alive after fire erupted in their house in Ichhra Lahore.

The fifth storey of a residential building caught fire near Chowk Baba Azam in Ichhra Lahore.

4 brothers and sister were scorched and they died. According to Rescue sources the deceased kids have been identified as Aman (12), Noor (8), Ibrahim (5) and Ismail (2).

Fire brigade has extinguished the fire besides completing cooling process.

Police and Forensic teams reached the scene and completed their preliminary proceedings.

Police said the investigation is underway to ascertain the causes behind fire outbreak. Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi expressed his deep sorrow and grief over the death of four children in the fire incident. He expressed his heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved family in their hour of sorrow saying that he equally shares.

## ECP completes training of electoral staff

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has completed priority-based training for election supervisory staff appointed for the smooth conduct of the 2024 general elections.

According to the electoral body, the training of 579,191 people has been completed, while the remaining 406,222 people will complete training by February 1.

ECP spokesman said on Thursday that the Commission had initiated training for nearly one million election staff during the last week of November, 2023, which would conclude by February 1, 2024.

The remaining 406,222 election supervisory staff, including District Returning Officers, Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers, and others would be imparted training before the deadline, he added. Strict disciplinary action was being taken against the staff who remained absent during the training programme, the ECP spokesman said.

He said in compliance with the ECP's special directives, the central control room had been fully operational since December 26, 2023, addressing and resolving complaints promptly. To date, the central control room had received 45 complaints, all of which had been resolved, he added.

The spokesperson said the central complaint cell at the Election Commission Secretariat also handled 165 complaints, promptly processing and issuing necessary instructions to the relevant authorities.

All 180 control rooms have also been activated at the provincial, divisional, and district levels, collaborating with the Central Control Room to monitor elections and swiftly address complaints.

Monitoring teams deployed nationwide in every district had also been mobilized to actively remove promotional materials daily, addressing violations of the code of conduct by candidates, the spokesperson added.

## Nadeem urges society to play role in polio eradication, importance of family planning

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Health Dr Nadeem Jan Friday emphasized the necessity of raising awareness about family planning-related myths among the rural population and called upon every section of society to play its due role in the complete eradication of poliovirus.

Talking to a private news channel, he said that every government was playing its top-level commitment and thoroughly engaged in various national polio drives where it is immunizing children under five in the country against the paralyzing poliovirus.

"Every child has the right to live life free from the threat of disability caused by polio and we will not rest until all children are safe from it," Dr Jan said.

Minister also urged that scholars, educators, media, and civil society should create more awareness for importance of family planning, adding, government needs the help of Islamic scholars to convince the public.

Replying to a query about the upcoming 'Global Health Security Summit in Islamabad' which will officially be inaugurated from January 10th to 11th said that moot would serve

as a great opportunity of bringing together international and national experts to share expertise and knowledge for a safer world.

He said that around 70 countries' experts and intellectuals will participate in the summit, adding, over fifty other ambassadors from various countries will also be part of this moot.

He said first time Pakistan is hosting an international health conference to address pandemic-related issues which would present a positive image of Pakistan and prove that the country could play a key role in the health sector.

He said national and international experts are taking part in the summit, adding, summit will discuss global pandemic planning responses and its facility for low-and middle-income countries to prevent disproportionate utilization of vaccines between the first and third world.

He said effective measures were also being taken to increase the capacity of health sector.

To another question, minister said that there is a great deal that Pakistan can contribute to the knowledge and experience of the global community in the fight against pandemics.

## Govt taking up issue of 'ghost article' with The Economist: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Friday said that the government would take up the issue of a "ghost article", published in the name of a jailed politician, with the foreign media outlet 'The Economist'.

"Today, we are writing to the Editor of The Economist about an article purportedly written by Mr Imran Khan," the minister said in a long thread posted on the social media platform 'X'. He said it was "puzzling and disconcert-

ing" that such an esteemed media outlet published an article in the name of an individual who was in jail and had been convicted.

The caretaker government, he said, believed that it was critically essential to uphold ethical standards and promote responsible journalism.

"We would like to know how the editorial decision was made, and what considerations were taken into account regarding the legitimacy and credibility of the content by The Economist," Solangi said while referring to the article.



KARACHI: President Dr Arif Alvi chairing a meeting on Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities.

## 'Easy come easy go' Discos, Gencos' employees consuming free electricity of worth Rs10b

ISLAMABAD (Online): "Easy come easy go" electricity distribution companies and employees of WAPDA received free electricity worth 10 billion rupees in the financial year 2022-23.

The users of free electricity include grades 1 to 22 and retired officers.

During the year 2022-23, the details of free electricity users have come out. According to the documents, free electricity worth more than 10 billion rupees was given to employees by electricity companies in one year.

The total value of units used for free in a year is 10 billion 48 crore 18 lakh rupees. Users of free elec-

tricity include employees from grade one to 22.

According to the document, a total of one lakh 89 thousand 985 employees are using free electricity. Retired employees are also included among those using free electricity units.

According to the document, 34488 employees of LESCO used free electricity worth 2 billion 827 lakh rupees.

20 thousand 834 employees of GACPO were given free electricity worth 1 billion 135 lakh rupees.

28 thousand 873 employees of PESCO used free electricity worth one billion 43 crore 90 lakh rupees.

21 thousand 97 em-

ployees of IESCO used free electricity worth one billion 12 crore 36 lakh rupees.

Free electricity worth one billion 41 crore 85 lakh rupees was given to 26181 employees of MAPCO.

32 thousand 171 employees of PESCO used free electricity worth one billion 64 crore 72 lakh rupees.

9720 employees of HESCO used free electricity worth 93 crore 55 lakh 88 thousand rupees.

7872 employees of SEPCO were given free electricity worth Rs 50 crore 58 lakh in one year.

5744 employees of Quetta Electric Supply Company used free electricity worth 31 crore 60 lakh rupees.

## Mainly cloudy weather forecast for Balochistan

QUETTA (APP): Mainly cloudy weather with cold conditions prevailed in most of the province during the next 24 hours, while isolated light rain wind/thunderstorms for Kalat, Makran, Lasbella, Awaran and coastal areas including its surroundings. According to the Met Office, the minimum temperature in Quetta was recorded at 0.5 degree centigrade and -0.5 degree centigrade in Zhob on Friday. Rain falling was recorded in respective areas of Balochistan including Urmara, Kalat, Quetta Samugli, Panjgur, Pasni, Khuzdar, Jiwani, Dalbandin and Gwadar.

## BFA continues crackdown against outlets selling expired & prohibited products

QUETTA: The Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) continued crackdown against the shops and fast food centres selling the expired and prohibited products in different parts of the province.

According to the official statement issued here on Friday, the BFA teams took action against nine outlets in Quetta and seven in Panjgur.

The expired items including cold drinks, juices, Iranian packets of spices

and other confectionery products while the prohibited items seized were included pan parag, gutka.

The action was also taken against the food corners on using old and used cooking oil besides the poor hygiene condition of the workers there.

The shops and other outlets were charged fine by the BFA teams. The owners and other concerned were directed to follow the SOPs of the Authority to run the business, otherwise stern action would be taken against them.



KILLA SAIFULLAH: Caretaker Provincial Health Minister Dr. Amir Muhammad Khan Jogezi visiting District Health Office Killa Saifullah.

## Grant approved for PTV Quetta's cameramen died in road accident

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Television (PTV) Managing Director Sayyid Mubashar Tauqir Shah on Friday approved financial assistance for the families of PTV Quetta Center's Chief Cameraman Ahmed Khan Solangi and Cameraman Zafar Ali, who died in a road crash the other day.

The decision was taken in line with the directives of Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi and Secretary Information Shahera Shahid, said a news release.

The grant of Rs 2.4 million was approved for the family of Chief Cameraman Ahmed Khan Solangi and Rs 1.5 million for the family of Cameraman Zafar Ali.

## Pakistan Startup Fund to be launched on January 9: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Dr. Umar Saif, announced on Friday that the Pakistan Startup Fund is set to be launched on January 9.

In an interview with private TV channels, Dr. Saif expressed confidence in the immense potential of Pakistani youth, highlighting that Pakistan is the world's second-largest online workforce. Discussing initiatives for IT education, Dr. Umar Saif mentioned ongoing efforts to conduct tests for IT scholarships, indicating a commitment to fostering talent and innovation in the technology sector.

Over the past four years, Pakistani startups have attracted nearly \$800 million in foreign investment, according to Dr. Saif.

He also mentioned that Pakistan ranks as the seventh-largest market for mobile phones globally, with 75 million broadband users.

Dr. Saif said social media users in Pakistan, surpass the total population of Canada.

Discussing initiatives for IT education, Dr. Umar Saif mentioned ongoing efforts to conduct tests for IT scholarships, indicating a commitment to fostering talent and innovation in the technology sector.



QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan presiding over a meeting of Secretaries Committee.