

# Independent

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Fires broadside at Nawaz Sharif

## Will not let three-time PM to be imposed on nation for fourth time, says Bilawal

**Says arrow will hunt down the lion on Feb 8; Contest only between PPP and PML-N now after bat's exit from polls: PPP believes in politics of serving masses; Will give interest-free loans to the people of Balochistan so that they can do your business and farmers will be assisted by Kisan Cards and build a university in Naseerabad besides giving youth card to the young people of the country to support them financially.**

DERA MURAD JAMALI (Agencies): PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari said on Sunday that only two political parties — his own and the PML-N — remained in the electoral arena, urging the nation to vote for the 'arrow' in the upcoming general election. The comments came a day after the PTI lost the battle for its iconic 'bat' electoral symbol, forcing its candidates to contest the polls as independents. "Only two parties are left now," Bilawal said

while addressing a rally in Balochistan's Dera Murad Jamali. "You have to decide between the PPP and the PML-N," he said. The former foreign minister said that the people had to use their vote to determine if they wanted the same politics to continue or "new thinking" to prevail. "You have to decide if you want to give the country's fate in the hands of a person who served as prime minister three but failed to do anything for the

country," Bilawal said, taking aim at PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif. "Or do you want to give an opportunity to a party that takes everyone onboard as the country moves forward?" he asked. He highlighted that the PPP practiced politics and contested elections "for the poor" while the PML-N supremo was taking part in the polls so he could be saved from going to jail. "I'm only contesting the polls so that I save you, the public, and the future

of Pakistan from those people," Bilawal said. Taking another swipe at Nawaz, the PPP chief said the former premier was a coward as he vowed to defeat the PML-N in their home ground of Lahore. "I'm also contesting from Lahore. I will strike them inside their house," he asserted, adding that the PML-N feared the public. "They fear what the public will do to them if they step out," he said. Bilawal said there was



DERAALLAH YAR: Chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addressing during political gathering



LAHORE: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Murtaza Solangi addressing a Seminar (Muzakara) organized by Think Fest at Al Hamra Hall.

Inaugurates election office:

## PkMAP not against anyone, just waging aging struggle for rights of Pashtoons: Mehmood Achakzai

**Says all nationalities living in Pakistan should get equal rights; we have to be resolute to secure our rights despite hurdles and constraints**

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chairman Pashtoonkhw Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) Mehmood Khan Achakzai inaugurated the central election cell of NA-263 and PB-41 in the respective election constituency on Sunday. The inaugural ceremony was attended by the election candidate of the party for PB-41, Abdul Qahar Wadhan besides other leaders including Dr. Hamid Khan Achakzai and others. A large number of the party workers and other

people were also present. Addressing the ceremony, the Chairman PkMAP said that PkMAP is not against anyone, but it has been struggling for rights of the Pashtoons in the province and country. He said that there have been numerous hardships in our struggle, and even the same would be in time to come, but we have to be firm and resolute against all odds for securing the rights. The Chairman PkMAP also said that this is the time of elections and now the people would make level allegations so that we may

deviate from our objective. However, still we have to move forward to achieve our objectives, he stressed adding that we should indulge in the politics of allegations. He said that this is time for us to put our stance with argument convincing the opponents even. The Chairman PkMAP also said that all nationalities living in the country should get their due rights equally. The candidate of PkMAP for PB-41, Abdul Qahar Wadhan and other party leaders also addressed the gathering.



QUETTA: Chairman Pashtoonkhw Milli Awami Party Mehmood Khan Achakzai is inaugurating the election office of the candidate PB-41 and NA-263.

## PTI kicks off election campaign in Karachi

KARACHI (INP): A day after losing 'bat' as electoral symbol, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) launched its campaign for the upcoming polls with a rally led by central leader Sher Afzal Marwat at Karachi's Sea View beach on Sunday. Marwat led the party's first election rally at Sea View with a significant number of participants. The rally was announced by PTI leader Raja Azhar, who mentioned that the party chose Sea View, a popular picnic spot in Karachi, to kick off its campaign.

porarily blocked due to the political rally but was soon restored. The party faced a setback on Saturday when the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), leading to the loss of its electoral symbol 'bat.' Following the Supreme Court's decision, the deadline for the allotment of electoral symbols to political parties expired. The ECP assigned different symbols to PTI candidates, who will now participate as independent contenders in the Feb 8 elections. Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, the now-former chairman, stated that all PTI candidates would participate independently, and the party would release a list of candidates with their new election symbols.

## In all 442 candidates in competition run for 16 NA seats from Balochistan

**119 & 363 candidates to contest elections from 3 NA & 9 PA seats from Quetta respectively**

Independent Report

QUETTA: In all 442 candidates would be in competition run for 16 seats of National Assembly from Balochistan province. According to the final list of candidates issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan, 442 candidates are contesting the elections on 16 NA seats from the province are included 428 male and 14 female candidates. The highest number of candidates i.e., 46 each are contesting from NA-255 and NA-263. From NA-262, there would be 38 candidates while from NA-264, there are 35 candidates competing the elections from the province. Two each female candidates are contesting from NA-255, NA-260, NA-262 and NA-263. No female candidate

has filed candidature for NA-251, NA-258, NA-259 and NA-261. This means, no female is contesting election from these four NA seats from the province. As far the seats of provincial and National Assemblies from Quetta, a total of 119 candidates are contesting elections from all three seats of National Assembly from Quetta i.e., NA-262, NA-263 and NA-264. Altogether 38 candidates are contesting the polls from NA-262 while 46 and 35 candidates are competing from NA-263 and NA-264 respectively. Similarly, a total of 363 candidates are in competition run for all nine seats of Provincial Assembly from Quetta. The highest number of candidates (63) are contesting elections from PB-42, Quetta-V.

Trillion Dollar Promise", the Foreign Office Spokesperson wrote her official X account. PM Kakar would attend three key thematic events on 'preventing an era of global conflict; restoring faith in the global system and preventing economic fracture'. On the sidelines of the event, he would also hold meetings with the government and business leaders. During his visit, Prime Minister Kakar would lead a special "Invest in Pakistan" event.

## Caretaker PM arrives in Zurich to participate in WEF meeting

ZURICH (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar arrived here on Sunday to participate in the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos to be held from January 15 to 19. Pakistan's Permanent Representative to Geneva Bilal Ahmed, Pakistan's Ambassador to Switzerland Amir Shaukat and high level officials received the prime minister. In the meeting, the prime minister would deliver a keynote address on the theme "Trade Tech's

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## 95 percent target of polio immunization campaign achieved in Balochistan

Independent Report

QUETTA: The anti-polio campaign came to an end in all districts of Balochistan province on Sunday. According to the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) for polio eradication in Balochistan, the campaign lasted for seven days all over the province. The EOC sources said that almost 95 percent target of the polio immunization was achieved in the province till sixth day i.e., Saturday. While the campaign also remained continued on Sunday, it is likely to achieve

more about the immunization campaign. It may be mentioned here that the anti-polio campaign was launched on Monday last in all 36 districts of the province. It was targeted to vaccinate approximately 2.6 million children during the campaign. For immunization of the children against polio, around 11,000 polio teams were formed. Worth mentioning was that the campaign remained continued despite harsh weather conditions including during and after snowfall in different areas of the province.

## Elections on Feb 8 in interest of country, political parties: Solangi

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Sunday that it was in the interest of all political forces and parties concerned that general elections should be held on February 8. Speaking at the seventh edition of Think Fest 2024, the minister said it would be good for the country if the elections were held on the scheduled day i.e., Thursday, February 8. He reminded that it was clearly written in the preamble of the Constitu-

tion that Pakistan would be run by the elected representatives. The minister said that in the run-up to the elections, everyone was complaining about the level playing field. The Pakistan Peoples Party and the Muslim Pakistan League (N) were voicing their complaints in that regard while Maulana Fazlur Rehman also complained of a lack of level playing field in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. "In fact, the working class of Pakistan does not have a level playing field," Solangi maintained.

Without a fundamental change in the system enabling the common man to contest elections, there would not be a level playing field, he remarked. The minister stressed that every political party should give its members the right to vote in the election of its office-bearers. He said in his opinion, the yesterday's Apex Court decision was a good precedent. It would have been better if there were legal experts in the panel who could explain the legal position, he added.

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QUETTA: Members of Balochistan Commission for Human Rights are holding protest demonstration for acceptance of their demands, held at Manan Chowk in Quetta.

## Third resolution tabled in Senate seeking delay in Feb 8 polls

Independent Report

ISLAMABAD (INP): Another resolution seeking a delay in the February 8 polls moved in the Senate on Sunday, citing the weather and the security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Senator Hilalur Rehman of the Independent Parliamentary Group submitted the resolution citing severe cold weather, snowfall, and security challenges as the hindrances for the general elections. "Severe cold and snowfall in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are depriving the citizens to cast their ballots while the candidates are also facing numerous challenges to run their campaigns," said the resolution. "In the same way, due to security concerns in the country, especially in KP, candidates are facing threats of terrorist attacks while campaigning," it said, adding that it was also creating obstacles and limiting candidates' participation in their campaigns. It added that the date of Feb 8 to hold the elections is not suitable. The resolution urged the ECP to delay polls to a date which was acceptable for all the relevant stakeholders.

## CS asks concerned authorities to take tribal elders in confidence for peaceful polls

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan has asked the concerned authorities to take tribal elders into confidence for ensuring peaceful elections in the province. He said that every possible efforts would be made to ensure free, fair and transparent elections in peaceful manner. The Chief Secretary was presiding over the meeting held to review the arrangements made for general elections in Loralai Division on Sunday. The Chief Secretary was briefed about the preparations made for the elections in the Division. Those who were present in the meeting were included the Additional Chief Secretary Home, Zahid Saleem, Inspector General of police, Abdul Khaliq Sheikh, Secretary S&GAD, Syed Faisal Ahmed, Secretary Local Government, Noor Ahmed Pirkani, Special Secretary Home, Abdul Nasir Dotani besides other concerned senior officers. Earlier, the Commis-

sioner Loralai, Mir Balach Aziz, Brigadier Razaq Ahmed of Frontier Corps, DIG police Nazir Ahmed Kurd and Deputy Commissioner Loralai, Sajjad Aslam Baloch welcomed the Chief Secretary and others upon arrival in Loralai. Addressing the meeting, Chief Secretary said that preparations have been finalised for the upcoming general elections in light of the directives of Election Commission of Pakistan. He said that it is our firm resolve to ensure free, fair and transparent elections in the province. Referring his visit, the Chief Secretary said that the basic objective behind his visit is to monitor the preparations for general elections. I'm this regard, visits would be made of the remaining divisions of the province so as to mobilize the government machinery for elections. He directed to ensure provision of best security, repair of the polling stations, provision of water, electricity, washrooms and construction of ramp for the disabled persons.

However, Azhar complained about police barricades on the roads leading to the venue. Subsequently, the traffic police clarified that the main track along Sea View beach was temporarily blocked due to the political rally but was soon restored. The party faced a setback on Saturday when the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), leading to the loss of its electoral symbol 'bat.' Following the Supreme Court's decision, the deadline for the allotment of electoral symbols to political parties expired. The ECP assigned different symbols to PTI candidates, who will now participate as independent contenders in the Feb 8 elections. Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, the now-former chairman, stated that all PTI candidates would participate independently, and the party would release a list of candidates with their new election symbols.

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LORALAI: Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan presiding over a meeting to review preparation for general elections

Bat and forth

It was grave news to finish a dour day. The Supreme Court late Saturday upheld the Election Commission's deeply controversial decision to take the bat from the PTI. It is a judgment that already seems unlikely to be looked upon favourably in history.

Just days after it overturned a past Supreme Court ruling on lifetime disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) on the grounds that the bench that previously decided the matter had 'read into the Constitution' to conjure up a punishment that never existed, a three-member bench of the apex court under the incumbent chief justice seemingly endorsed a very similar transgression by the ECP.

Despite there being no explicit provision in the election rulebook which gives the ECP power to deny a political party its election symbol on the basis of a contested intraparty election, the ECP had gone ahead and done just that. Now, it can rest easy knowing it has the Supreme Court's stamp of approval.

Given the implications of the punishment imposed on the PTI, that too mere weeks before a general election is due to take place, most legal observers following the proceedings in the Supreme Court had agreed that for the top court to endorse the ECP decision would be tantamount to denying the public their constitutional right to vote for the parties and political leaders of their choice.

What the Supreme Court made of this line of reasoning will be clearer once the detailed order of the court is available to be perused in detail. Meanwhile, word will spread today: one of the most popular parties in the country has been knocked out of the elections by the Supreme Court based on a technicality.

It will not be easy for the PTI support base to come to terms with the move. One also wonders what the general impact of this decision will be on how 'free and fair' the upcoming elections are publicly perceived to be.

It must be said that it was remarkable to observe the attention and importance given to the minutiae of the PTI's constitution during the hearing of this case. One wonders if the country would have been where it has been dragged to had the Election Commission given as much thought and consideration to the Constitution of Pakistan, whose explicit guidelines regarding the democratic process have been violated by it with such casual disregard on multiple occasions in the past year.

Lastly, one must also apportion some of the blame to the PTI's lawyers in the case, most of whom remained unable to argue the party's case effectively and succinctly before the court. At the moment, however, that seems beside the point. The party has bigger problems to ponder. Will it be able to survive this setback?

Healing Pakistan



Muna Khan

Quarantining during Covid in another country without your tools of comfort is tough. Of course, I am grateful for the support system I did have, like (but not limited to) my sister's dog, who kept me company when no one else could and accompanied me on walks. My time outdoors allows me to reflect on things like wellness and healing — issues that have weighed heavily these past few months.

I wondered if I could take heed of a doctor's prescription and apply it to our ailing country. It stems from a conversation I had with a doctor wherein I asked why I should proceed with his prescription. No pill is without side effects and in my experience, medicine invariably impacts a part of the body it wasn't intended for, usually the gut. Is it worth it, I asked, in this specific instance when I was not in pain? He said the answer didn't lie solely in the medicine.

I had presented him with symptoms, he ran tests and examinations after which he diagnosed and prescribed treatment. Another doctor could offer another prescription based on the same tests, he explained. Ultimately, I would have to take the medicine and see how I feel and work with him until I felt better. It wasn't a one-size T-shirt that fits all, he said. Often a patient doesn't see results in five days and either abandons treatment or seeks another opinion. Sometimes it is a quick fix like a pill for a

headache but often the road to wellness takes time and requires patience and faith. You see where I'm going with this. Many leaders speak about healing a nation but what does it actually entail?

I don't imagine I'll see a greater leader than Nelson Mandela in my lifetime. His endorsement of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the work it did in investigating human rights abuses committed during the apartheid regime between 1960 and 1994 tends to overshadow his commitment to public health. He lost a son to AIDS and talked publicly about the need to normalise the disease like TB, cancer etc, removing shame from it. Mandela's advocacy on AIDS helped save millions of lives and transformed health in Africa.

Mandela is equally known for forgiveness — of his opponents and his prisoners. In a 1998 conversation with former US president Bill Clinton he said: "You know, [the oppressors] already took everything. They took the best years of my life; I didn't get to see my children grow up. They destroyed my marriage. They abused me physically and mentally. They could take everything except my mind and heart. Those things I would have to give away and I decided not to give them away."

Here in Pakistan, our leaders have faced much injustice at the hands of the establishment but have they chosen forgiveness? The Charter of Democracy was an attempt but it stands fissured today. Leaders vow to heal the nation but then get caught up in a vortex of anger driven by revenge. I believe we're witnessing it now under the guise of 'making amends for past wrongs' and will probably see a new level of anger if/when Imran

Khan returns to power.

Pakistan is an ailing patient who has received all sorts of treatments but it's also kept in some comatose state or life support. Those attempting to cure it are not transparent about their plans because, let's admit, they are not qualified to treat it. They remind me of some doctors I have encountered: in it for the money, not the patient.

Pakistan is like me and the growing number of people being diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder where the body mistakenly attacks itself. I recognise I have agency in choice and the right doctor to guide me to my wellness but I'm unconvinced about the folks in line to treat Pakis-tan next.

Historically, Iran is an ancient land, with recorded history dating back to 550 BCE, when Cyrus founded the first Persian empire, the Achaemenid, the fourth king of which, Darius, expanded the borders of the empire to include territories from Anatolia to the River Indus. The Sassanid empire ruled Persia for nearly nine centuries from 224 BCE to 651 CE. Towards the end of this empire, Muslim Arabs and Persians came face to face in the Battle of Qadisiya, in 636 CE, germinating a lasting rivalry. Since 1979, Iran is an Islamic Republic. At no point in this historical journey of over 2,500 years, the nationalistic fervour of the Iranian people ever diminished.

In history, language, art and culture, there has been considerable congruity between the Persian mainland and the territories of Pakistan. The Persian language spread to India in the 16th century when the Mughals adopted it as the court language. Allama Iqbal is well known in Iran as Iqbal-i-Lahoori. Much of the poetry of Ghalib and Iqbal, as indeed the national anthem of Pakistan, are in Persian. Iran was the first

Pak-Iran relations



Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

Iran is a vast country spanning an area more than twice that of Pakistan with a population nearly one third of ours. Rich in natural resources, Iran possesses the second largest gas reserves, fourth largest crude oil reserves and significant non-fuel mineral resources. The people of Iran, called Persia until 1935, are deeply proud of their history, culture and language.

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country to recognise Pakistan, on Aug 14, 1947. Iran is also the country that hosted the first embassy of Pakistan abroad. Over the decades, Pakistan and Iran have maintained cordial relations. Notably, barring a few irritants, there is no major dispute between the two countries.

Despite this enormous goodwill, the tangible bilateral cooperation is far below potential. Some argue that the US sanctions imposed on Iran had undermined prospects for bilateral cooperation, while others blame the absence of political will on either side. On balance, the positives of the relationship far outweigh the negatives, and can thus help the relationship flourish to its full bloom. In this regard, three issues — energy, border, and trade — are of critical importance.

As Pakistan's neighbour, Iran should have been a natural choice for sourcing our energy needs. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline agreement (IP) was signed in 2012, but fell victim to US and UN sanctions. The successful conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) in 2015 raised hopes but unilateral withdrawal of the US from the deal in 2018 kept Iran under US sanctions. In 2022, the Financial Action Task Force also blacklisted Iran. These factors have stalled Pakistan's efforts to implement the IP project.

Iran has often hinted at imposing penalties on Pakistan for not implementing the IP agreement. For its part, Pakistan has tried to invoke force majeure, mainly because of US sanctions which is a factor beyond Pakistan's control. Going forward, both countries will be advised to work towards finding a way to legally circumvent US sanctions given that gas is not a sanctioned commodity. Another priority area is to better manage

the border, which Pakistan calls one of 'Peace, friendship and love'. While this is certainly a border between two friends, some militant groups routinely indulge in cross-border terrorism. One such group was Jundullah, a Sunni militant organisation whose leader was executed in Iran in 2010. Since then, the organisation's members have operated under different names, including Jaish al-Adl. The BLA is also active in the area, possibly with foreign support. Kulbhushan Jadhav of India, who committed espionage and sabotage, was also apprehended in Balochistan. Since all this can aggravate misunderstandings, it is important for Iran and Pakistan to enhance coordination on cross-border issues.

The two countries, despite being neighbours, have also not been able to boost bilateral trade. Ostensibly, the reason is the absence of payment mechanisms or regular banking channels due to US sanctions. While there is insignificant formal trade, informal trade has flourished. Two steps taken recently are likely to boost formal trade: a check on smuggling and the opening of a border market at Pishin-Mand crossing point. Border markets and barter trade should be encouraged to sidestep economic sanctions on Iran.

The recent rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia brokered by China and the growing Iran-China economic relations can greatly help us boost our own economic and commercial ties with Iran. In this regard, the potential of Gwadar and Chabahar ports being complementary must also be utilised fully. It would be worthwhile if China and Pakistan consider the possibility of extending CPEC to Iran. -- Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

PBF hails army chief's efforts for country's economic progress

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) has expressed satisfaction with the military diplomacy and economic initiatives undertaken by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) as the nation witnessed a positive shift in various sectors. In a media statement issued here Wednesday, PBF President Khawaja Mahboob ur Rehman said that a wave of optimism is sweeping through the country as the caretaker government's economic policies, coupled with the strategic decisions of the Army Chief, have resulted in tangible improvements in key economic indicators. He

said significant reduction in the value of the dollar against Pak rupee, that has seen a commendable drop from Rs 340 to Rs 280, prompted expectations of further stabilization.

The PBF President added, "The caretaker government has taken the best measures for the economy; the price of the dollar has fallen, and we anticipate even more positive changes when the new IMF and Asian Development Bank funds arrive, with hopes of the dollar reaching Rs 250." The impact of these measures is evident in the Pakistan Stock Exchange, where a positive trend has now emerging, bringing

relief to investors, he said. Additionally, the reduction in petrol prices has garnered praise from the public, further raising a positive sentiment towards the government's economic policies.

The PBF President appreciated the positive initiatives of the Army Chief. "There is a positive trend in the Pakistan Stock Exchange, and petrol prices have decreased. These things are good for our country. Furthermore, the decrease in essential commodity prices, such as daily-use items, has not gone unnoticed which need to be monitored properly by deputy commissioners so that the masses may benefit."



ISLAMABAD: People are busy buying Kinnow in Sunday weekly bazaar at sector G-10 in the Federal Capital.

China's e-commerce logistics index up in 2023

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): China's e-commerce logistics index went up 4.2 points year on year in 2023 as the operation of the sector registered steady expansion, industry data showed.

The index averaged 110.1 points last year, according to the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

In December 2023, the index stood at 112.4 points, edging down 0.7 points from the previous month, the data revealed.

The federation attributed this decline to the shrinking of demand, as sales promotions of major e-commerce platforms had concentrated heavily on the big annual shopping festival in November.

It also noted that e-commerce logistics demand still remained at a high level in December, with the categories of winter clothing and ice-and-snow tourism equipment proving major sources of momentum.



ISLAMABAD: Customers selecting and purchasing old clothes displayed by the Weekly Bazaar vendors to attract the customers.

China-Pakistan cargo route launched to facilitate air transport

ISLAMABAD (Online): A new air cargo route was launched linking Ezhou Huahu Airport in central China's Hubei Province with Lahore, said SF Airlines, China's largest air cargo carrier in fleet size.

Ezhou-Lahore cargo route is the first international air cargo route launched by SF Airlines in this year departing from Ezhou Huahu Airport, China's first cargo-focused airport, Gwadar Pro reported on Sunday.

Ezhou-Lahore route is planned to operate three times a week, providing over 300 tons of air

transport capacity from Ezhou to Lahore every week.

Transported goods mainly include textiles, 3C electronic products, electronic equipment, etc.

The opening of this international cargo route is an important measure for Huahu Airport to further increase routes to South Asia.

It will provide an efficient and stable air logistics channel for economic and trade exchanges between China and Pakistan, and provide more logistics convenience for Chinese brands to

explore the Pakistani market.

Previously, SF Airlines has opened two direct cargo routes from Ezhou to South Asia, Ezhou-Delhi and Ezhou-Chennai.

The opening of the new Pakistani route will further strengthen Ezhou's South Asian air transport network.

SF Airlines, the aviation branch of China's leading courier enterprise SF Express, to date has launched a total of 11 international cargo routes from Ezhou to global destinations.

Exporters urged to capture Kyrgyz pharmaceutical market

LAHORE (APP): Kyrgyzstan Trade House (KTH) Chairman Meher Kashif Younis Sunday urged Pakistani exporters to capture Kyrgyzstan's US \$ 650 million pharmaceutical market.

Talking to a delegation of exporters led by Ms Sana Abdullah here at KTH on Sunday, he said that by strategically entering this market, Pakistan can not only boost its economic prospects but also contribute to the healthcare needs of Kyrgyzstan's

seven million population. He adding that by capitalizing on its pharmaceutical prowess, fostering strategic collaborations, Pakistan can successfully capture a substantial portion of Kyrgyzstan's pharmaceutical market, contributing to the well-being of both nations.

Meher said Pakistan possesses a well-established pharmaceutical industry with a proven track record of producing high-quality medicines.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers busy cutting wood into pieces for selling purpose at their workplace.

SNGPL disconnects 1853 connections over using compressors in Multan

MULTAN (APP): Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) disconnected 1853 connections over using compressors so far during the ongoing drive across the region.

Deputy Chief Engineer Operations SNGPL Hussain Zafar while talking to APP here on Sunday said that the drive against illegal compressors was underway in order to ensure provision of gas supply to consumers equally. He said that various teams were visiting different areas in Multan region to discourage the use of compressors. He said that the gas meters were disconnected over the use of compressors and connection restored again after one week by taking

affidavit from the consumer concerned and seizing compressor. He informed that the use of compressors was not only destroyed the infrastructure of the SNGPL rather, it was also very dangerous for human lives. He urged the citizens to avoid using compressors for illegally getting gas supply as the consumers of tail end affected from it.

Hussain Zafar said that they had launched the drive concerned from November 2022 and disconnected 1853 connections so far.

To a question about RLNG, he informed that the whole industry has been shifted on RLNG while it was also being given to some private housing colonies like Butch villas.

Machinery import goes up by 6.36% in five months

ISLAMABAD (APP): The imports of the overall machinery group witnessed an increase of 6.36 per cent during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2023-24) compared to the corresponding period of the last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. The total imports of the machinery group during July-November (2023-24) stood at \$ 2,935.576 million against the imports of \$2,760.055 million during the same period of the last year.

The import of agriculture sector machinery and equipment surged by 60.76 per cent from \$19.784 million to \$31.804 million; office machinery including data processing equipment \$7.11 per cent from \$129.909 to \$204.095 million; construction and mining machinery by 3.87 per cent from \$33.260 million to \$34.546 million; electricity machinery and apparatus 17.10 per cent from \$778.902 million to \$912.073 million; telecom related equipment 74.36 per cent.

China's weekly export container shipping index up

SHANGHAI (Xinhua/APP): China's export container shipping index rose in the week ending Jan. 12, according to the Shanghai Shipping Exchange (SSE).

The SSE added that the average China Containerized Freight Index (CCFI) recorded an increase of 21.7 percent from the previous week to reach 1,140.31.

The sub-indices for all 12 shipping routes registered week-on-week rises, with that for the Europe service achieving the biggest increase of 40.1 percent.

## Naqvi okays grant of Rs90m for Punjab press clubs

Arfa Karim a torch-bearer for new generation: CM Punjab

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday said he was proud that he belonged to the fraternity of journalists.

Addressing a function held to distribute cheques among press clubs of the province, the chief minister announced a grant of Rs90 million for the clubs.

He said that journalism was the name of 'honesty and responsibility'. "A lot of responsibility rests on our

shoulders," he said, and added that he attached great importance to the provision of facilities to journalists.

He urged them to concentrate on digital media since the future belonged to this form of journalism. "Those who don't change themselves according to changing times lag behind others," the CM opined.

There were many things, he went on to say, in which Pakistan was behind other countries.

Speaking on the occasion, Caretaker

Federal Minister for Information Muratza Solangi said, "We are grateful to the chief minister for taking steps for the welfare of journalists," he added.

Punjab Minister for Information Amir Mir and others were also present on the occasion.

In his message on the death anniversary of Microsoft Certified IT Professional Arfa Karim Randhawa, the chief minister said 'daughter of the nation' still lived in people's hearts.



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi presenting special grants cheques to President and General Secretaries of 44 Press Clubs.

## Free travel facilities to students extended

**LAHORE (APP):** Caretaker Provincial Transport Minister Ibrahim Hassan Murad on Sunday announced a three-month extension of free travel facilities for students, following special instructions from the Punjab Chief Minister.

In a statement issued here, he said that students up to grade 12 could travel free in the Orange Line Metro Train.

## PFA imposes Rs660,000 cumulative fine on 5 eateries over violations

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) under the supervision of its Director General Muhammad Asim Javid conducted inspections of renowned restaurants and bakeries on MM Alam Road here on Sunday.

PFA DG Muhammad Asim Javid said the authority penalized five eateries with Rs660,000 cumulative fines for violating the Punjab Pure Food Regulations. He said that fine was imposed due to using substandard cooking oil and prohibited ingredients while preparing the different food dishes. PFA watchdogs also witnessed an abundance of

insects and worst condition of hygiene in kitchen areas, he added.

He further said that food business operators were also failed to present the medicals of workers and other necessary record to the raiding teams on the spot. The director general said that the provincial food regulatory body has been working against substandard food points and violators under the zero-tolerance policy. He has warned FBOs to sell the healthy and standard food products otherwise, the food businesses would be rooted out as per PFA Act. Moreover, he said that PFA is committed to providing hygiene.

## Two died and 18 injured in Kohistan road mishap

**KOHISTAN (APP):** At least two women died and 18 others were injured when a pak-up vehicle fell into a deep gorge at Village Qilla of district Kolai Palis.

According to the Rescue 1122 sources, the pickup, which was carrying more than 20 family members who were going to attend a marriage ceremony, fell into a gorge, resulting in two women dying on the spot and 18 others, including women, children, and men, sustaining injuries.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Haji Ghulam Ali addressing Hindko convention organized by Hindko Tahafuz Foundation.

## Global collaboration vital to reap benefits from emerging Artificial Intelligence: VC

**MULTAN (APP):** The two-day Artificial Intelligence and Information Technology Conference was concluded at Women's University here Sunday with a call for increased global collaboration to address the challenges posed by the rapid development of Information Technology.

Highlighting the positive impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on human consciousness and task efficiency, Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Kulsom Paracha stated that it would help manage difficult

task with ease and effectiveness. She also acknowledged the need for international cooperation, particularly in cybersecurity, as the growing development of Artificial Intelligence introduces new security concerns especially cybercrimes.

Dr. Paracha stressed the transformative potential of AI in accelerating the development of underdeveloped countries but also warned of job displacement like it was observed during industrial revolutions.

## 2200 CCTV cameras being installed to maintain law and order: Dr Jamal

**RAWALPINDI (APP):** Caretaker Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare and Population Welfare Punjab Dr Jamal Nasir on Sunday said that 2,200 Closed Circle Television (CCTV) cameras were being installed at 306 points in the city to improve the law and order situation in the city.

During a visit to the City Police Office to review the ongoing work of the Safe City Project, he informed that 300 labourers were working day and night on the Safe City project to complete the task. He said that under the Safe City project, 2200

cameras would be installed at 306 locations while Rs 230 million had been provided for the construction of the CPO office. Dr. Jamal Nasir said that in a short time, work had been started on mega projects in all sectors, including the Rawalpindi Ring Road project, which was stalled for a long time.

He said that the revamping of Holy Family Hospital (HFH) was a historic project that would be remembered by the people of Rawalpindi for decades which would significantly improve healthcare facilities. The minister said that around 83 percent of work on the old HFH block had been completed while 65 percent of work on the basement was finished. He added that most parts of the HFH would be opened to the public by January 31. Dr Jamal informed that the Planning and Development Board had approved Rs 1500 million for the revamping and renovation of the Hospital while 600 labourers were working in different shifts to complete the work within the stipulated time. Funds have also been released to upgrade Rawalpindi's parks, he added.

## Social media to play instrumental role in Election 2024

**PESHAWAR (APP):** In democratic setups, free and transparent elections provide a strong base for democracy and ensure that the government chosen through polls is of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Showcasing the signs of a healthy democracy in a country, a free, fair, and transparent election provides legitimacy to an elected government to take decisions in the national interest and the welfare of people for the next five years.

"Election gives the authority in the hands of the public and provides them the freedom to elect the government of their choice, which will work for their growth and development besides resolution of the country's

problems," said Professor Dr. A.H. Hilali, former Chairman, Political Science Department, University of Peshawar, while talking to APP.

In the 2013 and 2018 general elections, he said, social media played an impactful role in deciding the fate of political parties. "The PTI's social media strategies and social mobilizers compared to other political parties had helped in establishing government for a second consecutive term in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," he said.

According to a report from Digital Pakistan 2023, the number of internet users in Pakistan swelled to a record 87.35 million in January last year, showing a 4.4 million increase between 2022 and 2023. The number of social media

users also increased to a record 71.70 million in 2023, including 37.30 million users of Facebook, 71.70 million users of YouTube, 12.95 million on Instagram, and 16.51 million on TikTok.

Similarly, about 11.95 million people are using Facebook Messenger, 9.30 million LinkedIn, 25.70 million snapchat, and 4.65 million users of X (Twitter) in the wake of an increase in mobile connections to 191.8 million in January 2023 in Pakistan.

Professor Hilali said the process of filing and scrutinizing nomination papers for the 2024 general elections was completed, and social media's role would be crucial in the 2024 election. He said all political parties, including

PML-N, PPP, PTI, ANP, JUIF, MQM, IPP, and PTIP, have shown their presence on every major social media platform for political gains.

He said all political parties and leaders have opened official pages with blue-ticks on Facebook and Facebook groups for communication with party members as well as with their fans and voters. Besides other social media platforms, he said all political leaders, including Nawaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Pervez Khattak, and Jahangir Tareen, opened official X (former Twitter) handles with blue ticks for authentication, along with official pages on Instagram by the young political leaders. "For me, manifestos

of political parties are important, and every person can see the programs of these parties by visiting their social media websites and pages with a single mobile click," said Ehtisham Qaiser, a lecturer of Urdu literature, while talking to the news agency. Dr. Hilali said the success of political parties in the 2024 general election would largely depend on the political behavior and psychological-economic factors, past service records and manifestos of political parties, rather than the launching of personal attacks, blame games, characters assassination of political leadership, and dragging state institutions into politics in public meetings or issuing statements on social media platforms.

## International News

## Russia strikes Ukraine with 40 missiles, drones

**Monitoring Desk**  
KYIV: Ukraine suffered a large Russian missile attack, while its air defences were able to down a far lower proportion of them than usual.

According to Ukraine's air force, Russia launched 37 missiles and three drones. Eight missiles were downed, it said in a statement on social media. The air force's spokesperson said earlier this week that Ukraine was now suffering from a deficit of air defence missiles. It was not immediately clear whether this or any other factor was the reason for the low hit rate.

Most of the types of missile used overnight were extremely fast-moving

ballistic types, the air force said. These are far harder to shoot down.

"It should be noted that more than 20 of all the listed (weapons) which were not included in the number of the downed, did not reach their targets as a result of active countermeasures by electronic warfare," the statement said. There were no details on the targets of the strike.

Air defences shot down Russian missiles in at least five regions across Ukraine, according to local officials from those provinces.

The large south-eastern city of Dnipro was struck, the local governor said, also without provid-

ing detail as to what was hit. Police in the northern region of Chernihiv posted a picture of a large crater made by a downed missile.

"As a result of being hit by the debris of an enemy missile, several private homes and non-residential buildings were damaged, one building was practically destroyed," the police wrote. No people were hurt but a dog was killed, police said.

France's new foreign minister Stephanie Sejourne on Saturday renewed his country's support to Ukraine, choosing Kyiv for his first official visit abroad, as the war with Russia nears a second anniversary.



A plume of smoke ascends following Israeli bombardment over the Gaza Strip.

## North Korea fires missile, minister to visit Russia as tensions rise

**Monitoring Desk**  
SEOUL: North Korea fired an apparent intermediate-range missile off its east coast on Sunday, South Korea said, as tensions run high after Pyongyang's recent launches of an intercontinental ballistic missile and its first military spy satellite.

"North Korea fires unidentified ballistic missile towards East Sea," Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said had detected the launch but gave no further details.

Japan's coast guard said that an "object, potentially ballistic missile, launched from North Korea," citing information from the country's defence ministry, and warning vessels to take care.

North Korea's last missile test was of a Hwasong-18 solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile, which it fired into the East Sea on December 18. The apparent test comes days after North Korea conducted a series of rare live-fire drills near the maritime border with the South, prompting counter-exercises.

## Five migrants die trying to cross the Channel

**Monitoring Desk**  
PARIS: Five migrants trying to cross the Channel to Britain died in French waters in the early hours of Sunday, French local authorities said.

The small boat overturned as it attempted to launch from a beach in Wimereux, south of Calais, an official told Reuters, adding that one person in critical condition had been taken to hospital in Boulogne, northern France.

Dozens were pulled from the cold water but the overnight rescue effort was complicated as the waters were too shallow for the French navy's boats that came to help.

## Volcano erupts in southwest Iceland

**Monitoring Desk**  
COPENHAGEN: A volcano in southwest Iceland erupted on Sunday, the country's meteorological office said, making it the fifth eruption on the Reykjanes peninsula since 2021. A coast guard helicopter has been sent to assess the situation and the exact location, the Civil Protection agency said. The eruption began north of the fishing town of Grindavik but it was still not clear exactly where the lava.

## Maldives tells India to withdraw troops by March as row deepens

**Monitoring Desk**  
MALE: The Maldivian president on Sunday told India to withdraw its nearly 100 troops by March 15, a day after returning from China where he signed a raft of deals.

New Delhi considers the Indian Ocean archipelago to be within its sphere of influence but the country has shifted to China's orbit, the Maldives's largest external creditor.

The March deadline was set during talks with Indian officials in the Maldives on Sunday, a top

aide to President Mohamed Muizzu said, honouring the leader's long-standing election pledge.

"The president put forth this request at the meeting of the high-level committee between the two nations... the proposal is currently under consideration," Muizzu's Public Policy Secretary Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim told reporters.

India has a deployment of about 89 personnel, including medical staff, to operate three aircraft to patrol the archipelago's vast maritime territory.



A bus stops at a place protected with sandbags in Belgorod, the main city in Russia's south-western region which has come under shelling by Ukraine over the past week.

## UNSC members uphold right of Palestinians to stay in Gaza

**Monitoring Desk**  
UNITED NATIONS: In a UN Security Council meeting on Friday evening, representatives unanimously called for allowing Palestinians to remain in Gaza and the West Bank, emphasising the importance of respecting international law and preventing forced displacement.

The meeting addressed the worsening situation in the Middle East, particularly focusing on the escalating conflict in Gaza and rising tensions around the Red Sea.

As the war in Gaza approached the 100-day mark, key figures and representatives voiced serious concerns about the situa-

tion in the Palestinian enclave and rejected any move to displace Palestinians from their lands.

With over 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza internally displaced, the situation in the Palestinian territory "is heart-breaking and untenable," said US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

"The US position has been clear and consistent - Palestinian civilians in Gaza must be able to return home as soon as conditions allow," she said, noting that her country has also made it clear that "civilians must not be pressed to leave Gaza under any circumstances."



Taiwan voters elected Lai Ching-te to be their next president despite warnings from China that he would take the island closer to war.

## Blizzard cancels flights, disrupts presidential campaign

**Monitoring Desk**  
CHICAGO: Tens of millions of Americans were in the pathway of dangerous and damaging weather conditions as snowstorms moved across the Northwest and Midwest, flooding threatened the East Coast and potential tornadoes were on tap in the South.

Airlines delayed more than 7,600 flights across the U.S. on Friday, including planes grounded at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport due to winds and blinding snow.

In Iowa, Republican presidential candidates canceled events three days

out from the state's caucuses, the first of the state-by-state contests in which parties pick their nominees ahead of November's general election.

Blizzards arrived in much of the upper Midwest on Friday morning with heavy snows and fierce winds of up to 60 miles per hour (96 kph) that were expected to continue into Saturday, the National Weather Service (NWS) warned.

More than 133,000 homes and businesses lost power in Michigan, according to data from PowerOutage.US.

## Arab partnership awaits Israeli commitment: US

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: Arab nations are ready to collaborate with the US on both short-term and long-term solutions for Palestinians in Gaza, but this partnership is contingent upon Israel's willingness to participate, says the US State Department.

In an interview with MSNBC's Andrea Mitchell, the department's spokesperson Matthew Miller reviewed Secretary of State Antony Blinken's seven-day visit to the Middle East, highlighted the willingness of Arab nations to work with the US on Palestinian issues. However, he emphasised that this cooperation depends on Israel's commitment to the process.

"We've traveled to nine countries and met with leaders in each of those, securing agreements with all of these Arab partners, as well as with Türkiye," Miller stated.

"They were ready to coordinate with the United States and take real steps to improve the lives of the Palestinian people in Gaza and to rebuild Gaza."

## Taiwan tells China to 'face reality' after election

**Monitoring Desk**  
TAIPEI CITY: Taiwan told China on Sunday to "face reality" and respect its election result, after voters defied Beijing's warnings and chose pro-sovereignty candidate Lai Ching-te as president. Voters spurned Beijing's repeated calls not to vote for Lai, delivering a comfortable victory for a man China's ruling Communist Party sees as a dangerous separatist.

Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its territory and has never renounced force to bring it under its control, responded to Lai's victory

by saying it would not change the "inevitable trend of China's reunification".

Lai, of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), had vowed to defend the island from China's "intimidation" and on Sunday Taipei's foreign ministry told Beijing to accept the result. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs calls on the Beijing authorities to respect the election results, face reality and give up suppressing Taiwan in order for positive cross-strait interactions to return to the right track," it said in a statement.



Chief Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf award certificate to a student of Bahria University Karachi Campus during 19th Convocation ceremony.

Chief of the Naval Staff attends the 19th convocation of Bahria University Karachi campus

Independent Report KARACHI: 19th Convocation of Bahria University Karachi and the Institute of Professional Psychology was held at Karachi. Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf and Rector Bahria University, Vice Admiral (Retd) Asif Khaliq graced the twin sessions of the convocation ceremony as chief guests respectively and awarded Medals and Merit Certificates to the students achieving outstanding performance in academics.

were awarded to students from various departments, encompassing Management Studies, Business Studies, Humanities & Social Sciences, Computer Sciences, Earth & Environmental Sciences, Electrical Engineering, Software Engineering, Computer Engineering, Media Studies and Professional Psychology. During the first session, Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf awarded 22 Gold Medals and 18 Silver Medals to students who excelled in their respective degree programs. In his address he

highlighted the significance of meeting challenges and reframing them as opportunities. Chief of the Naval Staff emphasized that teamwork and communications are the pivotal elements for success. During the second session, Rector Bahria University, Vice Admiral (Retd) Asif Khaliq awarded 24 Gold Medals and 19 Silver Medals to students for their outstanding achievements in their respective domains. In his speech, he emphasized that responsibility is the price of greatness.

Solangi terms press clubs as main pillars of press freedom

LAHORE (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Sunday that press clubs were the main pillars of press freedom.

Addressing the cheque distribution ceremony among the representatives of press clubs across the Punjab here, he said that journalists were an important part of the society. Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi and Provincial Information Minister Aamir Mir also addressed the cheque distribution ceremony of the press clubs. The information minister appreciated the Chief Minister Punjab for approval of Rs 9.45 million grant for press clubs in the province. He said that Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi always took care of public needs and he was always engaged in public service.

Thousands of pro-Palestinians march on Washington to demand ceasefire in Gaza

WASHINGTON (APP): Tens and thousands of demonstrators rallied and marched in Washington, D.C., on Saturday to demand an end to Israel's deadly military campaign in Gaza, marking almost 100 days since the start of the Israel-Palestinians war that is killing 250 Palestinians per day. The march, one of the biggest in this capital city, was led by a coalition of pro-Palestinian groups who are calling for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, an end to US funding for the Israeli military, and for Israel to be held accountable for war crimes and violations of international law. At a rally on Freedom Plaza, speakers shared stories of victims in Gaza, and marchers walked several blocks before arriving in front of the White House. Protesters carried signs listing the names of Palestinians killed and accusing President Joe Biden of participating in a 'genocide'. Israel's siege of Gaza has killed more than 23,800 Palestinians, according to Gaza's health ministry, since it declared war on October 7. One of the organizing groups in Washington, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), said that they had sent a letter to the White House calling on the president to secure a "complete and verifiable ceasefire," the release of all hostages in Gaza and political prisoners in Israel, and the termination of unconditional US financial and diplomatic support for the Israeli government. The letter also called for Israeli officials to be "held accountable for the Gaza genocide" and the initiation of credible negotiations for a just and enduring peace by ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The rally in Washington is the second in the US capital since the current Israeli offensive began on October 7. The Gaza Health Ministry has estimated that at least 23,708 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, and 60,000 wounded in the Israeli action, the vast majority civilians. Earlier this week, South Africa accused Israel of genocide in a case brought to the International Court of Justice, charging that Israel's far-right government was "intent on destroying the Palestinians in Gaza" and creating conditions "calculated to bring about their physical destruction". Among those addressing the crowd in Washington, by video link, was Al Jazeera journalist Wael al-Dahdouh, whose wife, daughter, two sons, and a grandchild were killed by Israeli airstrikes. Also speaking were long-shot US presidential candidates Cornel West and Jill Stein, as well as the daughter of Malcom X, Ilyasah Shabazz.

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KARACHI: Leader of Jamaat-e-Islami Hafiz Naem ur Rehman addressing during demonstration against Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, to show solidarity with Palestinian people, in Provincial Capital.

SC to hear petitions filed on several election issues this week

ISLAMABAD (Online): Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) will hear the petitions filed regarding several election issues this week. A 3-member bench headed by Chief Justice (CJ) Qazi Faizaisa will hear the cases.

In these cases, objections under corrupt practices and other references will be heard in Karachi provincial circle PS 17 Karachi Mir Asim against RO, Sohail Ahmed Durrani against Mir Yunus Aziz, objections under corrupt practices and other references, Badr Munir against Razan Nasrullah election eligibility case, Arshad Hussain against Naveed Aslam Provincial Assembly of Punjab, Nadia Aziz name Chaudhry Muhammad Hamid, including other election matters will be heard.

ANP terms SC verdict a victory of democracy

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial President Awami National Party (ANP) Aimal Wali Khan on Sunday hailed the recent Supreme Court ruling and termed as a victory for democracy. In a statement issued here, Aimal Wali Khan said that over the past two days, both sides presented compelling evidence, shedding light on the transparency of the case. Aimal Wali Khan pointed out that a specific political party was failed to provide a substantial defense, shifting the narrative from critiquing principles to questioning ethical standards. Expressing concern over the validation of 800,000 votes within an hour, Khan raised alarms about potential foul play.



LORALAI: FC Brig. Razaq Ahmed presenting souvenir to Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan

CEC Raja instructs KP IGP to provide security to JUI-F rallies

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Raja Sultan has instructed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Inspector-General of Police (IGP) to provide security to Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam Fazl (JUI-F) election rallies amid threat reports. The development comes as interior ministry had warned that there were serious threats to the lives of JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Awami National Party (ANP) provincial president Aimal Wali Khan. In a letter to the chief secretaries and inspector general of police of all provinces and circulated by the ANP, the interior ministry had said it had received reports from reliable sources revealing serious threats to the lives of the Maulana and Aimal. "It is requested that extreme caution and vigilance is exercised and necessary security arrangements are made at Maulana Fazl and Aimal's residences and during movement and public gatherings to avert any untoward incident," it said in a letter. Meanwhile, JUI-F leader Maulana Hafiz Waqas submitted an application in election commission, seeking security for party workers and rallies ahead of general elections.

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KARACHI: PTI leader Shah Afzal Marwat is leading the rally in connection with upcoming general election.

Local hail Sibi-Harnai railway line restoration after 17 years

QUETTA (INP): A railway section between Balochistan's Sibi and Harnai districts, which was restored after 17 years in October last year, was hailed by locals as a major step towards prosperity. The Sibi-Harnai railway track was closed in August 2006 due to terrorist activities. While the local people were facing social, economic and other problems due to the train shutdown, there were also difficulties in religious festivals, cultural gatherings and other communications. The local people of Harnai had to travel through 6 districts to reach Sibi which was costly and time consuming. The closure of the train track stopped the delivery of coal by train from Harnai to other cities of Pakistan and Sibi and other areas lost fresh agricultural produce from Harnai. Pakistan Army and FC Balochistan (North) established peace here by carrying out operations against terrorists in Sibi, Sangan, Harnai and adjoining areas. Attempts to rehabilitate the Sibi-Harnai railway track have been made from time to time, but construction gained real momentum in 2023. Pakistan Army and FC Balochistan (North) took over the security duties of Railway Engineers and NLC staff and thus this train maintenance work was completed within a short period of time. The people of Sibi and Harnai hailed the train restoration as a positive step for the region's prosperity, economic development and comfortable travel facilities. Sardar Ibrahim Khan of Sibi said, "Prior to 2006 when the track was active, trading was very common.

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Revisiting dams construction quality in Balochistan

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan is a province dominated by arid climate having 85% dependency on Agriculture and livestock where the precipitation ratio as compared to rest of the country is very low making water a precious commodity for its population. Therefore, to meet the needs of its population, respective governments resorted to construction of weirs, canals, channels and dams with the small and big dams tally touching around 1085 figure. This is surely the largest number of dams in all the four provinces to meet the needs of Balochistan people who are mainly dependent on agriculture and livestock businesses. But recent climatic impacts and torrential rains in the province had raised many questions about the quality of construction of these dams as dozens of dams suffered damages due to heavy down pour. Experts believe there had been some technical flaws or absence of globally recognized development protocols that these dams could not sustain the changing weather patterns. They think the effectiveness of dams - the sole source of hope for residents of Balochistan's parched land - could not pay off fully due to reasons like improper management, lack of construction and quality of construction and lack of research institute on rainfall and disaster risk reduction procedures. "Garuk Dam constructed in Kharan district is one such example where better planning could save billions of rupees," stated an Engineer of the Irrigation department. He revealed that as per PC-1 of the cost of this under construction dam was estimated at Rs 12 billion but it reached Rs 27 billion. "The height of dam in revised PC-1 is decreased from 55m (180 ft) to 52m (171 ft) but the live storage capacity is increased from 24,896 AF to 27,073 AF." Moreover, he said the discharge capacity is also increased from 60 Cusecs to 73.1 Cusecs increasing the cost of spillway from Rs.1150.620 million to Rs. 5797.764 million. According to reports, 38 dams alone in Qila Abdullah district were damaged besides over a dozen in Quetta, eleven in Khuzdar, nine in Hub, Dera Bugti and Bela seven in Kachhi, five each in Chagai Nushki, Harnai, Zhob and Musa Khel, twelve in Duki, Surab, Kharan Washuk Mastung, Kech, Kalat, Surab and Kohlu districts. "We need to strictly implement globally recognized standards in construction of dams in Balochistan," observed Dr. Deen Muhammad Kakar, a geological expert. "Geophysical, geological and feasibility surveys are three layer prerequisites we need to practice in construction of a quality dam." "If we do not fully care for land's lithology and efficacy of the planned dam, we would waste our money," he said and mentioned to failure of 25 dams constructed in Chaman district that he claimed were constructed in the seismic zone. "This situation demands proper designs, use of standard materials, maintain quality control through regular health checks to serve the real purpose of providing water to people," he added. The experts also believe that reputation and competence of contractors must also be fully taken care of while awarding the contract because the contracts awarded to incompetent builders cost in billions to national kitty. "When we award contract to less qualified consultants, how could we be sure about quality of design and construction," stated Dr Deen Muhammad. This is a common apathy in our system that sometimes the contracts of certain projects are awarded either under political influence or on basis of personal relations. Therefore, this tendency must be shunned to save billions of rupees fleeced from our kitty. Although the challenge is enormous yet the concerned government departments are confident to cope with this situation through multiple steps initiated recently. "The government in collaboration with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Air Aviation and Planning and Development department is working on construction of Automatic Weather Stations," said Abdul Razaq Khilji, Director General Water Resources Planning, Development and Monitoring Directorate of Irrigation Department. "This project would help us compile the data of rainfall and construct dams keeping in view the expected rainfall." He agreed that construction standards must be updated to international standards and stated, "a three-pronged approach including geological special-ists could guarantee the dams' utmost success." "Dams built without careful planning and necessary protocols prove to be potential target of harsh weather like we witnessed in 2022," Khilji said. "Unfortunately, we were unable to preserve thousands of cubic feet water after record-breaking rains in 2022." As the Irrigation Department is mandated to meet water needs of people besides monitoring and improving the depleting water table in 18 river basins across Balochistan, it is confident to come up to masses aspirations. "The present government is thriving hard to achieve those goals and there will be a considerable impact on the livelihood of people living in this province," commented Secretary Irrigation Hafiz Majid.

Gauhar's house raided, 4 officials plus SHO Margalla suspended

ISLAMABAD (Online): In connection with the police raid at the house of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Barrister Gauhar, on the order of IG Islamabad, 5 officers including SHO Margalla have been suspended while SP City has been appointed as the inquiry officer. A detailed report has been ordered to be submitted within 3 days. According to the spokesperson of Islamabad Police, 5 officers including SHO Margalla have been suspended by the order of IG Islamabad on the issue of police raid at the house of PTI barrister Gauhar. Islamabad Police has completed preliminary investigation. It should be remembered that on January 13, local police arrived at F-7/2 in search of an proclaimed offender on the information of an informer.

Naem regrets Muslim leaders' failure to stop Israel's onslaught in Gaza

KARACHI (INP): Jamaat-e-Islami Karachi chapter Emir Hafiz Naemur Rehman on Sunday said the Muslim leaders have failed to protect the innocent Palestinians at the hands of indiscriminate attacks of Israel. He added the cowardly rulers of the Muslim world gave Israel the courage to bomb children, women and houses in Gaza. He made these remarks while addressing the Gaza March and highlighted that the Muslim world can show sympathy to the Gaza's brothers and sisters by protesting against the crimes committed by Israel. The JJ Karachi region chief said, "We salute the patience of Hamas as we see that everyone is engaged in politics and preparing for polls but the JJ has not forgotten Gaza even during the elections." He highlighted that that twenty-five thousand Palestinians have been martyred, including children and women while applauding the actions of Hamas whom he mentioned has destroyed the Israel's defence technology. He said everyone in Pakistan is engaged in politics, who are working for the pleasure of America, Nawaz Sharif, Zardari and others are not opposing Israel, they are all mixed up. Further, he claimed that the major political leaders have been avoiding to take the names of culprits including USA and Israel - who have killed the hapless people of Gaza.

SC to hear level playing field plea against ECP today

ISLAMABAD (Online): Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) to hear petition filed by Tehreek-e-Insaf against Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) regarding not giving a level playing field. A three-member bench headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faizaisa will hear the case. Notices have been issued to parties. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) will also submit its detailed answer to the court on Monday. For this, Gohar Khan Advocate will submit the answer. Some sources said that after ECP has allotted election symbols to the candidates of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf to contest the election as an independent.



QUETTA: Candidate for PB-42 Aslam Rind speaks during a press conference.

Zulekha expresses concern over deteriorating law and order situation in Mastung

QUETTA: Zulekha Aziz Mandokhail, provincial leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and candidate PB-37 Mastung, while expressing concern over the deteriorating law and order situation in Mastung, has said that caretaker government had miserably failed to safeguard the lives and properties of people. These views were expressed by her while enquiring after the health of Maharaj Satesh Kumar who had been injured in a vehicle snatching bid in Dasht area of Mastung. Expressing grave concern over the deteriorating law and order situation in district Mastung, she said that the incumbent caretaker government had failed to protect the lives and properties of people. She said that a well planned conspiracy had been hatched to deteriorate law and order situation in Balochistan, adding that people of Mastung were not secure in their homes which was a question mark on the performance of caretaker government and district administration Mastung. She called on the authorities to take steps for securing national highways of the province.

Musadiq alleges Abbasi of misinterpreting PML-N supremacy

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Musadiq Malik has alleged Shahid Khaqan Abbasi of misinterpreting party supremacy. Speaking in Alhmrta Hall Lahore on Sunday, he said that the conversation of Khaqan Abbasi regarding Nawaz's tenure was out of context. Musadiq Malik said that Abbasi's criticism was not against PML-N but against himself as he spent most of his time in the said party. The later should be held accountable for his misdeeds, he added.



QUETTA: Workers of Pakistan Muslim League (N) hold a rally pay tribute to martyrs of the Pak Army.