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Elections can't be postponed, ECP tells Senate on polls delay resolution

Electoral body says it made commitment before the Supreme Court to hold elections on Feb 8, 2024; Okays 250 million watermarked ballot papers for the February 8 polls

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has dismissed the proposal to postpone the general elections, emphasizing that the established polling date of February 8 was mutually determined with the President of Pakistan.

In a letter addressed to the Joint Secretary (Legislation) of the Senate, the ECP conveyed that it would not be prudent to postpone the general elections at this stage. Additionally, the resolution of the upper house of Parliament cannot be currently implemented.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has already directed the caretaker government to ensure the maintenance of law and order during elections. This

includes enhancing the security framework to create a favorable environment for peaceful and credible conduct of the 2024 general elections.

The letter stated that the ECP has made a commitment before the Supreme Court to conduct the general elections on February 8, 2024.

Similarly, it is worth noting that previous general elections and local government elections have taken place during the winter season.

It's worth noting that Independent Senator Dilawar Khan has written a letter to the Senate Chairman, expressing concern that the ECP has not taken any steps to implement his resolution passed on January 5, which proposed the

postponement of elections. The resolution received majority support with 14 votes from senators.

Meanwhile the Election Commission (ECP) tasked the Printing Corporation of Pakistan on Monday with producing 250 million watermarked ballot papers for the February 8 polls.

According to sources, the ECP sanctioned the printing of ballot papers for the upcoming general elections during its meeting.

Distinctive watermarks will adorn the ballot papers, which are set to be printed using three different machines. Rigorous security protocols have been ensured for the Printing Corporation premises during the ballot paper production.



RAWALPINDI: Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC), General Sahir Shamsah Mirza exchanging views with Ali Bin Mubarak Al Khater, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Pakistan during meeting held in Rawalpindi.

'Thank you very much'; PTI withdraws SC petition for level playing field

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has withdrawn its petition from the Supreme Court (SC) seeking a level playing field in the upcoming general elections.

As the hearing of the PTI's appeal began in the Supreme Court on Monday, Counsel Latif Khosa said the party would like to go to the people's court for the survival of democracy. "We want to go to the court of 250 million people," he asserted, and told the chief justice of Pakistan (CJP): "Thank you very much."

CJP Qazi Faez Isa asked: "Do you want to pursue the case or not?" Khosa replied that he had been instructed to withdraw the application. "We came to you for a level playing field for fair and transparent elections," he remarked, adding that people had been allotted symbols like glass, eggplant, bowl etc.

"We have been humiliated," the lawyer said and added ECP can only take back the electoral symbol of the party, but here, a political party is being kept out from Parliamentary politics.

CJP Qazi Faez Isa asked: "Do you want to pursue the case or not?" The PTI lawyer replied that he had been instructed to withdraw the application. "We came to you for a level playing field for fair and transparent elections," he remarked, adding that people had been allotted symbols like glass, eggplant, bowl etc.

Petrol price slashed by Rs8 per litre

LAHORE (INP): The federal government on Monday slashed petrol price by up to Rs8 per litre for the fortnight starting January 16. However, the government decided to maintain the price of high-speed diesel. According to a notification issued by the Ministry of Finance, the price of petrol has been reduced by Rs8 per litre, bringing the new price to Rs259.34 per litre. The price of high-speed diesel will remain unchanged, i.e., Rs276.21 per litre.

FM Jilani reiterates Pak commitment to a peaceful, stable Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani on Monday underscored Pakistan's commitment to a peaceful and stable Afghanistan and emphasized the need for enhanced coordination for regional stability. Here received Iran's Special Representative for Afghanistan Affairs Hassan Kazmi Qomi, Foreign Office Spokesperson posted on X account. The foreign minister also underlined the critical role of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan to achieve the vision of a peaceful and stable region.

Earlier, Ambassador Qomi held extensive talks with Pakistan's Special Representative on Afghanistan Affairs Asif Durani over the situation in Afghanistan and regional processes for peace and dialogue.



ISLAMABAD: Iran's Special Representative for Afghanistan Affairs, Hassan Kazmi Qomi called on caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani.

Maryam Nawaz says Character involved in excesses against Nawaz facing ultimate justice

OKARA (INP): Senior Vice President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Maryam Nawaz while referring to the recent resignations tendered by two SC judges has said that every individual involved in committing excesses to Nawaz Sharif was facing ultimate justice. Speaking after formally launching her election campaign at Iqbal Stadium in Okara on Monday, she appreciated the people who remained loyal to Nawaz Sharif and his party despite the tough period they had gone through. Despite fog and intense cold weather a large number of people attended the rally.

Maryam Nawaz said, "They were acting like pharaohs, but are now running away like rats. A person standing for truth like Nawaz never back down. Nawaz had left the office with grace, they are escaping while trying to hide their faces."

She said a terrorist party couldn't get an election symbol and proposed "petrol bomb" as election symbol for them to share their reality.

The PTI chairman was in habit of favouritism when the judges used to greet him by saying "good to see you", she said and added that he had lost the facilitators and patronage.

"The facility of issuing decisions on basis of phone [calls] made by the mother-in-law [of former chief justice Umar Ata Bandial] isn't available now," she said. "You and your facilitators have been caught red-handed while cheating."

Nawaz was removed from the office again and again, but brought back each time by these umpires, Maryam said while pointing to the crowd and asked the people to give a heavy mandate to the three-time prime minister for an effective government and swift decision making.

The PML-N chief organizer said that Nawaz was already busy in devising plans to ensure cheaper services and goods to the masses and promised that she would work for extending their basic rights to women, including employment opportunities.

Senator Dilawar writes letter to Senate chairman for polls delay

ISLAMABAD (Online): Independent Senator Dilawar Khan, who submitted the resolution for the postponement of election in the senate, has written a letter to Chairman Senate.

It has been said in the letter written by Senator Dilawar Khan that Senate had passed the resolution to postpone the election on January 5.

This is a matter of concern that Election Commission has not yet taken any steps to postpone the February 8 elections.

It has been said in the letter that attention should have been paid to the concerns identified in the resolution. Senator Dilawar Khan said that it should be ensured that elections in February 8 are postponed so that people from all over the country can participate in the election process.

It is pertinent to say that Senator Dilawar Khan presented the resolution in the senate to postpone the general elections and said in this that it is very cold in majority areas so for this reason, it is difficult for these areas to participate in the election process.

PPP accuses PML-N of attempting to rig elections

Bilawal blames Nawaz-led party for gradually sidelining its political opponents

QAMBAR SHAHDADKOT (INP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has accused the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) of resorting to rigging tactics ahead of the February 8 general elections.

As both political bigwigs eyeing the office of the prime minister, the PPP chairman blamed the Nawaz Sharif-led party for gradually sidelining its political opponents in a bid to come into power without having any electoral competition.

"Nawaz-league doesn't want to do fair politics but it wants to play alone by ousting all political opponents from the pitch," Bilawal said while addressing a press conference in Qambar Shahdadkot on Monday.

He alleged that some PPP candidates had not been allotted 'arrow' electoral sign by the returning



LAHORE: President National Party Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch meeting with PML(Q) Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and President Muhammad Shabbaz Sharif.

SC is operating under London Plan, alleges Imran Khan

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Founder Chairman Imran Khan said that everything is happening under the London Plan and he was being punished for exposing Donald Lu and General Bajwa. Holding informal talks with the media on Monday, former Prime Minister Imran Khan said the Supreme Court (SC) is implementing the London Plan.

The former PM Imran Khan said his imprisonment, tearing down of the PTI and the pardoning of Nawaz Sharif's case are also part of the London plan. He said that everything is being done to show that 'they' are above the law.

The PTI founder chairman said he wants to ask Chief Justice of Supreme Court Qazi Faez Isa

Pakistan, Kyrgyz agree to strengthen health ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): A bilateral meeting was held between the caretaker Minister for Health Dr. Nadeem Jan and the Health Minister of Kyrgyz Republic Alymkadyr Beishenaliev on the sidelines of the Global Health Security Summit. Dr. Nadeem Jan welcomed the Kyrgyz dignitary and expressed gratitude on behalf of the Government of Pakistan for the participation of the Kyrgyz delegation in the Global forum hosted by Pakistan. The Kyrgyz Minister appreciated the initiative of Pakistan's Health Minister in organizing the first-ever Global Health Security Summit. He appreciated the befitting arrangements made by Pakistan.

ICCPO holds meeting with foreign diplomats and regional security officers

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: According to the details, the Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCPO) Dr Akbar Nasir Khan chaired a meeting with foreign diplomats and regional security officers of embassies at Diplomatic Enclave, a public relations officer said.

He said that, CPO Security Division, SSP Security Division and officials from other law enforcement departments were also present during the occasion.

During the meeting, the ICCPO wished a Happy New Year to the meeting participants and briefed the foreign diplomats and embassies regional security officers about the steps taken by Islamabad Capital Police to ensure foolproof security arrangements around the diplomatic enclave.

This meeting was arranged every year. Emphasizing the utmost priority of ensuring the security of foreign missions, embassies, and offices, ICCPO highlighted the continuous en-



hancement of security measures at the diplomatic enclave through modern technology.

ICCPO Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan said that, as part of these efforts the protective barrier of the diplomatic enclave is reconstructed, while modern cameras equipped with advanced technology are being installed along the internal and external roads, perimeter walls, and surrounding routes.

Effective measures are being taken for the surveillance and monitoring of vehicles, motorcyclists, and pedestrians, with increased

emphasis on mobile and foot patrols within the diplomatic enclave, he added.

He further said that the deployment of mobile applications and a panic alert system has been created for prompt response in case of any untoward incidents. Additionally, a WhatsApp group has been operational to facilitate better communication among stakeholders. During the meeting, participants raised questions regarding the current challenges within the diplomatic enclave, to which ICCPO provided directives to the officers for prompt resolution.



QAMBAR SHAHDADKOT: Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari talking to media persons during his visit to Qambar Shahdadkot.

Political parties bound to hold intra-party polls: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Monday said that every political party was bound to hold intra-party elections under their constitution.

The apex court's decision about the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's elections had set a precedent which would further promote democracy within the parties, the minister said while speaking in a talk show of the Pakistan Television.

He said the Election Commission did not take notice of the irregularities in the PTI's intra-party elections, rather a complaint to the effect was filed with it.

"Democracy is not only necessary in the country but also within the political parties," he said. Every one in democracy had the right to criticise and the caretaker government could not usurp that fundamental right, the minister added.

The basic role of the caretaker government was to act as a bridge between two elected governments, and the incumbents were its responsibilities amicably, he remarked.

Solangi said under Article 218(3) of the Constitution, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was responsible for holding free, fair and transparent elections and the caretaker government was committed to assist it in that regard.

He said that every citizen should exercise their right to vote a per conscience.



Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf exchanging views with High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Pakistan Admiral (Retd) Ravindra C Wijegunaratne at Naval Headquarters Islamabad

Courts not to compromise in dispensing justice to masses: AJK CJ

MUZAFFARABAD (APP): Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Chief Justice (CJ) Justice Raja Saad Akram Khan on Monday said that the superior courts will never compromise on their dignity in dispensing justice to the masses.

Addressing the 11th Judicial Conference under the auspices of the High Court of Azad Jammu and Kashmir here on Monday as chief guest, he pointed out that administrative injustice was the biggest reason behind increasing litigations in the courts that have to intervene to provide remedy to the sufferers and also stressed the lawyers participating in the conference to ensure implementations of the courts' orders rather defying in the interest of clients. The conference was presided over by Chief Justice High Court of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Justice Raja Sadaqat Hussain Khan and was participated by Judges of the higher judiciary, subordinate courts, Minister Law and Parliamentary Affairs Mian Abdul Waheed, Secretary Law Idress Abbasi, Law officers and a large number of lawyers including senior lawyers of Supreme court.

The conference titled "Responsibility of Judiciary, Government, Lawyers and Litigants in the Dispensation of Justice" was told by the additional registrar of the high court in his presentation that all the cases of 2018 and earlier had been disposed of by the High Court and subordinate district courts due to the specific administrative measures taken by the Chief Justice of High Court during the last two years.



OKARA: Chief Organizer PML-N Maryam Nawaz addressing a public gathering

Daily Voice of Masses Independent

Missing empathy

In recent days, the missing persons' issue has attracted much back and forth between a group of determined protesters seeking the whereabouts of their disappeared loved ones, and a caretaker government that simply refuses to recognise their anguish as legitimate. Amidst repeated attempts to gaslight the protesters and paint them as troublemakers, a fresh report submitted by the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances gives the lie to the state's position that it has been unfairly criticised. In the report, requisitioned by the Supreme Court, the commission has conceded that merely seven per cent of the production orders issued by it have ever been complied with. Considering that production orders are issued for individuals believed to be in state custody, it is no wonder that the vast majority of victims' families see the authorities as complicit in the disappearance of their loved ones. Last week, an Islamabad High Court justice underlined once again that the higher authorities, including the prime minister and his cabinet, are responsible for ensuring the right to liberty of all Pakistani citizens. He also expressed the hope that the officials directly responsible for disappearing citizens will one day be prosecuted. He made these remarks as protests were roiling Balochistan, where more people have reportedly been disappeared despite the massive spotlight shining on this issue. Meanwhile in Islamabad, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, led by Mahrang Baloch, continues to wait on the government in Islamabad, hoping it would make some attempt at rapprochement. Along with other BYC leaders, she remains camped outside the National Press Club, still knocking on the state's door, still hoping the Baloch will be welcomed in. One hopes it won't be long. From the 'welcome' given to these protesters by the Islamabad police, the hurtful remarks made about their 'duplicitous' by the caretaker prime minister, and a fresh insult from the Balochistan caretaker information minister, who on Wednesday accused the protesters of using their grief to get visas for other countries, the state has made a mess of the situation. There has recently been a global outcry against the subjugation of historically disadvantaged people, and this seems like a particularly bad time for Pakistan to be presenting itself as a case study. One wonders what the state believes it stands to gain from such tactics. The country is in turmoil: internal security is weakening, the political arena remains gripped in chaos, the economy is on the ventilator, and too many social groups seem unhappy about the state's oppressive policies towards them. Given the breadth of challenges facing the country, those who have assumed responsibility for it must start putting out fires, not stirring up more trouble for future generations.

Empowering local governance

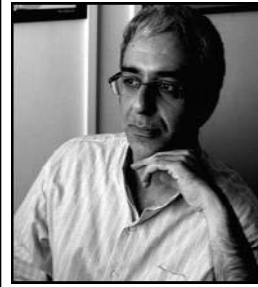


Abdullah Khalid

As the promise of elections looms, manifestos take centre stage, promising reform and progress. In our volatile context, empowering local governments is a crucial, yet often overlooked pathway towards a more responsive and resilient democracy. Despite constitutional provisions for devolution, Pakistan's local governance system remains hobbled by a plethora of challenges. Over-centralisation, inadequate financial resources, weak institutional capacities and limited citizen participation have plagued this tier of government. Though varying in detail, existing Local Government Acts share the common flaw of inadequate devolution and excessive provincial control. As general elections approach, parties are driven by political considerations, which shape their approaches to local governance. A review of some manifestos reveals inconsistent approaches to local governance. The PML-N, while promising devolution and financial autonomy, focuses on party-aligned initiatives. The PTI manifesto touches upon citizen participation and local development but lacks concrete mechanisms for implementation. The PPP emphasises that rural development aligns with local governance potential, but the required details remain vague. The PML-Q focuses on administrative reforms and overlooks the need for structural changes like fiscal devolution. The ANP manifesto primarily ad-

cludes education, health, and sanitation, to local bodies. Local government representatives can be more than just service providers. They can become catalysts for progress in diverse areas such as ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), Corporate Social Responsibility, and Disaster Risk Management. Local governments can promote environmental sustainability through waste management, renewable energy projects, and green infrastructure development. Additionally, they can champion social causes like women's empowerment, youth development, and minority inclusion. Local governments can foster partnerships with businesses and civil society organisations to address pressing issues like poverty, illiteracy, and healthcare access. This can create a collaborative ecosystem for social good and shared responsibility. Local governments can also be pivotal in disaster preparedness and response, leading community-based initiatives for early warning systems, evacuation plans, and post-disaster rebuilding efforts. Pakistan's political manifestos must transcend rhetoric and translate into genuine commitment to local government empowerment. A comprehensive vision is needed, encompassing legislative reforms, capacity building, financial independence, and citizen participation. Only then can local governments become the engines of development, democracy, and social justice Pakistan desperately needs. The upcoming elections present a critical opportunity for parties to break free from political expediency and embrace a transformative vision for local governance. The future of Pakistan's democracy hangs in the balance. -- Courtesy Dawn

Southern promises



Zarrar Khuhro

Why South Africa? Of all the 195 countries that make up this world, why was it this nation that took Israel to court for its genocide of the Palestinian people? Unlike the Muslim and Arab countries, South Africa has no real ethnic, cultural or religious affinity with Palestine and — unlike the Arab states — is located over 7,000km from Gaza. Why then did South Africa take on the Zionist state when those much closer — in all senses — to Palestine have chosen to remain silent spectators to mass murder? The answer lies in history and in the shared experience of brutalisation by a white supremacist settler regime that prides itself on apartheid and bloody repression. Israel was created in 1948, the same year that the apartheid regime came into force in South Africa. This coincidence aside, both states soon recognised that their status as white settler colonies established at the expense of local populations made them brothers in arms. This unholy dalliance officially began in 1953 when Daniel Malan, the prime minister of apartheid South Africa, conducted an official tour of Israel, which marked the beginning of a very close alliance. In years to come, the alliance grew stronger with both apartheid nations learning from and supporting each other in repressing their respective native populations. Palestinian population centres were cut off from

each other in much the same way as South Africa created 'Bantustans', powerless black African statelets meant to ensure the exclusion of blacks from the South African political system. The similarity was acknowledged and celebrated at the highest levels, with South African PM Hendrick Verwoerd, known as the architect of the Bantustan project, himself saying "The Jews took Israel from the Arabs after the Arabs had lived there for a thousand years. Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state." And while Israel would loudly condemn apartheid on international forums the reality was that it considered South Africa a kindred nation, with Israeli general Rafael Eitan saying that South African blacks "want to gain control over the white minority just like the Arabs here want to gain control over us... And we, like the white minority in South Africa, must act to prevent them from taking over." Keeping these populations in check was also a shared priority and Israel would provide anti-riot vehicles, weapons and training for the forces of white South Africa; in the '80s hundreds of Israeli military advisors were stationed in South Africa while Pretoria's troops were training in Israel. Israel also helped their ideological cousins develop a nuclear programme, with Pretoria finishing at least six nuclear bombs, all of which were later dismantled when South African president F.W. de Klerk abandoned the nuclear programme in an effort to rehabilitate South Africa's global image. Speaking of image, Israel often ran interference for South Africa in an effort to insulate their ally from foreign pressure, setting up a 'Joint Secretariat for Political and Psychological Warfare' in 1975 to conduct

"propaganda and psychological warfare," as part of a well-funded bilateral campaign to rehabilitate South Africa's international image. But every action has a reaction, and as Israel cosied up to apartheid South Africa, the Palestine Liberation Organisation deepened its ties with Nelson Mandela's African National Congress. Just as South Africa's white supremacist PM was one of the first major heads of state to visit Israel, one of the first leaders Mandela met on his release from jail in 1990 was none other than Yasser Arafat, who also asked Mandela's advice prior to the Oslo Accords. Mandela himself remained a lifelong supporter of the Palestinian cause and famously remarked that "Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians." As a result, the powerful Israeli lobby sp---a--red no effort when it came to demonising Mandela and the ANC, with the Israeli-backed Anti-Defamation League condemning the ANC as "totalitarian, anti-human, anti-democratic, anti-Israel and anti-American." Israel's greatest ally and partner in crime, the US, played a malign role as well, with strong evidence indicating that the CIA played a part in tracking Mandela's movements and leaking that information to the apartheid regime, leading to his 27-year-long incarceration. Mandela himself remained on the USA's terrorist watchlist till 2008. Today, we see history come full circle, with the sons and daughters of those who struggled against oppression and injustice in South Africa seeking to free their Palestinian brothers and sisters from the shackles of a murderous regime. -- Courtesy Dawn

Commerce News

ADB's food security forum scheduled in April to tackle escalating food crisis

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Asia and the Pacific Food Security Forum 2024 is set to take center stage from April 8 to 12, 2024, in Manila, Philippines to discuss actions for easing a worsening food crisis in the region. This pivotal event, announced by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), aims to facilitate discussions on immediate actions to alleviate the worsening food crisis and strategize for long-term food security against the adverse impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. The forum would serve as an opportunity to evaluate the interim performance of ADB's

commitment to allocate a minimum of \$14 billion of its own resources to support food security between 2022 and 2025. Additionally, it will outline ADB's forward program on food security, forging partnerships with a diverse array of stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific region. According to the ADB announcement, the Asia and the Pacific Food Security Forum 2024 will act as a platform for both public and private sector partners to showcase their thought leadership and innovative initiatives. Participants will delve into discussions focused on constructing more



HYDERABAD: A vendor displaying quilts to attract the customers at his shop during winter season.

New cargo route important driver for Pakistan-China trade: Ambassador Hashmi

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan Ambassador to China, Khalil Hashmi said that the new cargo route between Pakistan and China is an important driver for trade between the countries and a significant step forward in bilateral connectivity spectrum. "A welcome development and an important driver for trade between Pakistan and China. A significant step forward in bilateral connectivity spectrum," he said in a statement. Ambassador Hashmi

FPCCI to hold Round Table Discussion on Packaging Sector on 17th

LAHORE (APP): Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) will hold "Round Table Discussion" on the Packaging Sector: Challenges and Opportunities" here at its Regional Office on January 17, (Wednesday). The FPCCI spokesman told media here Monday that the packaging sector's "industry status" and issues will be discussed. All the stakeholders of the packaging sectors will attend the discussion. There will be five sessions in the Round Table Discussion. The first session will be introductory in which FPCCI Regional Chairman and Vice President Zaki Aijaz, Managing Director and CEO of Packages Limited, Syed Hyder Ali, Director & CEO of Century Paper & Board Mills Limited, Aftab Ahmed, CEO of Roshan Packages Limited.



NEIJANG: Ambassador of Pakistan to China, Mr. Khalil Hashmi addressing a ceremony arranged by the city government of Neijiang city, celebrating the arrival of the first batch of 182 tons of Pakistani dry chilies.

Huge opportunities of investment available in AJK: Barrister Sultan

MIRPUR (AJK) (APP): Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry said on Monday that huge opportunities of investment stood available in different sectors. Talking to various public representative delegations at Jammu Kashmir house in the federal metropolis, the President invited the intending entrepreneurs from across the country besides the UK-based Pakistani Diaspora community to take benefit of the bright opportunities of the available huge potential for investment in trade and industrial sectors in AJK especially in the twin industrial districts of Mirpur and Bimber in particular. Referring to the region's favourable climate and investment-friendly environment, the president said that the Private sector can invest in various sectors of Azad Kashmir. He said that besides it is natural resources Azad Kashmir has huge human resources.

China, Pakistan to forge strong software cooperation

BEIJING (APP): The 21st China International Software Corporation Conference was successfully held in Chengdu, China. The Cooperation Negotiation on Standardization and Internationalization, a sub forum of the conference, highlighted the significance of the growing software partnership between China and Pakistan. During the event, Muhammad Zohaib Khan, Chairman of the Pakistan Software Association, provided an insightful overview of Pakistan's software industry, highlighting the country's significant advancements in cybersecurity, AI, gaming, and animation. He also emphasized the attractive incentives available through the Special Technology Zone Authority (STZA). "Pakistani companies possess expertise in niche areas such as Fintech, Healthcare, E-commerce, and other solutions that are in high demand globally. Collaboration between China and Pakistan can extend beyond services to include joint ventures and co-development initiatives," Mr. Khan stated, he further highlighted the impact of Pakistani IT companies in African markets.



LAHORE: A vendor is unloading the woods from handcart to use as fuel at traditional mud oven at Misri Shah area of the Provincial Capital.

Pak needs extensive information outflow, data governance to revolutionize agrifood system: Experts

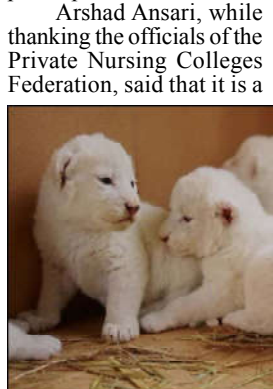
ISLAMABAD (APP): Climate Impacts" held here that was participated virtually by many online participants including members of academia, media and professionals. Opening the discussion, the Executive Director, SDPI Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri said food is a necessity and climate change is a reality that threatened its access and availability to the masses due to environmental degradation. He said the year 2023 was declared the hottest year in our history and La Nina and El Nino impacts were creating havoc in the countries bearing the burden of its effects. However, it is important to understand their impacts on the agriculture and food sectors. Dr Suleri mentioned that in adverse weather scenarios services and manufacturing sectors can halt their services but the food and agriculture sectors will face irreversible impacts of crops and species loss due to shift in weather patterns. He said, at the COP-28 moot, the FAO's baby step of producing a report on food system sustainability underlined the target of 32 percent CO2 removal from the crop sector through different strategies which

was a starting step but rather a positive one in the right direction. He mentioned that the SDPI is conducting the dialogue as part of its series of efforts after its hackathon held before its flagship SDC conference in 2023 on food and agriculture with the support of the Canadian mission in Pakistan. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Representative in Pakistan, Florence Rolfe said that climate change is real and could not be denied anymore, either the world recorded the first or second hottest year in its history. She added that Pakistan would have to adapt to climate change and extend effective incentives to its farmers in water conservation and crop productivity through alternative crops ensuring crop diversification. She proposed that the country's due to rising temperature variability could focus on early crop sowing that can help generate more produce with the available water and resources provided the growing shift in pattern. She added that there was much scientific evidence on early crop sowing, however, the issue is that more production in the cotton crop.

LPC, Private Nursing Colleges sign MoU

LAHORE (APP): The MoU signing ceremony between Private Nursing Colleges Federation and Lahore Press Club (LPC) was held on Monday in a local hotel. In the ceremony, Patron-in-Chief of Private Nursing Colleges Federation Mehmood Sadiq, President Nadeem Pal, Dr. Sania Khora, Lahore Press Club President Arshad Ansari, Secretary Zahid Abid, Senior Vice President Shiraz Hasnat, Vice President Amjad Usmani and all members of the governing body participated.

very welcome thing for the children of journalists that they will be able to get nursing education at a low cost. He said that the profession of nursing deserves high respect and it is a field in which there are job opportunities even today. Dr. Sania Khora said that serving humanity is the mission of her federation and under this mission she is here today. He said that he and his team will also organize a medical camp in Lahore Press Club every month. On this occasion, a luncheon was also organized in honor of the newly elected body of Lahore Press Club. Shields were also presented to the newly elected officials.



KARACHI: A view of the newly born cubs of African Lioness at Zoo in Provincial Capital.

Excitement at peak as Gilgit-Baltistan's annual Winter Feast kicks off

ISLAMABAD (APP): The enchanting landscapes of Gilgit-Baltistan are set to witness an unprecedented celebration of winter sports as the annual seven-day Winter Feast commenced on Monday. This year's festivities mark a historic milestone with the inclusion of the National Ice Hockey Championship, promising a week of exhilarating competitions and cultural events, according to event organizers. For the first time in the festival's history, they said that the National Ice Hockey Championship takes center stage, drawing teams from various regions, including both male and

female competitors. The icy battlegrounds are ready to host an intense showdown of skill, speed, and teamwork as the players vie for victory. Beyond the thrill of ice hockey, the festival boasts a lineup of diverse competitions, including Ice Skating and traditional local games such as Basra, Pindok, and Baalbut. Participants from across Gilgit-Baltistan are gearing up to showcase their prowess in these unique and culturally significant contests. One of the highlights of this year's event is the active participation of female teams in various competitions.



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Raza Naqvi offering a Dua after inaugurating E-Services/Mobile App at Lahore Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education.

Naqvi inaugurates 37 police stations, 5 projects in Gujranwala

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, accompanied by the cabinet, embarked on an extensive 6-hour visit to Gujranwala, inaugurating 37 police stations, 5 projects, and inspecting the Lahore Sialkot Motorway Link Road.

The link road to Gujranwala is slated for traffic opening by January 31, accompanied by the construction of a flyover at 'Chan Da Qila' to connect the Expressway with GT Road, said a handout issued here on Monday. The CM commended

the progress on Gujranwala's roads, announcing the formation of a committee to finalize the design of the 'Chan Da Qila' Flyover. Updates on ongoing work at Gujranwala University and hospital upgrades.

CM inaugurates 'Arfa Teacher Chatbot' in honor of Arfa Karim

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi paid a heartfelt tribute to Arfa Karim, the great daughter of the nation, during his visit to the Arfa Software Technology Park on Ferozepur Road here on Monday. The CM inaugurated the "Arfa Teacher Chatbot" in honor of the visionary Arfa Karim and, as a symbol of remembrance, lit candles at the technology park. He also visited the Arfa Karim Technology Incubator, commending the Arfa Karim Foundation's endeavors in advancing IT initiatives. Mohsin Naqvi expressed appreciation for the Arfa Karim Foundation team introduced to him, stating that there could be no better homage to Arfa Karim. He emphasized the role of digitalization and IT in aligning educational visions with contemporary requirements. The newly launched "Arfa Teacher Chatbot" is positioned as a tool to enhance Pakistan's positive global image and contribute to skill development.

'Women-driven EV 'Pink scooties' to take over streets of Punjab soon, Minister

Independent Report
LAHORE: Provincial Transport Minister Ibrahim Hasan Murad said on Monday that the Punjab government has initiated a plan to introduce 'Pink EV Pink Scooties' to make women safer, which will provide livelihood to women for economic and domestic needs. Talking to the PTV news channel, he said that the government of Punjab has initiated a program

scheme to empower Pakistani females by introducing 'Pink Scooties', adding, that the government through a lucky draw will give over 2000 to 3000 scooties in the first phase of this scheme. He explained that this scheme has various positive impacts on women and girls, adding, that women with Pink EV scooters will not wait at the bus stops for long hours for buses, vans and other transport they can travel from one place to another with a safe and friendly atmosphere. This ambitious initiative reflects the government's commitment to sustainable transportation solutions and environmental conservation. Talking about EV motorbikes and Rickshaws, he said that this initiative aims to provide a sustainable and eco-friendly mode of transportation while promoting the use of electric vehicles.

LHC wraps up petition seeking disbandment of Punjab care taker set up

LAHORE (Online): Lahore High Court (LHC) has wrapped up petitions seeking abolition of care taker set up in Punjab and constitution of new care taker set up declaring them in-fructuous in the light of reply from federation counsel.

The petitions filed by Sheikh Rashid and Zaman Virdig came up for hearing before single bench of LHC led by Justice Shahid Karim. Federal government, election commission and governor Punjab have been made respondents in the petitions. The petitioner took the plea the sitting government has completed its tenure after Supreme

Court (SC) order for holding election on May 14 in Punjab. No care taker set up can stay after 90 days. The incumbent care taker government is working illegally and unconstitutionally in Punjab. The care taker government of Punjab was abolished forthwith and order was issued for establishment of new interim set up in Punjab. The counsel for federal government argued the said matter is pending hearing in Supreme Court (SC) too. SC has given order to hold election. Election schedule has been issued. The elections are going to be held on February 8.



KARACHI: Lady Health Workers and vaccinators of Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) are holding protest demonstration for acceptance of their demands, at Karachi press club.

Home Deptt seeks details of focal persons other staff for election duty from DEOs

PESHAWAR (APP): The Home Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has sought the details of focal persons and other staff including watchmen for election duty from the District Education Officers of all districts. A letter issued here said that the focal persons should be nominated by all the district education officers and their data should be sent at the earliest, adding that all the watchmen should be assigned duties wherever

the polling stations have been established. In pursuance of the letter of the Home Department, the education department has instructed all the district education officers to formally nominate focal persons in connection with the general election 2024 and send their names along with related details. It further directed the DEOs to assign responsibilities to the watchmen of the schools.

International News

Yemen Houthi rebels fire missile at US warship in Red Sea in first attack after American-led strikes

Monitoring Desk
JERUSALEM: Yemen's Houthi rebels fired an anti-ship cruise missile toward an American destroyer in the Red Sea but a U.S. fighter jet shot it down in the latest attack roiling global shipping amid Israel's war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, officials said. The attack on Sunday marks the first U.S.-acknowledged fire by the Houthis since America and allied nations began strikes Friday on the rebels following weeks of assaults on shipping in the Red Sea. The Houthis have targeted that crucial corri-

dor linking Asian and Mideast energy and cargo shipments to the Suez Canal onward to Europe over the Israel-Hamas war, attacks that threaten to widen that conflict into a regional conflagration. The Houthis, a Shiite rebel group allied with Iran that seized Yemen's capital in 2014, did not immediately acknowledge the attack. It wasn't immediately clear whether the U.S. would retaliate for the latest attack, though President Joe Biden has said he "will not hesitate to direct further measures to protect our people and the free flow of international

commerce as necessary." The Houthi fire on Sunday went in the direction of the USS Laboon, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer operating in the southern reaches of the Red Sea, the U.S. military's Central Command said in a statement. The missile came from near Hodeida, a Red Sea port city long held by the Houthis, the U.S. said. "An anti-ship cruise missile was fired from Iranian-backed Houthi militant areas of Yemen toward USS Laboon," Central Command said. "There were no injuries or damage reported."



Swiss Federal Minister Guy Parmelin and Wang Shouwen, Chinese Vice Minister of the Ministry of Commerce shake hands after signing a joint statement of the free trade agreement, next to Swiss President Viola Amherd and Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China, Li Qiang during an official visit in Kehrsatz near Bern, Switzerland.

Pacific nation Nauru cuts ties to Taiwan, switches to China

Monitoring Desk
TAIPEI: The South Pacific nation of Nauru announced on Monday it was severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan and would instead recognise China. The announcement came days after Taiwan elected the independence-leaning Lai Ching-te as its next president. In a media release, the Nauru government said it would no longer recognise Taiwan "as a separate country" but "rather as an inalienable part of China's territory". China claims democratic, self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if needed.

Nauru said it would "sever diplomatic relations" with Taiwan immediately, and "no longer develop any official relations or official exchanges with Taiwan". The accident occurred in Simuyu region's Bariadi district, more than 500 kilometres north of the capital, Dodoma, burying the miners under heavy debris. "As we close the rescue operations, the death toll remains 22, all men," Faustine Mtiitu, acting commander for the region's fire and rescue force, told reporters on Sunday.

War on Gazans rages amid calls for ceasefire

Monitoring Desk
GAZASTRIP: Israeli tanks and aircraft hit areas in central and southern Gaza on Sunday, the 100th day of the ongoing aggression that has claimed a surging civilian death toll and ravaged the besieged Palestinian territory. The conflict has created a dire humanitarian crisis for the 2.4 million people in Hamas-ruled Gaza, the United Nations and aid groups warn, and reduced much of the coastal strip to rubble. According to the health ministry in Gaza, at least 23,968 people have been killed, the majority of

them women and children. On the other hand, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a press conference with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry called for a ceasefire in Gaza and the restoration of Palestinian statehood. "It is necessary to insist on the establishment of an independent, fully sovereign state of Palestine on the 1967 borders, with east Jerusalem as its capital." A joint statement from the two ministers urged an immediate end "to all acts of violence, killing and targeting of civilians and civilian establishments".

QatarEnergy pauses LNG shipments through Red Sea, seeking security advice

Monitoring Desk
DOHA: QatarEnergy, one of the world's largest exporters of liquefied natural gas, has stopped sending tankers via the Red Sea although production continues, a source with knowledge of the matter told Reuters on Monday. At least four tankers used to carry Qatari LNG were held up over the weekend after US and British forces carried out air and sea strikes on Yemen in response to Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea, part of a route that accounts for about 15% of the world's shipping traffic. The Al Ghariya, Al Huwaila and Al Nuaman had loaded LNG at Ras Laffan in Qatar and were supposed to head to the Suez Canal but stopped off the coast of Oman on Jan. 14, according to LSEG shiptracking data. The Al Rekayyat, which was heading back to Qatar, stopped

along its route on Jan. 13 in the Red Sea. "It is a pause to get security advice, if passing (through the) Red Sea remains unsafe we will go via the Cape," said a source with direct knowledge of the matter, referring to the considerably longer route around the Cape of Good Hope at Africa's southern tip. The Qatari government's International Media Office and QatarEnergy did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Shipowners and managers of the four vessels including Teekay Shipping Glasgow, Pronav Ship Management, Nakilat Shipping Qatar Ltd and Shell's shipping and chartering arm STASCO also did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Qatar, the world's second largest exporter of LNG, shipped more than 75 million metric tons of the fuel in 2023.

Mexico sent 25,000 troops to Acapulco after Hurricane Otis. But it hasn't stopped the violence

Monitoring Desk
MEXICO CITY: The Mexican government sent 25,000 troops to Acapulco after the resort was hit by Hurricane Otis on Oct. 25, but apparently that hasn't stopped the violence this week. The main Acapulco business chamber reported that gang threats and attacks have caused about 90% of the city's passenger vans to stop running, affecting the resort's main form of transport. The chamber said the violence was forcing businesses to close early on Thursday and Friday. "Organized groups of people who have no conscience or commitment to Acapulco have committed criminal acts in broad daylight, threatening civilians with direct armed attacks, and this caused 90% of public transportation to

shut down," wrote Alejandro Martinez Sidney, president of the National Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Services in Acapulco. "If this situation continues, we will be forced to close businesses," he wrote in a statement Thursday. The problem continued into Friday, with few vans or buses seen in the streets. Martinez Sidney was apparently referring to attacks on the privately-owned and operate passenger vans in recent days. Local media reported that at least three vans had been burned, a practice that gangs often use to enforce extortion demands for daily protection payments from van drivers. The Category 5 hurricane killed 52 people and left 32 missing, and severely damaged almost all of the resort's hotels.



Britain's Secretary of State for Defence Grant Shapps gives a speech at Lancaster House, in London, Britain.

Five die trying to cross Channel to UK in freezing cold

Monitoring Desk
CALAIS: Five migrants died and a sixth was in critical condition on Sunday after trying to reach Britain from northern France in freezing temperatures, the French maritime authority said. More than 30 people were rescued, the maritime prefecture said in a statement. The fatalities were the first reported migrant deaths on the Channel in 2024. Authorities said four migrants died overnight, while a fifth body was found later on the beach. The group was at-

tempting to reach a vessel off the resort town of Wimereux when their small boat got into difficulty around two am, the maritime prefecture said. The crew of a French tow vessel, the Abeille Normandie, went to the rescue and spotted "unconscious and lifeless people" in the water, an official said, estimating the water temperature at nine degrees Celsius. Along the Wimereux embankment a journalist saw items of clothing and shoes abandoned by the migrants.

