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Perpetrators of May 9 incidents facing judicial process: PM

Says ECP would ensure that nobody should get the impression that any person was made a target for his political affiliation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Sunday said the incidents of May 9 were still being investigated and action should be taken against those involved in them.

Speaking in a private television channel programme, he said those who perpetrated the incidents on May 9 were facing the judicial process.

Many persons were still avoiding the courts and were in hiding, he said adding they should have sur-

rendered before the law to avail their legal rights but now they would face obstacles in carrying out their political activities related to the elections.

He said the Election Commission would ensure that nobody should get the impression that any person was made a target for his political affiliation.

To a question, he said the leader of the house and leader of the opposition in the National Assembly agreed to his name and he was appointed as the care-

taker prime minister.

He said he was supported by many people including his teachers to reach the level of attainment in his life.

The prime minister said the people of Pakistan would elect their representatives on February 8 and his government would carry out a peaceful transfer of power to them.

By the morning of February 9, it would be known whom the people had elected, he observed.

He said the govern-

ment of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) failed to resolve problems of governance during its tenure as it lacked political maturity and got involved in confrontation with the institutions.

Talking about the issues of Balochistan, he said once militants realized that they would have to lay down their arms, the problems would be settled.

PM Kakar was of the view that the sanctity of the

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QUETTA: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki in a group photo with Caretaker Provincial Ministers and Advisors to luncheon hosted by Chief Minister.



KABUL: Ameer Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (JUI) Maulana Fazlur Rehman along with delegation meeting with Vice Prime Minister Afghanistan Maulvi Abdul Kabeer.

Fazal in Afghanistan to discuss regional security issues

KABUL (INP): Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Sunday reached Kabul, Afghanistan to hold talks on regional and security issues amid a spike in cross-border attacks.

According to party spokesperson, the JUI-F chief - who is on maiden visit to Afghanistan in nearly 10 years - was welcomed by interim Afghan Foreign Minister Ameer Khan.

Fazl last visited Afghanistan in 2013 and met then-president Hamid Karzai.

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), the JUI-F said Fazlur Rehman departed for Afghanistan with a high-level delegation of party leaders, including

Maulana Abdul Wasi, Maulana Salahuddin, Maulana Jamaluddin, Maulana Salimuddin Shamzai, Aslam Ghauri and others.

During the visit, Fazlur Rehman will hold meetings with the Afghan Taliban leaders and discuss the regional and security situation, the statement noted.

It is pertinent to mention here that the representative of the Taliban government and Afghan envoy in Islamabad had officially invited Maulana Fazlur Rehman a few days ago to visit Afghanistan on behalf of his government.

Relations between the Taliban government and Pakistan have seen a rapid

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Luncheon hosted for caretaker Ministers & Advisors: Caretaker Govt playing effective role to restore peace & resolve public issues as per mandate, Domki

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki has stated that the interim government is playing effective role for restoration of peace and resolving the issues faced by the masses, as per its mandate.

He said that the development projects pending for long time are being executed. The inauguration of the communication project of the Quetta Development Package has been made while other ongoing projects would also be inaugurated under Quetta Package soon.

The Chief Minister mentioned that the care-

taker provincial government launched the Health Card programme in the province under which more than 2.2 million families got the quality facilities in 1200 hospitals of the country.

Moreover, the Sibbi-Hamari railway section and Bolan Mail were restored while on the other hand, the computerized local and domicile certificates, heirs certificates and arms licenses were issued.

These details were shared by the caretaker Chief Minister while speaking on occasion of the luncheon hosted for the caretaker provincial ministers and advisors here on Sunday.

Mir Ali Mardan Domki said it has been priority to complete collective nature projects for restoring law and order and resolving the issues of masses.

The Chief Minister vowed that we would continue to bring improvement in the governance and serve the masses with sincerity whatever possible in the available time.

He praised the caretaker ministers and advisors for utilizing their capabilities to complete the mission of public welfare.

The Chief Minister said that we would leave the

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Achakzai welcomes former promising cricketer: Former Intl. cricketer Ahmed Shahzad promises to establish cricket Academy in Quetta

Caretaker Provincial Minister for Information praises Ahmed Shahzad for raising voice for inclusion of Quetta players in PSL

QUETTA: The former international cricketer and member of national squad, Ahmed Shahzad has announced to establish his cricket academy in Quetta for nurturing young cricket talent for the national and international level matches.

He said that he wants to bring his (Ahmed Shahzad) cricket academy in Quetta for he would be needing the land and infrastructure.

The former international cricketer vowed to contribute to the development of cricket at the grassroots level, providing

opportunities for talented youngsters to receive proper coaching and mentorship, potentially paving the way for future representation in national and international cricket.

Ahmed Shahzad was addressing a press conference along with the caretaker Provincial Minister for Information, Jan Achakzai here at the Sikandar Jamali Auditorium in Civil Secretariat on Sunday.

He said that he got lot of love and affection from Quetta, and he would remain connected with it for rest of his life.

He said that the manner he was welcomed and treated is really memorable for him.

He went on to say that the love he got from people of Quetta, he did not get anywhere, so he wants to do much for the people of Balochistan.

Ahmed Shahzad also mentioned that there is a great potential of cricket among youngsters of the province, what had been lacking the desired opportunities for them to prove it. He said that it would be his utmost endeavour to

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QUETTA: Provincial General Secretary Mulin League (N) Jamal Shah Kakar along with other leaders lead the rally to launch of the Balochistan Election campaign.

Political parties urged to make efforts to address issues related to minorities' rights

QUETTA (APP): Center for Social Justice (CSJ) and Minority Forum Pakistan organized a public assembly titled "Effective Representation of Minorities in Elections" organized in Quetta as part of the mobilization and advocacy campaign launched in connection with the elections 2024.

The event was joined by representatives of the political parties including Rauf Lala from Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Agha Gul from National Party, Anita Irfan from Pakistan Muslim League-N and representative from Jamiat Ulema Islam-F who presented the position of their political parties regarding minorities rights and agreed to take practical steps to address the outstanding issues faced by minorities.

Executive Director of CSJ Peter Jacob stated that public representatives associated with political parties

required public opinion and support to introduce legislation regarding any matter concerning human rights, so that the public could keep an eye on the progress of political representatives and convince them to take steps to address the human rights challenges, said a news release issued here the other day.

Suneel Malik presented the findings of the manifest assessment report "Promises to Keep and Miles to Go" regarding the assessment of the Delivery of the Pledges about Minorities' Rights in Elections Manifestos, and added that political parties have failed to take effective actions to fulfill the pledges they make before elections.

He further added that the political parties must not forget their commitments to the electorate, instead, they must focus on actions to implement the

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Spokesman says: ECP secretary to resume duties after recovery

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Secretary of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Omar Hamid Khan, currently on medical leave due to health issues, will come back to his duties once he gets better.

In response to rumours surrounding the resignation of the ECP secretary, the ECP spokesman clarified that the Election Commission's work is being efficiently handled by the two Special Secretaries during the Secretary's absence.

Secretary Omar Hamid Khan is an intelligent and hardworking officer who has fulfilled his responsibilities admirably, the spokesman added.

Five killed in firing incident on passenger bus in Parachinar

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least four people, including a woman, lost their lives and three others were injured in a firing incident on a passenger bus in Parachinar, the Kurram District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. According to the police spokesman, on Sunday, a passenger bus was heading from Parachinar to Kohat when unknown assailants carried out the attack, resulting in the killing of four people and injuring three others.



QUETTA: Caretaker Provincial Minister for Information Jan Achakzai along with National Cricketer Ahmed Shahzad addressing a Press Conference. Provincial Information Secretary Imran Khan is also present.

Don't pay attention to rumours, ECP fully functional: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan (ECP), said that the Secretary Election Commission was facing some health issues for sometime.

"We pray to Allah for his complete and speedy recovery", the Federal Minister of Information said.

The minister said that ECP was fully functional and there was no crisis of any kind.

Preliminary lists of polling stations published by ROs in Balochistan

Independent Report

QUETTA: The preliminary lists of the polling stations of respective election constituencies have been published by all Returning Officers in Balochistan on Sunday.

This was announced by the Provincial Election Commissioner of Balochistan, Ejaz Anwar Chohan in an official statement issued here on Sunday.

The PEC said that any voter or candidate can submit the objection on the preliminary lists of polling stations to the District Returning Officers by January 11, 2024. The DROs would give judgments on the objections or suggestions by January 17, 2024. According to the PEC, the final lists of polling stations would be displayed before 15 days of the general elections.



QUETTA: Senior Politician, Nawabzada Haji Lashkari Raisani cutting ribbon during the inauguration ceremony of Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) Election Office, in Quetta.

Social media giants, services face disruptions as internet disrupted across Pak

ISLAMABAD (INP): Internet services were disrupted across Pakistan as users reported difficulties accessing popular social media platforms, including X, Facebook and YouTube on Sunday, Internet Monitor Downtime said.

According to Downtime, the social media platforms, especially the website versions have been down shortly after 5pm local time.

Users in major cities such as Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad began experiencing difficulties accessing social media sites shortly after 4pm. Additionally, users also complained about sluggish internet services.

A sharp rise in connection outages on YouTube, X and Facebook was seen in Dera Bugti's graphs.

The reason behind the widespread disruption is yet not clear as the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has not issued any statement.

Bilawal says we will take back Lahore of Bhuttos from Patwaris

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said he will take back Lahore of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto to old politicians and Patwaris with the support of poor people of the city.

Bilawal addressed a gathering of party workers in the National Assembly constituency NA-127.

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Bilawal said the city of Lahore is not the Lahore of any businessman or a cricketer player, it is the Lahore of Shaheed Bhutto and it is everyone's misunderstanding to scare the PPP [leadership and workers] by martyring its Jialas (workers) and Bibi Benazir

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11,000 teams formed to achieve target of immunization: Balochistan set to initiate seven-day anti-polio campaign to vaccinate around 2.6 million children

Independent Report

QUETTA: Ali is set to initiate seven-day anti-polio campaign in Balochistan from today (Monday). The Coordinator Emergency Operation Center (EOC) for Eradication of Polio in Balochistan, Syed Zahid Shah told that all the necessary arrangements have been finalized for the polio immunization campaign in the province.

According to the EOC Coordinator, approximately 2.596 million children below five years of age would be administered anti-polio vaccine in all districts of the province.

In all 11,399 teams have been formed to achieve the target of immunization in the province. These are included 9,116 mobile teams, 958 fixed site teams and 630 transit points teams.

marked, adding he commended.

However, he urged the parents to ensure vaccination of their children against the virus in the upcoming campaign.

Undoubtedly the absence of any reported polio cases in the province since January 2021 indicates the effectiveness of previous vaccination efforts and surveillance systems. Continuous vaccination campaigns and surveillance are vital in maintaining this disease-free status and working towards the ultimate goal of complete polio eradication.

Therefore, it's important to continue such campaigns, raise awareness, and ensure that every child receives polio drops to sustain this positive trend and prevent any resurgence of polio in Balochistan.

Hindu nationalists denigrate India's founder Gandhi for advocating Hindu-Muslim unity: WP article

WASHINGTON (APP): Seventy-five years after his assassination, India's founding father Mahatma Gandhi, who is regarded in the West as the exemplar of nonviolent protest, has become a casualty of India's lurch toward Hindu nationalism, a prominent Indian journalist wrote in a leading U.S. newspaper, while highlighting that his killer is now being reimagined as a martyr and hero.

At the outset, the article pointed out that on Gandhi's 154th birthday anniversary, three of the

top 10 trends on X (formerly Twitter) in India celebrated Nathuram Godse, the Hindu fundamentalist who assassinated the Indian leader. A month before that, it said, at one of the biggest Hindu festivals in India, posters of Godse were displayed along with those of Hindu deities in the state neighbouring Gandhi's birthplace of Gujarat.

Godse opposed partition, felt Gandhi was pro-Muslim and feared that Hindus would continue to lose ground if Gandhi remained as an influence on the government.

Godse was a member of the Hindu nationalist paramilitary organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is the ideological fountainhead of Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Ms. Ayyub said.



QUETTA: Muslim League (PML-N) Leader, Noor Muhammad Dumar along with Dostain Domki and others are addressing a Press conference.

QWP for general elections on time

PESHAWAR (APP): Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Sunday rejected the Senate resolution seeking the postponement of the February 8 polls and demanded that the general election must be held on its scheduled date without any delay.

Speaking at a press conference in Shabqadar tehsil in the Charsadda district, he said the Senate resolution demanding a delay in holding the elections was meaningless.

Aftab Sherpao said that the election must be held to enable the people to elect their representatives. Criticizing the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Sherpao said that its popularity graph had started falling, but it was using the so-called regime change theory in a face-saving effort. He urged the people to use their right to vote to send their representatives to the assemblies so that they could work for the uplift of

their areas. "We will spare no effort to serve the people," he vowed.

He said that his party had always served the people as it believed in working for the development of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

About the denial of a level playing field, he said that the nomination papers of the PTI candidates had been accepted so this complaint was not based on reality.

He said the PTI was getting unprecedented relief from the courts.

Aftab Sherpao said the voters must not fall for catchy slogans as these were meant to hoodwink them. He advised the voters to check the track record of the candidates before casting their ballots.

He said that nobody cared to raise their voice for the rights of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa facing a financial crunch.

He said all uplift projects in KP were placed on the back burner.

Karachi industrialists need security not advisory: Shakoor

KARACHI (INP): Pashan Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor here Sunday said that the industrialists of megacity Karachi need security and not advisory.

He said the industry is the backbone of the national economy, but the industrialists face crime, extortion and kidnapping for ransom. They need hundred percent safety from these threats.

He said the industrial areas of Karachi need peace and security. They need better infrastructure and a smooth supply of gas, water and electricity. He said the performance of police should be improved to end thefts, robberies and kidnappings. He said without introducing reforms in our policing system we can't give peace to our city.

He demanded that recruitment in police from top to bottom should only be made on merit, without any political influence. He said in fact all government vacancies should be filled through the public service commission.

push to the economy it is necessary to boost industry, but it can't be done without peace and security. He said crime is on the rise in Karachi and the traders and industrialists are either closing down their businesses and industries or shifting them to other cities. He said no one is ready to invest in Karachi and if this situation continued the megacity would face a serious economic crisis and huge unemployment.

He said road networks in the industrial estates should be improved besides better public transport facilities to improve labour mobility. He said lingering public transport projects including the KCR should be started and expedited.

He said the trade and industry of Karachi badly need protection as the growing crime has become a serious threat for the economic survival of the megacity. He requested the federal and provincial governments and the chief of army staff to focus on the law and order of Karachi for the sake of the national economy.

They termed performance of the interim government as an exemplary.

They vowed to play their due role and use potential for the public welfare continuing the initiatives for resolving their problems in the limited time and available resources.



LAHORE: Players participating in 100 meter race during Inter-Division Annual Sports Calendar Athletics Championship at Punjab Stadium, in Provincial Capital.

Nawaz Sharif should vie for presidency not premiership: Mushahid

ISLAMABAD (INP): Senator Mushahid Hussain has advised Nawaz Sharif to become president instead of vying for the prime minister's office.

Chairman Senate standing committee for defence Mushahid Hussain was talking to a private television channel in an exclusive interview.

"In view of ground realities and knowing Mian Nawaz Sharif, I will tell him to shun the premiership. It will be better for the country and the democracy that he becomes the head of state," Mushahid said.

"I don't want him to be expelled from office fourth time. Now it is a hybrid-plus system, not conducive for Nawaz Sharif, as three among six prime ministers have been

jailed," he added.

"Nawaz Sharif is a king, he makes strong decisions like nuclear and CPEC," Senator Mushahid said.

"He has become prime minister of the country thrice, and mother of all deals is that no big distance would remain between the 'elite' and the 'street' any long. This distance should be ended, and I think it will happen," Senator Syed said. Mushahid Hussain Syed said that the Army Chief's US visit was very pleasant, "see those that were more favourites, have now become favourites to a lesser extent". "It is fighting between 'dear ones', in which it used to be said that 'return back' you would not be said anything, he said.

Govt not using available legal, political options for Aafia release: Dr Fowzia

ISLAMABAD (INP): There are many political and legal options for seeking early release of Dr Aafia Siddiqui from the US prison, but sadly the government of Pakistan is simply not utilizing these options for the reasons better known to it, said Aafia Siddiqui's lawyer Dr Fowzia Siddiqui, addressing an Aafia Siddiqui Conference here, organized by Team Aafia Pakistan.

She said that the nations that don't respect their daughters would never grow and prosper. She said Pakistan is facing problems because our rulers sold the daughters of the nation. She said that the lawyer of Aafia Clive Smith was

shocked to know about torture and sexual abuse meted out to Aafia. She asked the Pakistani youth if they would remain silent over these atrocities.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) KP chapter ameer Senator Mushtaq Ahmed Khan said that Aafia is the most oppressed woman of this century. She is innocent and never ever involved in terrorism or money laundering. He said due to the laudable role of the Islamabad High Court there are some developments in the Aafia Siddiqui case.

Ji Azad Kashmir chapter ameer Dr Mushtaq Ahmed said that the illegal detention of Aafia Siddiqui is a great test for the Pakistani nation.



QUETTA: President of Young Nurses Association Irshad Ahmed Baloch speaks during a press conference.

Former Intl. cricketer.

Continued from page 1 enable the young cricketers from the province to play in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) as well as the national and international level cricket.

He pledged that we have to produce cricket's super stars from the province in time to come.

Earlier, the caretaker Minister Information welcomed the former international cricketer Ahmed Shahzad in Quetta.

He said that Ahmed Shahzad had been invited to come to Quetta. He (Ahmed

Shahzad) has heartfelt affection with Balochistan, and he always raised voice for the talent from the province.

Jan Achakzai also recalled that he (Ahmed Shahzad) had also raised voice to include the cricketers of Quetta in the PSL.

He hoped that the former promising cricketer would continue to play his part for promotion of cricket in the province and encourage the young lot to be part of the national and international cricket in future.

Fazal in Afghanistan..

Continued from page 1 bombings since the Afghan Taliban came to power in August 2021.

Moreover, Islamabad-based think tank Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies - in its report - stated that over 82pc of terrorism-related deaths in 2023 resulted from attacks perpetrated by three major groups TTP and its subsidiaries Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan, Islamic State of Khorasan and the Balochistan Liberation Army. JUI-F's Fazlur Rehman, on the other hand, expressed grave concern over the peace and security situation in the country after his party came under attack thrice in the last six months.

Recently, the JUI-F's chief convoy was targeted in a brazen attack at the Yarik Interchange in Dera Ismail Khan.



QUETTA: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki presides over the high level meeting of Balochistan Development Authority.

Fazlur Rehman 'backs' delay in general elections

ISLAMABAD (INP): Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has extended support to a resolution adopted by Senate, seeking a delay in February 8 general elections.

Speaking to a private news channel, the JUI-F chief said that it won't make any difference if elections were delayed in the wake of country's security situation.

The Upper House of Parliament adopted a resolution, which was moved by independent Senator Dilawar Khan during a session with only 15 lawmakers in attendance. It sought delay in general elections in the light of extreme weather in hilly areas and the deteriorating security situation.

However, the passage of the resolution was strongly criticised by major political parties - including PPP, PML-N and PTI. Moreover, PPP and PTI served notices to their senators, Gurdeep Singh and Bahramand Tangi, who remained abstained from voting.

Extending support to the resolution, Fazlur Rehman said that it reflects the party's stance as the election environment wasn't visible, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan amid terror attacks.

The politician, time by time, had expressed grave concern over the peace and security situation in the country after his party came under attack

thrice in the last six months. "The authorities should realize the seriousness of the situation and an environment should be made so that we can conduct our election campaign easily," he added. However, he said, if the elections are held on time, the JUI-F will participate and won't not run away.

"The Constitution upheld the right to vote for every citizen of Pakistan and the Election Commission of Pakistan was bound to conduct free and fair polls in contingency upon inclusivity and ensuring the participation of all regional people."

"The vote turnout in colder areas remains notably high during the moderate weather conditions.

3 more judges LHC included in ET

ISLAMABAD (Online): Election Commission of Pakistan has added 3 more judges from Lahore High Court (LHC) in the Election Tribunal, the notification of which has also been issued.

According to the notification, Justice Shakeel Ahmed, Justice Ahmad Nadeem Arshad and Justice Tariq Nadeem have been included in the Election Tribunal. Three judges will hear the appeals against the decisions of the RO to reject or approve the nomination papers.

It should be noted that elections will be held across the country on February 8, nomination papers have been submitted by the candidates for the general elections. Various political parties are also continuing to issue party tickets to their candidates.

Raziq removal from post of MD Sendak challenged in IHC

ISLAMABAD (Online): The matter of removal of Raziq Sanjrani, brother of Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani, from the post of MD Sendak has been challenged in the Islamabad High Court (IHC).

Raziq Sanjrani filed a petition in IHC through lawyer Raja Inam Amin Minhas. Raziq Sanjrani's reinstatement petition has been scheduled for hearing today (Monday).

Chief Justice Amir Farooq will hear the case. Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar Haq Kakar approved the removal of Raziq Sanjrani.

The Ministry of Petroleum had de-notified Raziq Sanjrani. Raziq Sanjrani was also dismissed from permanent government service.

Political.

Continued from page 1 pledges they make in the election manifesto to improve the human rights situation in general, and religious freedom and minorities rights in particular.

The campaign "Main Bhi Pakistan Hun" not only awakens public opinion regarding the demands, but also reminds the political parties of the promises made in the election manifesto regarding minorities' rights, and demands concrete measures to address issues faced by minorities.

The representatives of political parties, lawyers, teachers, youth, social activists, and religious leaders participated in the awami assembly and vowed to fully participate in the general elections by supporting the five demands presented in the public assembly.



KARACHI: People warm their hands on bonfire to save themselves from cold waves during the winter season, in Karachi.

Year after worst power breakdown in country's, investigation complete

ISLAMABAD (Online): The investigation into the worst power breakdown in the country's history has been completed after one year.

The bureaucracy saved the senior officers by putting the responsibility of the loss of billions of rupees on the junior officers.

According to the documents found online, the investigation of the largest power breakdown in the history of the country has been completed on January 23, 2023. In its report, the investigative committee blamed the loss of more than 80 billion rupees on three junior officers.

Under this, 2 deputy managers, one shift in charge and one manager power control center have been made a scapegoat while the mem-

bers of the investigation committee have been saved for the power break down on January 23, 2023. The original responsible officers have been saved.

According to the report, Deputy MD System Operations Ali Zain resigned to avoid action and as per the SOPs, Deputy MD Ali Zain was primarily responsible for the power control system across the country.

The report further states that during the investigation it has also been revealed that the electricity transmission system worth 3 thousand billion rupees is running without SOPs.

It should be remembered that on January 23, 2023, Pakistan was shocked by a 20-hour long power breakdown.



KARACHI: Hindu minority couples attend their mass wedding ceremony in Provincial Capital. The Pakistan Hindu Council organized the collective wedding for some 122 couples belonging to low income groups.

ECP rebuts PTI claims of deprivation of level-playing field

ISLAMABAD (INP): Refuting all the allegations levelled by the PTI that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had kept the party deprived of a level-playing field in a run-up to the general elections scheduled to be held on February 8, 2024, the ECP on Sunday prayed to the Supreme Court of Pakistan to reject the PTI's petition with fine.

In its reply submitted to the apex court in the level-playing field case, the election commission said that on the SC's order, its officials had a meeting with the PTI leaders at which they assured the latter that there would be no discrimination against them and that the

party would be treated at par with other parties. "In this connection, the ECP also issued instructions to the IGP of all the four provinces," the commission said in its reply.

It further said that by December 26, 2023, PTI had filed 33 complaints from across the country.

The commission also provided to the SC details of the steps it had taken after it received these complaints.

"The IGPs and chief secretaries of the four provinces as well as the returning officers (ROs) submitted their reports to the ECP," read the reply.

Govt is committed to provide all fundamental rights to trans community: Mushaal Mullick

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussain Mullick here on Sunday said that the government was committed to provide all fundamental rights to the transgender community across the country at gross root level.

She was addressing at a workshop on wellness and communication development for non-binary and transgender persons, orga-

nized by AQ Khan Foundation. She said that over 0.3 million transgenders were registered with concerned government department and the government was planning to a mass campaign with the name of "Dukhtar" rest of the country for the protection, jobs and skilled programs for trans community.

Transgender persons are guaranteed all fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan. In addition, the Act recognises transgender per-

sons' right to property inheritance, voting, education, employment, healthcare, assembly, access to public places and to hold public office, she said.

Mushaal underlined that trans community was playing its vital role for the development of the country and they were contributing at every level with their sincere efforts and hard working.

She said that the government would constitute committees at district level for collecting the proper

data of transgenders, to provide the education, health care, jobs, social security, social media trainings, vocational trainings and other opportunities to make them a productive and economically independent citizens. "We all are human beings and have the rights to do every positive act for the development and promotion of the society and state", she added. The SAPM also appreciated the best efforts of Dareecha organization for the development of trans community.



ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussein Mullick, is being presented a shield at the conclusion of the workshop on "Wellness and Communication Development for non-binary and transgender individuals".



ISLAMABAD: Additional Chief Secretary, Gilgit-Baltistan Captain Retd Mushtaq Ahmed addressing a press conference at a local hotel.

Change in lifestyle crucial in managing stomach diseases; Dr. Hyder

ISLAMABAD (APP): Renowned consultant Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist Dr. Hyder Abbasi emphasized the pivotal role of lifestyle changes in effectively managing stomach diseases.

Addressing the interconnected nature of mental and physical health, Dr. Hyder underscored its significance in comprehensively addressing stomach-related health issues. Abdominal discomfort, a commonly experienced ailment, becomes a matter of concern when it was persistent and accompanied by alarming symptoms, he said in an interview with Pakistan Television News on Sunday.

He identified red flags such as unexplained weight loss, chronic constipation, or traces of blood in urine, indicating the need for a more in-depth investigation into the underlying causes.

Dr. Hyder recommended undergoing a colonoscopy test as part of a comprehensive examination of the intestines for individuals aged 50 and

above. However, he acknowledged that barriers such as carelessness and a lack of resources often deter many from pursuing necessary diagnostic procedures.

Dr. Hyder expressed concern over the premature attribution of urinary issues to hemorrhoids, leading individuals to self-medicate without a proper diagnosis.

He highlighted the unfortunate realization that individuals often become aware of the true underlying problem, such as colorectal cancer, only when the condition exacerbates.

Dr. Hyder also shed light on inflammatory bowel syndromes (IBS), presenting a unique challenge in diagnosis. Symptoms like abdominal pain, changes in bowel habits, and constipation can point to IBS, he added.

Unlike other conditions, IBS often doesn't present clear signs on medical scans. Counseling and a holistic approach to diagnosis and treatment are effective in managing IBS.

Int'l workshop on 'Ethical Research in Clinical Trials' to be held next month

ISLAMABAD (APP): Two-day International workshop on "Ethical Research in Clinical Trials" will be held under the auspices of COMSTECH and UARS in February to address the challenges of research integrity in clinical trials in low-middle-income countries and propose the best suitable guidelines to improve the quality of research in this domain.

The workshop, scheduled to be held from February 07-09 in Cairo, Egypt, is aimed at imparting knowledge and training about research integrity and creating a network of professionals working in the field for continuous learning and exchanges.

According to an official of COMSTECH, the meeting and its workshop will help devise solutions for the challenges faced in clinical trials by low-middle income country.

Students, scientists, researchers, experts, healthcare managers, gov-

ernment officials, think tanks, health NGO's, policy makers from the domain of multicenter clinical trials research from across the world and global south countries can register for the workshop for physical or virtual participation.

Globally the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge enjoys a place of distinction, and the public expects to reap considerable benefit from the creative and innovative contributions of scientists. As science becomes increasingly tangled with major social, philosophical, economic, and political issues, scientists become more accountable to the larger society of which they are a part.

Therefore, it is more important than ever that those individual scientists and their institutions periodically reassess the values, and professional practices that guide their research as well as their efforts to perform their research work with integrity.

KCEU flays Indian blames against Raja, Farooq

ISLAMABAD (APP): Belgium-based Kashmir Council European Union (KCEU) Chairman Ali Raza Syed has strongly condemned the Indian allegations levelled against Farooq Siddiqi alias Farooq Papa and Raja Muzaffar Khan, the prominent Kashmiri figures based in North America.

In a statement issued on Saturday, Chair of KCEU Ali Raza Syed said that Indian allegations against Farooq Siddiqi and Raja Muzaffar of Kashmir Global Council (KGC) are totally baseless and fabricated as they are out of Jammu and Kashmir for a long time and just focusing on the legitimate rights of the people of Kashmir.

He said, they are not involved in any illegal activities against the Indian government and the allegations against them are untrue and lack credible evidence.

Dr Fazal appointed as Dean Faculty of Education AIOU

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr. Arif Alvi has appointed Prof. Dr. Fazal-Ur-Rahman as the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) for the next three years.

The Ministry for Federal Education and Professional Training notified the university of his appointment, and the university has issued an official notification in this regard.

It is pertinent to mention here that according to the Act of AIOU, the President of Pakistan serves as the Chancellor of Allama Iqbal Open University. Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, congratulated Dr. Fazal on his appointment and expressed his hope that the faculty members under his guidance would work even harder towards the development of the university and aligning the curriculum with contemporary requirements.

Deans, faculty members and principal officers also congratulated Dr. Fazal and considered his appointment a positive omen for the prosperity and progress.

Contempt petition on resolution to postpone polls is likely to be held this week

ISLAMABAD (Online): The hearing on the petition filed for contempt of court on the resolution to postpone the general elections in the Senate is likely to be held this week.

It can also be objected to by the Supreme Court because the proceedings of the Senate cannot be challenged in any court.

Sources have said that the application filed against the decision to postpone the general elections in the Senate is likely to be processed this week. Objection can also be raised on the application and it is possible that it may be ap-

pointed to the bench and dismissed after a regular hearing because no court including Supreme Court of Pakistan has jurisdiction to issue any order against the internal proceedings of senate, all proceedings are protected by law.

It should be noted that a petition for contempt of court has been filed in the Supreme Court against the chairman of the Senate and members of the Senate. A resolution was passed in the Senate to postpone the elections. The petition was filed in the Supreme Court on behalf of lawyer Ishtiaq Ahmed Mirza.

Petition to remove Imran from party chairmanship likely to be heard Tuesday

ISLAMABAD (Online): There is a strong possibility that the Supreme Court will hear the petition filed by PTI founder Imran Khan against the decision of the Islamabad High Court on the issue of removal from the party chairmanship this week.

The application may be fixed for hearing tomorrow (Tuesday) or the day after tomorrow (Wednesday).

It should be noted that

the Election Commission's decision to remove him from the Assembly membership and party chairmanship was challenged in the petition. In the petition, the Election Commission and the Speaker of the National Assembly have been made parties.

It was opinionated in application that application was filed in Islamabad High Court (IHC) during the hearing in Lahore High Court (LHC).

Attaching Kashmiris' properties by Indian NIA has become a new normal practice in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (APP): Attaching Kashmiris' properties on one pretext or the other by the Indian dreaded probe agency, National Investigation Agency (NIA), has become a new normal in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

According to a report released by Kashmir Media Service on Sunday, the NIA attached property of a civilian, Mushtaq Ahmad, in Chanapora area of Srinagar yesterday.

It said NIA has already confiscated the office of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) for spearheading the movement for peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

The IIOJK authorities have already seized scores of properties worth crores belonging to pro-freedom Kashmiris and Jamaat-Islami of the territory, it lamented. The report said the Indian authorities have also identified hundreds of properties belonging to pro-freedom people in the occupied territory to be attached which is a sheer political vendetta on part of the Modi regime.

It said Indian troops are regularly destroying the Kashmiris' houses during violent cordon and search operations CASOs, adding the RSS-backed Modi regime is hell bent on depriving Kashmiris of their land, properties and jobs.

The report deplored that demolition of properties and illegal confiscations are part of India's systematic settler colonialism campaign in the IIOJK.

The Modi regime, it said, is using every brutal tactic to muzzle the freedom voice of the Kashmiris but its nefarious tactics will not deter IIOJK people from pursuing the freedom cause and the freedom movement will be taken to its logical conclusion at all costs. The report also urged the world community and international human rights organizations to take notice of the Modi regime's brutal actions in IIOJK and help resolve the long-pending Kashmir dispute.

02 injured in firing incident in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): Two people were injured in a firing incident on Sunday when an unidentified motorcyclist opened fire on Dolphin Police personnel near PIMS Hospital in Islamabad. According to police spokesman, the assailants fired upon Dolphin Police, prompting a retaliatory response. In the exchange of gunfire, two suspects were injured and subsequently apprehended.



ISLAMABAD: Children are enjoying swings at Sukh Chayn Park in the Federal Capital.

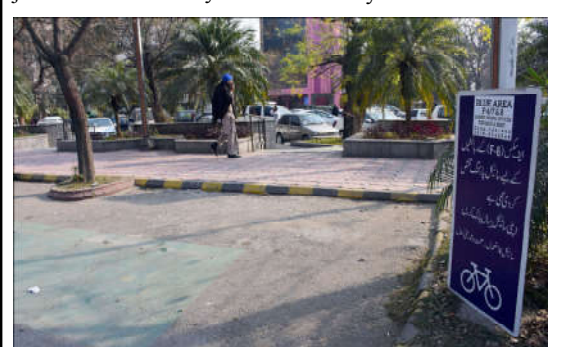
APHC expresses concern over continued illegal detention Hurriyat leaders

ISLAMABAD (APP): The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has expressed serious concern over the continued illegal detention of thousands of Kashmiris, including Hurriyat leaders and activists languishing in different jails in India Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). According to Kashmir Media Service, the APHC spokesman, in a statement issued in Srinagar, said that the freedom-loving people of Kashmir had been facing the worst type of Indian state terrorism for demanding their inalienable right to self-determination.

He said that despite the Indian suppression and repression, the exemplary steadfastness displayed by the people of Kashmir had jolted Indian military arro-

gance and utterly bulldozed its nefarious designs to break the will of the Kashmiri people.

The spokesman, denouncing the confiscation of properties and houses of the people of Kashmir by the Indian Bharatiya Janata Party regime with the help of Indian armed forces, urged the United Nations Human Rights Council and other rights organizations to visit IIOJK and monitor the worst situation where people were being imprisoned in their houses, having no right to talk and walk freely in the territory. He also urged the international community to support the Kashmiris' just struggle for the right to self-determination, help stop the massive human rights abuses perpetrated by Indian forces.



ISLAMABAD: A board displayed for people parked their cycles alongside a road outside super market in the Federal Capital.

Mobile Registration Centers of BISP to be operational soon

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Mobile Registration Vehicle Centers to facilitate the registration process for the intending beneficiaries of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), belonging to the remote areas of the country, are likely to be operational soon.

The Mobile Registration Centers will enable the deserving women residing in the far-flung areas to access the registration facilities through mobile vehicles.

According to an official source, the process of induction of Mobile Vans, which started in August, has entered into its last stages. A total of 25 Mobile Vans is being included to serve as Mobile Registration Centers of the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) which will facilitate those who were unable to access the registration facility. The source revealed that as many as 19 Mobile Registration Centers are being established in the remote areas of Balochistan, five in Sindh and one in Islamabad in this phase. The Mobile Registration service is likely to be operational soon to facilitate the registration process of the beneficiaries residing in the far-off areas of the country.

It is pertinent to mention here that the BISP identifies the deserving beneficiaries through NSER and enroll them in the programme while it is for the first time in the country's history that people with special abilities and Transgenders have been included in the programme and can register.

Taobat – A nature lovers' paradise

ISLAMABAD (APP): Nature has bestowed Pakistan with countless bounties figuring mesmerizing views, tall pines, snow covered peaks, gushing brooks and rivers, green plains and hilly terrains. These matchless gifts of Nature from coasts of Karachi to towering peaks of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan amalgamate to present glamorous and enthralling views for visitors.

Standing tall among them is Taobat – a unique destination with its picturesque and captivating scenic beauty, nestled on the banks of River Neelum, in Gurez Valley of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Neelum valley, one of three regions of Gurez valley and the last station in Pakistani controlled AJK along Line of Control is some 200 kilometers from Muzaffarabad and 39 kilometers from Kel valley.

Having the history of centuries, this land was also explained as "one of the most beautiful scenes in Kashmir" by a British author Sir Roper Walter Lawrence who visited the region in 1895.

"It is the most beautiful scenes in all of Kashmir, where the tourmaline waters of the Kishenganga River are framed by mountain scarps of indescribable grandeur," Walter Lawrence had written in his book "The Valley of Kashmir."

Even after a vast time span of 13 decades, this place is as beautiful today as it was at the time of Walter Lawrence's visit.

Drive from Kel to Taobat is surely a mesmerizing journey leaving tourists in awe when they pass through beautiful villages of Machhal, Phulwai, Halmat, Janawai, Sardari and Makroon falling on way from Dawarian to Taobat.

Wooden cottages, enchanting waterfalls, flower-covered meadows, heavily forested mountains and a roaring river – all join together to present the look of 'Heaven on Earth,' for tourists travelling to Taobat on a road snaking through these small localities.

Sharda is the most picturesque spot on way to Taobat with its captivating landscape, springs and tree-covered hillsides and the houses built on steep slopes having their roofs partly stuck into mountain.

Being an ancient seat of knowledge and wisdom, the ruins of an old Buddhist University can still be found in Sharda.

"Visiting here is a real pleasure. Once you move towards Neelum valley, your eyes remain stuck to beautiful views," said Rashid Mahmood, a tourist from Islamabad. "Travelling on bumpy roads is

really thrilling. It is Nature all around on way to Taobat. This heavenly beauty leaves indelible prints on your mind."

As the tourists had to travel by jeeps from Kel to Taobat, they enjoy a thrilling journey and captivating views. Men grazing cattle and farming next to their wood houses and women strolling around wearing long black velvet gowns to arrange food and wood stock for winter, present a real primitive look.

Taobat, Krishanganga enters into Pakistani side Kashmir becoming the Neelum river and making the region awe inspiring where tourists even forget to wink their eyes. Taobat receives heavy snowfall during its six months long winter season from October to April.

"We face harsh winter. Snow engulfs our houses and pavements from December to March," remarked Nasir Ali, a resident of the area. "Our people have to gather ration and wood during summers and lock inside their houses during peak winter season."

Nasir informed that majority of local people work at corn, beans, potato and vegetable farms to earn their living. "People here commonly survive on farming and income from tourists with some opting for other professions."

Being in far flung region, the area lacks some most essential amenities like well equipped hospitals, paved roads, gas and higher education institutes.

"Although 60% tourists coming to Kashmir visit Taobat, yet the area still lacks basic amenities," Nasir said. "Even for communication, the tourists have to purchase special Scam SIMs as other networks do not operate here."



ISLAMABAD: A view of people on outing during dense fog covering surrounding areas of the Federal Capital.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent
Monday January 08, 2024

Commendable work

Thankfully, at least some of the checks and balances safeguarding the electoral process appear to be working as intended. There have been encouraging updates from all over the country about appellate tribunals reviewing and, in most cases, overturning the rejection of nomination papers by various returning officers.

Though the process is still ongoing, the tribunals have already cleared the path for scores of candidates who had previously been disbarred from participating in elections on various grounds. The rejection of papers, described in some contexts as 'wholesale' and 'based on flimsy reasoning' by observers, had disproportionately affected those who have been critical of the state, especially the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf. By the time the initial scrutiny was completed, most of the PTI's strongest candidates had been knocked out. This was followed by complaints that ROs in some constituencies had also withheld copies of their decisions, allegedly to prevent them from being appealed on time.

It now appears that many of those affected may have been right about being wronged. At least one judge hearing the appeals, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, is reported to have made remarks to the effect that the ROs in Islamabad and Rawalpindi had, in the majority of cases, rejected papers over petty issues which could have been resolved within five to 10 minutes in their offices. The question does arise as to why such hasty decisions were taken in the first place, but the affected candidates may take heart knowing that the appellate tribunals seem to be working independently and without fear or favour. As a result of the tribunals' decisions, many from PTI's top-tier leadership — what remains of it — are now back in the running. They include well-known names like Hammad Azhar, Atif Khan, Firdous Shamim Naqvi and Zulfi Bukhari, as well as other, less-prominent ones.

Though appeals filed by some other big names have been turned down, the party remains committed to participating in the elections, and it seems it will find a way to make do. The work of the appellate tribunals is commendable as it has restored a sense of fairness after the ugliness that marred the formal start of the electoral process. From snatching of papers to abductions of candidates, instances of state interference had been widely documented, casting a dark shadow on the legitimacy of the upcoming polls.

With the tribunals acting sensibly, a significant portion of the controversies surrounding the pending election will now die down, allowing parties and candidates to focus on their campaigns and strategise for their wins. With both local and international analysts repeatedly underscoring that a free and fair election is the only way out of the crises Pakistan is mired in, any effort to ensure that the exercise remains free of controversy should be encouraged and celebrated.



Muhammad Amir Rana

What if the doors of Prime Minister House had opened for the Baloch protesters demanding an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, and what if the president of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan had given them a chance to share their painful stories?

Wouldn't this have been a substantial confidence-building measure for a province suffering from insurgency, terrorism, bad governance, and economic crisis for decades?

The victims' families — currently camped out in the open in the midst of the Islamabad winter — had come for justice and needed empathetic treatment from the state. They were given a brutal reception by the police and heard spiteful

remarks from caretakers in the government.

If the caretakers' response to the protesters is taken as the response of Pakistan's institutions, it can only be interpreted as a sign that the centre remains unwilling to rethink its strategy for dealing with Balochistan.

If that is the case, how does one interpret the efforts by the security establishment to open a dialogue with Baloch society, especially its youth? Either the state institutions are confused, or they have been trapped by those who seek to spoil peace.

Stedman's theory of the spoiler problem in peace processes can help shed more light on this situation. The theory is a pillar in conflict studies: it defines spoilers as leaders and parties who believe that an emerging peace threatens their power, interests, and worldview.

Each spoiler is a distinct entity, and Stedman identifies four key challenges in managing spoilers: position (inside vs outside), number, goal type (limited, greedy, total), and locus (leadership vs followers). These factors influ-

ence how spoilers disrupt peace processes, as 'inside' spoilers use covert tactics, while 'outside' ones resort to overt violence.

In short, the Stedman theory can be described by thinking of a peace process as a fragile bridge being erected over a chasm of conflict. The spoilers are shadowy players who, driven by various motives, are determined to topple that bridge before it is complete.

The conflict in Balochistan is multifaceted, and the state and society are still struggling to find a strong bond for cohesion. In state policy, the province is considered a special case in all respects — from governance to resource distribution and political empowerment to security; everything has created a class of cronies.

The cronies are from diverse backgrounds, including state institutions, the political and tribal elite, religious clergy, bureaucracy, and contractors. They seek power and money from the crisis: resolving the conflict is never in their interest.

The state's interest lies in stability, and institu-

tions believe in maintaining the status quo. They see factors and actors challenging their order with suspicion. The state relies on the wisdom of its cronies, and it fears dialogue with actors who do not agree with its worldview and policies. If political compulsions build pressure to widen interactions with other stakeholders, the spoilers from the cronies club start sabotaging the process.

The reason is simple: Stedman identified their greed and the fear of losing the advantages they enjoy behind their destructive tendencies. The worst aspect of the process is that they advocate using coercive measures and continue constructing and widening their definition of 'enemy'.

For spoilers, all those who disagree with their policies, narratives, and worldview fall in the enemy category. This is interesting because the cronies themselves come from varied ethnic, religious, tribal, and social classes. They construct an exclusive and dichotomous definition of patriotism through which only they qualify to be patriots. For example, they portray themselves as

modern yet oppose progressive political and social ideas. They claim to be religiously moderate but make alliances with religious fanatics. Stigmatising and labelling adversaries as spoiler tactics to win the support of powerful institutions.

Spoilers not only destroy peace processes, but they also fail their patrons and create hurdles in the way of any effort for reconciliation and cohesion. They articulate the situation in a way that holds the key to peace and stability.

Balochistan's simmering discontent, fuelled by long-standing grievances, has defied repeated attempts at reconciliation. The state institutions have been experimenting with a host of measures to address the crisis, including giving amnesty. If we look deeper, the spoilers, who have somehow become 'custodians' of the peace process, can easily be identified. It is due to them that nothing changes.

They spoil the Aghaz-i-Haqooq-i-Balochistan package during the Pakistan Peoples Party government (2008-13). The PML-N government

(2013-18) followed in the same footsteps after making reconciliation with Baloch insurgent leaders a clause of the National Action Plan, announced in January 2015. The PTI government was no different in its approach. The security institutions also attempted to engage in a broader dialogue with the Baloch people, especially its youth. However, nothing really worked.

Security institutions often seek impunity for actions taken during conflicts, but the missing persons issue in Balochistan has become a critical human rights crisis. Spoilers have exacerbated the situation by justifying these acts and politicising a purely human rights matter with inflammatory rhetoric and by manipulating media resources. Like all ordinary Pakistanis, the Baloch people simply yearn for respect. The current chief justice of the Supreme Court is known for his strong stance on human rights and has a history of visiting persecuted journalists. A single gesture of empathy from him could have a transformative impact. -- Courtesy Dawn

Spoiling peace**Storytelling as therapy**

Ghazi Salahuddin

If you are unnerved by the national state of affairs and unable to figure out what the rulers and leaders of this country are doing, there is one place you can retreat into and be at peace with yourself, if only for a brief period.

But what is that place I am alluding to — and would it require some kind of a physical movement? Well, I was thinking of the possibility of escaping into the magical world of a 'dastan' or the realm of fantasy that is enclosed in a story or a book of fiction. That listening to a story or reading a novel can be a therapeutic exercise is what I am trying to say.

I would not be surprised if you, my readers, are a bit mystified by this statement. Actually, I am using a peg to move on to my favourite theme of how

literature, specifically fiction, can benefit a society like ours. The obvious inference, then, is that our abysmally low reading habits may have contributed to the rise in intolerance and extremism and the spread of violence across various sections of our society.

First, let me refer to the encounter that I am using as a peg for this column. I had the good fortune of attending an event at the Mohatta Palace Museum in Karachi on Friday, one segment in the distinguished lecture series meant to commemorate 25 years of the museum.

The rather extended title of this lecture was: "The art of the Hamzanama painting, literature and dastangoi in Mughal Lahore". It was a fascinating excursion into the magical realms of not just Hamzanama but mainly Tilism-e-Hoshruha, evoking the medieval tradition of storytelling.

It featured Shahnaz and Fakir S Aijazuddin, a power couple that shines on our cultural and literary firmament.

Fakir Aijazuddin dealt with Hamzanama as an art historian and Shahnaz

Aijazuddin delved into the wonders of Tilism-e-Hoshruha, the Urdu magical epic that she had condensed into a one-volume English translation that was published in 2009. The two dastango, Nazrul-Hasan and Syed Meesam Naqvi, presented a highly dramatic rendition of a 'dastan'. And there were two giant, 250-year-old 'naqqaras' brought from Sehwan that were played to conclude an evening's escape into the world of magic.

This is not a report of the event that was a rare treat for its select audience. Hameed Haroon, with his poetic eloquence, set the stage for an enchanting evening. But I need to quickly hop over to the importance of storytelling and of fantasy in making the lives of the people more meaningful and more endurable.

We, for instance, know that Einstein would advise parents to read fairy tales to their children to make them more intelligent. The idea, simply, was to enlarge the boundaries of a child's imagination. It was in this context that Einstein believed imagination to be more im-

portant than knowledge.

Incidentally, Shahnaz Aijazuddin mentioned Harry Potter and the magical realm created by J K Rowling as an extension of a dastan like Tilism-e-Hoshruha. There was some reference, also, to Tolkien's high fantasy novel Lord of the Rings. I see this as the continuation of the old tradition of storytelling.

It has been suggested that these fantasy novels as well as science fiction have contributed to the creativity and inventive thinking of young people, particularly in the United States. Some years ago, The Guardian had a weekly column titled 'Book Clinic' in which experts replied to readers' questions as to what books they should read to deal with specific personal problems or social issues.

I recall one reader posing this question: "Which books would restore my faith in politicians?" I wonder if there are any relevant books for a Pakistani critic to suggest while answering a similar question from a regular viewer of talk shows. However, the quality of our politics would certainly not be what it is

if most of our politicians were readers of books.

There was this German novel by Nina George, 'The little Paris bookshop', about a middle-aged man who operates a bookstore on a barge on Seine in Paris as some kind of a literary apothecary. He has the gift of sensing which books will soothe the troubled souls of his customers. His purpose is to use literature to help people improve their lives.

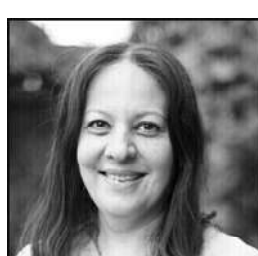
We have the word: 'bibliotherapy'. It is "a therapeutic approach employing books and other forms of literature, typically alongside more traditional therapy modalities, to support a patient's mental health". It involves storytelling or the reading of specific texts.

Psychologists have said that fairytales teach children how to deal with basic human conflicts, desires and relationships in a healthy way. But storybooks are not within the reach of all our children. For that matter, so many of them are out of school and are stunted for lack of nourishment. And that tradition of grandmothers telling bedtime stories has almost ended, also because

the grandmothers and their grandchildren often do not speak the same language.

I do realize that these thoughts would appear to be haphazard and somewhat incoherent. Perhaps I am not able to fully elucidate the need that we have for the magic that is enshrined in, say, Tilism-e-Hoshruha and Alif Laila and fairytales to be able to deal with the abrasive realities of our life. One motivation for me was an article I read this week in The New York Times by a Brazilian journalist with this title: 'Telling stories to my daughter got me through the darkest times'. When Bolsonaro won Brazil's presidential election in 2018, Vanessa Barbara was nursing a four-month old daughter. On one of those lonely nights, she started to tell random stories to her daughter, just to feel less alone and to divert her sad feelings.

She wrote: "Little did I know that this, the simple act of telling tales, would see us through an unhinged far-right presidency and a devastating pandemic. In the toughest of times, it was a lifeline". -- Courtesy TheNews

Not a new normal

Muna Khan

I tested positive for Covid on the first day of the new year in New York. It is not an ideal start to the year, or holiday, but the period of isolation so far has brought many reflections.

The most obvious is that the pandemic is not over.

Last Sunday, the technical leader to the World Health Organisation's Covid-19 response, Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, reaffirmed on X that Covid remains a global health threat.

"[This new phase] is marked by reduced impact compared to the peak of Covid 19 a few years ago, but it's still a global health threat and it's still a pandemic causing far too many (re)infections, hospitalisations, deaths and long covid when tools exist to prevent them."

Yet this has not received the media attention it deserves.

At the time of my writing, the United States is facing the second biggest surge of the pandemic according to data from the Centres for Disease Control.

The surge is expected to peak next week with an estimated two million infections per day and estimates that one in three people will get Covid. People must take precautions, especially masking, but masks alone have become a divisive issue here. Many people cite "science" that claims masks are ineffective in preventing the spread.

This is why the media's role in public messaging is critical right now, yet its focus is on

other issues.

Professor Eric Topol's op-ed in The Los Angeles Times on Thursday should sound alarm bells for policymakers, certainly in the US, who "are still playing make-believe" about the current wave atop of high cases of the flu and respiratory virus.

The current JN.1 variant "has continued its evolution with mutations adapted for infecting or re-infecting us," writes Topol. But, he offers some good news: the latest booster in the US "provided protection from hospitalisation in the range of about 60 per cent against JN.1 and other recently circulating variants." Even those who had not gotten this booster were protected from hospitalisations or visits to the ER.

The bad news is that only 19pc of Americans have received the latest booster, so far. This is the tragic face of health inequities.

The United States isn't alone in its 'state of denialism and general refusal to take simple steps to reduce the risk of infection,' writes Topol. Countries all over the world are not acting on Covid mitigation strategies. There's a need to resume testing, data collection and public guidelines (like masking) backed by trusted science sources.

We know masks, air filtration and proper ventilation work against variants. When combined with vaccinations and testing, "we have layers of defense that work effectively together, no matter how the virus evolves. The key is to do it all, not rely on only one," writes molecular biologist Dr Lucky Tran.

In fact, he recently posted an image of a rapid test that checks for SARS-CoV-2, RSV, Adenovirus, M.pneumoniae, and influenza. It isn't approved in most countries but "imagine if governments pro-

vided this for free to the people!"

But governments like Joe Biden's are more interested in securing a second term and giving their ally Israel a free pass to co-m-mit more atrocities. "This passivity re-inf--r--ces the illusion that the pandemic is be--h--nd us when it's actually raging," writes Topol.

Since isolating, Topol's piece is one of the few I've come across on a mainstream media outlet about the dangers this wave poses. Friends in Karachi say they're hearing about a rise in cases there, too. My chacha called a public hospital in Karachi to ask about boosters but was told there are none and no plans afoot to get them either.

At least protect the most vulnerable — the elderly, the poor, the immunocompromised. Relaunch the NCOE and resume data collection so it can be used to understand the virus and prepare strategies to combat it.

The journalist Ed Yong, who covered the pandemic in 2020, wrote about watching publications he once respected "become complicit in normalising a level of death once billed as incalculable."

In a piece for The New York Times last month he wrote: "In this status quo, people are expected to ignore the threat of infection, pay through the nose if they get sick and face stigma and ridicule if they become disabled. Journalism can and should repudiate that bargain." Yong reminds us that Covid isn't just a health problem, it is a social one. Journalists must ensure this story is told and let people feel everyone's health matters. Until those that matter take note and take action. -- Courtesy Dawn

Complex conflict

Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

Three months into the war in Gaza, thousands of Palestinians, including a large number of children, have been martyred by the Israeli Defence Forces. What is the end goal of Israel for which it has unleashed unprecedented death and destruction? Israel's stated objective is that it wants to destroy Hamas. This is not credible because Israel is meting out genocide-like collective punishment to all Palestinians, and not just Hamas. Is Israel's goal, then, to create a 'greater Israel' by forcibly pushing the Palestinians into neighbouring Arab countries or elsewhere? If that be the objective, Israel has certainly overestimated what its brutal force can achieve, and underestimated the resilience of Palestinians, who seem determined not to leave the land on which their ancestors had lived for millennia.

The Palestine-Israel conflict is a complex issue. One land, two claimants: Jews and Palestinians. Both cite history to consolidate their claim to the land. The roots of this conflict lie in the decision of the British in 1917, called Balfour Declaration, to settle the Jews of Europe in Palestine.

Once a sufficient number of Jews had reached Palestine and displaced the local Arab population, the British took the matter to the UN in 1947, where it was agreed to have two separate states, Palestine and Israel. However, Israel has never allowed the two-state solution to work. Instead, it has

imposed an apartheid-like occupation on the helpless Palestinians.

The issue also has an ideological dimension. The state of Israel was created for the Jews of the world. The name itself comes from Hazrat Yaqoob (Jacob), the son of Hazrat Ishaq, and grandson of Hazrat Ibrahim. Hazrat Yaqoob was also called Israel, and his descendants as Bani Israel. His successors included Hazrat Daud (David) and his son Hazrat Suleiman, both of whom built large kingdoms in this territory. Prophet Moses rescued the Bani Israel and brought them to this land from Egypt. All these Prophets are equally sacred for Muslims. Add to that the Masjid al-Aqsa, which was the Qibla-i-Awwal. Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ascended to Heaven (Mairai) from this mosque. Israel has no right to deny Muslim Palestinians the right to live in the lands which they hold in such holy esteem.

Israel continues to justify its atrocities in the name of 'self-defence'. The Hamas action of October 7, 2023 did not take place in a vacuum as the UN secretary general had rightly remarked. The Palestinians are under brutal occupation. The Hamas action was an act of resistance against the occupying force, which is permissible under international law.

Israel's indiscriminate firing on Palestinian houses, schools, and hospitals has elicited massive protests not only in Arab or Muslim countries, but all across, including in the United States. Yet, Israel is not ready to listen to these voices. One reason for such a ferocious Israeli response could be that there is domestic criticism for not anticipating the Hamas attack. Further, Netanyahu wants to look strong as his domestic popularity is declining. The firm support of the US may have also emboldened

the Israeli leadership. Another reason could be that Arabs and Muslims could not display enough unity to take tangible actions against Israel, such as boycotting Israeli products or even cutting off diplomatic ties.

Nevertheless, pressure is now mounting on Israel. The US cannot continue to ignore the loud calls of the international community for an immediate and permanent ceasefire. Some European countries, like the UK, stand with Israel, but their people are agitating against the relentless bombardment of civilians in Gaza. Israel is also suffering a heavy financial cost of the war. Many businesses have closed down in Israel. A major setback for Israel is that the Arab-Israeli normalisation process has halted.

The US influence in the Middle East has also received a setback. The Arab world, including the Gulf countries, are now looking ever more inclined to explore other options for their security needs. The US has also been widely criticised for casting its veto, thus paralysing the United Nations from playing a role in stopping the war in Gaza, an objective supported by 153 countries of the world. It is high time for the Biden administration to revisit its unqualified support to Israel. Given the unwavering resolve of the Palestinians, Netanyahu's dream of creating a greater Israel is not likely to succeed, but he and his right-wingers are surely destined to go into history books as the most ruthless and heartless regime. Pakistan has consistently supported the right of Palestinians to self-determination. Pakistan has also not formally recognised the state of Israel. There have been some voices in the country for doing so. However, after the recent war in Gaza, there is even less likelihood that Pakistan would recognise Israel. -- Courtesy Dawn

Governor KP underlines important role of graduates in healthcare development

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali on Sunday recognized the important role of graduates in the ongoing development of healthcare and emphasized the importance of their contribution to the wider healthcare landscape.

He said this while addressing the first annual convocation 2024 of Khyber Medical University (KMU)-IMS and Kohat Institute of Dental Sciences (KIDS).

He said that the role of medical and dental graduates play in shaping the wider health landscape is commendable.

Chief Guest Governor Haji Ghulam Ali congratulated the graduates of Medical and Dental

Colleges and Gold Medalists. He appreciated their unwavering dedication to medical knowledge and their outstanding efforts.

Highlighting the importance of the convocation, the Governor thanked VC KMU Prof. Dr. Ziaul Haq, Principals and all the attendees for making the event a memorable gathering for teachers, proud graduates, parents and distinguished guests.

During the ceremony, Governor Haji Ghulam Ali announced that 286 students were awarded MBBS and BDS degrees.

He termed awarding gold medals to 200 students as a great honor for colleges, KMU, and their parents.

The Governor

praised the important role of KIMS, KIDS, and KMU in shaping the future healthcare workforce.

He said that these graduates will use their tireless efforts and ability to raise the quality of healthcare not only in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but in the whole of Pakistan.

Vice Chancellor KMU Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq, in his welcome speech, described the participation of Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other distinguished guests in this convocation ceremony as wonderful.

He also deeply acknowledged the continuous support from the parents and congratulated the all medical and dental graduates.



PESHAWAR: A delegation of 30-members tribal elites of merged District Mhmand meeting with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Haji Ghulam Ali.

Feroze Shah pays homage to Kargil Hero Captain Karnel Sher Shaheed

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: In a solemn and respectful visit, Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel, the Caretaker Minister of Information and Public Relations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, undertook a detailed visit to the shrine of the revered Kargil war hero, Captain Karnel Sher Khan Shaheed Nishan-e-Haider.

During the visit, Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel laid wreaths, recited Fatiha, and documented his reflections in a commemorative book. Expressing gratitude for the opportunity, he conveyed, "It is my good fortune to recite Fatiha at the martyr's grave. Such brave individuals bring immense joy to the lives of nations."

The caretaker minister also extended condolences to the family of Captain Karnel Sher

Khan, emphasizing the profound significance of the sacrifices made by the martyrs. He remarked, "Captain Colonel Sher Khan Shaheed is the pride of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the only son who courageously earned Nishan Haider. The foundations of our nation have been fortified by the blood of these heroes."

Highlighting the invincible defense of Pakistan owing to the sacrifices of its soldiers and officers, Barrister Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel stressed, "The survival and development of the country are indebted to the blood of our martyrs. Every Pakistani, irrespective of religion, color, race, or political affiliation, has a duty to honor these brave souls."

Reflecting on the tragic events of May 9, the caretaker minister condemned the acts.

CM orders early completion of Children Hospital upgrade

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi paid a detailed visit to the Children Hospital and reviewed progress on the upgradation work of the medical facility.

On the direction of the CM, upgradation work in the emergency, main corridor and other wards of the hospital has been expedited. The chief minister inspected the main corridor, reception counter and checked the quality of work and directed to ensure quality along with undertaking preventive measures in the electricity and air conditioning wiring work. He directed to complete the wiring work in three days and early completion of tiles installation work in the main corridor.

Mohsin Naqvi lauded

the performance of the Secretary Communication & Works, Secretary Health and their team on undertaking swift work in the main corridor. He met with the labourers working late night and commended them for working with diligence. He issued directions for early completion of the ongoing upgradation work.

Mohsin Naqvi said that task for the provision of better facilities in more than 100 hospitals of Punjab would be completed by 31st January. "The whole team is striving day and night to accomplish this task. The fruit of hard work with a noble intention would definitely be passed on to the people," he maintained.

The Secretary C&W and Secretary Health gave a briefing about the work being done under the

upgradation project. He said that installation of tiles and finishing work had been started.

Provincial Minister for Information Amir Mir, Secretary C&W, Secretary Health, Commissioner Lahore, Deputy Commissioner and officials concerned were also present.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi visited the Safe City and new CPO Office projects in Rawalpindi on Sunday.

He reviewed progress being made on both the projects and set a deadline for completing the two projects by January 31. He ordered to complete civil works of the projects at the earliest. He ordered for undertaking proper planning for installation of cables and cameras from the onset.



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi inspecting the construction work of the reception counter under upgradation project during his visit to Children Hospital.

Secretary of Relief pays visit to Rescue 1122 office in Abbottabad

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Relief, Rehabilitation, and Settlement Department KPD Anayatullah Waseem paid a visit to the Rescue 1122 district office in Abbottabad on Sunday. District Emergency Officer Anif Khatak gave a detailed overview of the emergency services offered and the collaborative efforts with various departments to ensure effective service delivery.

In discussions with the Rescue 1122 personnel, Secretary Relief Anayatullah Waseem highlighted that Rescue 1122 stands as a formidable force equipped with modern technology and a dedicated team.

The organization is committed to providing equal and efficient emergency services to the residents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Rescue personnel, possessing extensive practical knowledge, strive to deliver

timely and optimal assistance during emergencies.

Anayatullah Waseem emphasized the active involvement of Rescue 1122 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under the leadership of Director General Rescue 1122, Dr. Khaateer Ahmad.

The organization operates tirelessly, ensuring the provision of services around the clock in a manner that reflects a well-organized daily routine.

Moreover, Rescue 1122 collaborates with security forces, district administration, and other institutions to implement a comprehensive policy aimed at delivering services to the public.

The administration of Rescue 1122 is also taking diverse measures to enhance the welfare and well-being of its personnel, ensuring a promising and secure future for them.

29 cases referred to drug court

FAISALABAD (APP): The District Quality Control Board (DQCB) has referred cases of 29 clinics to drug courts for further proceedings.

During its meeting held with Deputy Commissioner (DC) Abdullah Nayyar Sheikh in the chair, the Board heard 56 cases and issued warnings to owners of 18 medical clinics whereas cases of nine clinics were adjourned to the next meeting as record of these cases was not completed yet.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (Headquarters) Kashif Raza Awan, Secretary DQCB Robina Akhtar and others were also present.



LAHORE: Caretaker Provincial Minister for Health Professor Dr. Javed Akram enquiring about the health of child during his visit to Children Hospital.

DC inaugurates anti-polio campaign in Larkana

LARKANA (APP): The Deputy Commissioner Larkana Dr. Sharjeel Noor Channa on Sunday inaugurated a six-day National Polio Campaign by administering Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) to children up to the age of five years at EPI Centre, CMC Children Hospital Larkana.

The drive is being launched by the Health Department and will continue till January 13, 2024, throughout the district. Speaking on the occasion, DC Larkana said that eradication of polio is a challenge for the whole nation and everyone has to perform an important role in achieving this national cause. He expressed the hope that during the immunization drive, all children across the country

would be administered anti-polio drops for up to five years of age.

In this regard, he said that the officials of the health department are working hard with dedication, honesty and full devotion to making a disease-free district.

He directed the mobile Teams which were established by the Health Department they should ensure to administer polio drops to children under age five.

He advised the Parents, Teachers, representatives of NGOs and Scouts to realize their responsibilities and cooperate with Mobile teams during the campaign.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Larkana also visited CMC Children's Hospital.

One killed, three injured in road mishap

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): One person was killed while the other three sustained serious injuries as an overspeeding car collided with a tractor trolley due to thick fog near Noor Shah Talai.

According to rescue officials, a patwari Sheikh Gul Zaib resident of Layyah district, riding in a car with family, was going to Layyah from Multan, and suddenly the car collided with a tractor trolley from the back side near Noor Shah Talai due to thick fog.

As a result, Sheikh Gul Zaib died on the spot, while his wife and two kids sustained serious injuries.

Nation-wide anti-polio drive from Monday

LAHORE (APP): To administer vaccine drops to children under five years of age, nation-wide anti-polio drive of varied duration would be started from Monday, January 8, 2024.

During the campaign, teams of Health Department would go door to door in all 159 districts of the country.

In Punjab, during a week-long polio campaign, over 23 million children will be administered polio drops.

The Health Department has declared Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan as the most sensitive cities in this

regard.

In Sindh, nearly 10.03 million children up to the five years of age will be administered with anti-polio vaccine drops.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, over 7.4 million children up to five years of age will be administered anti-polio drops during the drive.

In Balochistan, over 2.5 million children up to five years of age would be administered anti-polio drops. In Gilgit-Baltistan, over 250,000 children would be vaccinated. In case a polio team did not visit any home, parents could call helpline 1166.

Murree snowfall season: Wardens directed to make best arrangements to regulate traffic

RAWALPINDI (APP): Regional Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khurram Ali and City Police Officer, Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Hamdani have directed the Chief Traffic Officer, Rawalpindi Taimoor Khan and City Traffic Police Officers deployed in Murree to make best arrangements to regulate traffic during snowfall season.

According to a CTP spokesman, 163 traffic wardens and officers of traffic police had been deployed at all important points of Murree to regulate traffic and facilitate the tourists. Traffic police had devised a comprehensive plan for Murree for the snowfall season according to which entry of heavy vehicles in the city would be banned, he added.

He said an emergency Help Line 051-9269200, had also been introduced for facilitating the tourists.

The citizens, having complaints, could contact police round the clock, he said. Help Line center was also serving as control room from where all possible facilities were being provided to the tourists and all out efforts were being made to cope with any untoward situation. He told that several points had also been reserved for car parking. Different main roads including Kashmir Point, Mall Road, Guldana Road and other roads had been closed for two way traffic, he said adding the tourists should cooperate with traffic police so that traffic mess particularly during snowfall season could be avoided.

5 children hospitalized for suffocation

FAISALABAD (APP): Five children of a family were hospitalized due to suffocation in the Samsundri police limits.

A Rescue 1122 spokesman said here on Sunday that a family had lighted a fire in their house to beat the cold but the fire caused suffocation. As a result, five children of the family, including Zinasha, 18, daughter of Ghulam Muhammad, her sisters Aliya, 15, Eman Fatima, 10, brother Abdullah, 7, and cousin Meerrab, 7, daughter of Sadeer, started feeling dizziness. Rescue 1122 shifted them to Allied Hospital.

Ban imposed on plying vehicles with tinted glasses in Tank

TANK (APP): The district administration Tank has imposed a ban on plying vehicles with tinted glasses by enforcing Section 144 across the district. According to notification, the order would remain enforced for a period of 10 days until January 15 or unless withdrawn or modified, imposing a ban on displaying or brandishing of arms.



HYDERABAD: Residents of Sui Gas Cooperative Housing Society are holding protest demonstration for demanding basic facilities, in Hyderabad.

Man killed, 4 injured in road accident

HYDERABAD (APP): A man was killed while 5 others sustained injuries as a truck trawler struck carts and a bike parked by the roadside in the Liaquat Colony area. According to the police, the incident happened near Pakistan Bakery late on Saturday night in the jurisdiction of Sakhi Pir police station.

The police identified the deceased person as 45-year-old.

Construction of water distribution centre inaugurated

FAISALABAD (APP): Provincial Secretary for Housing & Urban Development Sajid Zafar Dali inaugurated the construction of water distribution centre at Madina Town and said that the project would be completed with an estimated cost of Rs.785 million.

Talking to the media,

he said the centre would help Water And Sanitation Agency (WASA) to provide potable water to 120,000 people of Faisalabad.

He said that construction contract was awarded to a Japanese company which was also directed to complete the project within stipulated time period.

Breaking shackles of poverty through welfare projects

PESHAWAR (APP): In a foggy morning, Zakir Khan, an impoverished fruit seller, starts his rickshaw journey from his mud house in the outskirts of the provincial metropolitan to Peshawar's fruit market hoping to purchase apples, guavas, bananas, and other fruits on reasonable rate to support his eight-member family.

Assisted by his son Asadullah Khan, the 65-year-old vendor, donned in traditional attire - woolen Chadar and Chitralli cap, starts his day with Fajr prayer and after having breakfast, rushes to Chamkani fruit market in Peshawar expecting to get fresh fruits through open auction on reasonable prices and anticipates a profitable sale in the local

market.

After purchasing fruits, he unloads his fruits-packed rickshaw at his hand cart in Pabbi fruits market at Nowshera after covering 15-kilometer distance from Peshawar and working till night. "I have been associated with the painstaking fruit seller business since my childhood and recently my two sons Arifullah Khan and Asadullah Khan have started assisting me to sell all stock before night," he said.

"It is an extremely challenging business and sometimes he suffers financial losses in case fruits are not sold on time," he said, adding that due to exorbitant prices of the fruits many customers just ask about prices of different fruits and return

empty handed.

"Last year, citrus of Khanpur tehsil of Haripur and Manki Sharif of Nowshera districts was available at Rs180 per dozen that has now jumped to Rs 250 per dozen in local market with start of new year while apples per kg were sold at Rs 200 per last year against Rs 250 this year making difficult to continue this hard earned business due to discouraging response of consumers and poverty," he said.

"I have come to purchase fruits for birthday party of my granddaughter, but the prices were sky-high this morning and will come again at night hoping for reduction of prices of apple, guava and banana to celebrate the event with

great pomp and show," said Riazul Haq, a retired teacher while talking to APP at Pabbi fruit market.

Complaining about soaring prices of fruits and vegetables with the start of the new year in the local market, he said that district administration failed to regularly check fruits prices at market and take strict action against price hikers and hoarders.

"Poverty is the mother of all social ills including illiteracy, corruption, street crimes, drugs addiction and unemployment besides creating socio-economic imbalances in the society," said Professor Dr Muhammad Naem, former Chairman Economics Department, University of Peshawar.

He said that

thousands of youth were being graduated by the public and private sectors universities every year and could not find suitable jobs due to our outdated education system and lack of coordination between government departments, educational institutions and industries in terms of jobs creations, as result, increase in poverty ratio in recent years.

Professor Naem while quoting a World Bank report said that the poverty ratio has raised from 34.21 per cent in 2022 to 39.41 per cent in 2023, pushing 12.5 million people below poverty line. He said that Pakistan labour market was yet to recover fully from the 2022 devastated floods, COVID-19 pandemic and shabby economic situation.



SARGODHA: People are setting around fire during cold weather in the city.

VP PBF says: Regional Trade Agreements vital to reinvigorate growth

LAHORE (INP): Vice President, Pakistan Business Forum (PBF), Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad has said that devising regional trade agreements among South Asian countries was need of the hour to improve the economic well beings of billions of people; though Pakistan's regional trade was below the desired level which needs to be seen in whole prospective before SIFC.

He said, "In international relations it is a common axiom that a state can change its friends but it cannot replace its neighbours due to geographical compulsions. If neighbours cannot be replaced, ideally a state should enjoy at least cordial relations with its

surrounding states if not the best relations".

Talking to the members of FPCCI here on Sunday, Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad said that Pakistan must start putting sustainable and inclusive economic growth, above all we must create a cycle of profligacy and austerity.

As the average annual economic growth between 2010 and 2023 has been lackluster, around 4 percent, and has been accompanied by a rise in Pakistan's total debt as a share of its GDP, from 55 percent to 76 percent. Bangladesh, in contrast, grew at an annual average of 6.2 percent over the same period, while its debt to GDP ratio rose from 30 percent to 39 percent.



GILGIT: A vendor selling a traditional steel fire stove to the customer at his work place.

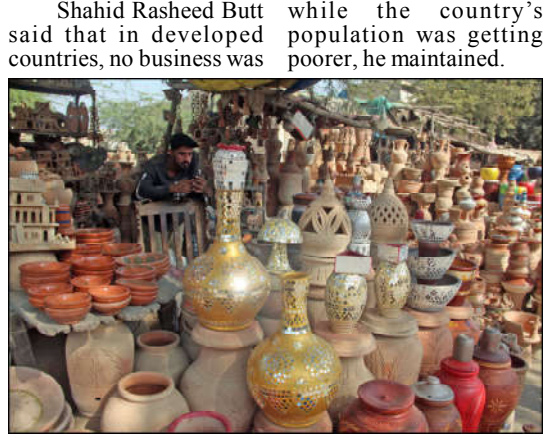
Shahid Rasheed says: Pakistani businessmen milking masses against developed countries

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt has said that exploitation of rights of citizens was not allowed in developed countries but business in Pakistan was unthinkable without exploitation.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, he said that key sectors and industries were operated without any regulatory oversight in Pakistan, allowing businessmen to rob the masses and promote poverty in the country.

Shahid Rasheed Butt said that in developed countries, no business was

allowed to exploit the people and if it was done, it was made an example but the majority of businesses in Pakistan were milking the masses. Irresponsible and greedy people, whose only aim was to make money, exploit people in the name of business, as most of the big businesses were in their hands, he added. The business leaders said that many sectors were operating without a regulator and many regulators have been hijacked by big businesses. For this reason, the wealth and influence of businessmen were continuously increasing while the country's population was getting poorer, he maintained.



KARACHI: A vendor is displayed fancy plants pots attraction for customers at his roadside setup Kumhar Wara area in Provincial Capital.

Retailers seek tax relief amidst recent policy changes: LCCI

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) President Kashif Anwar has urged the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) for S.R.O 1842(1)2023 Amendment, saying that retailers seek tax relief amidst recent policy changes. The LCCI spokesman told media here Sunday that in a bid to address the concerns raised by the LCCI members, President Kashif Anwar has penned a letter to FBR Chairman Malik Amjed Zubair Tiwana, urging for amendments in S.R.O 1842(1)2023 dated 21-12-2023. The focal point of

contention revolves around a recent notification amending rule 150ZEA of the sales tax rules, 2006, specifically targeting Tier-1 retailers under section 2(43A) (g) of the sales tax act, 1990. Under the revised rule, retailers with a deductible withholding tax under section 236 H of the Income Tax Ordinance 2001 exceeding Rs. 100,000/- in the last 12 months are now obligated to integrate with the point of sale (POS) system. Kashif Anwar pointed out that this amendment would affect retailers across 21 different sectors/products.



CHINIOT: A view of farmers sowed maize for dry on a road during chill weather in the city.



KP Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and Newly Merged Districts Affairs Dr. Aamer Abdullah formally launching Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) digital mobile app.

Freelancers to now receive their payments through PayPal: Minister

ISLAMABAD (Online): The Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Dr Umar Saif on Sunday announced that freelancers would now receive their payments through PayPal.

In a video message, he said that it had been a longstanding demand of freelancers to have access to PayPal for easier payment receipt in Pakistan.

The minister clarified, "While PayPal itself is not coming to Pakistan, an agreement has been reached where remittances would be channeled through PayPal via a third party."

"Under the newly devised program,

freelancers will not need to open a PayPal account. Instead, individuals outside the country will make payments from their PayPal accounts, and the funds will be promptly deposited into the freelancers' accounts," the minister explained.

He said that under the nation's first space policy approved by the federal cabinet, international companies would be allowed to provide communication services through low-orbit satellites.

Saif said that satellite communication technology was advancing rapidly and many private companies in the world wanted to

provide communication services through low-orbit satellites.

"Satellites used to be geostationary, far away from the land. They are useful for broadcasting TV signals but communicating is difficult because there is latency," he said.

Saif said that communication services and internet services could be offered through low-orbit satellites, which were relatively closer.

He said that there had been a lot of development in this regard in the private sector.

"So now it has become possible for communication services in Pakistan to be provided through satellites and the

private sector has this technology," he said.

He said the National Space Policy would enable private sector companies to "offer affordable internet services in Pakistan while enabling increased investment in our national space program".

National Space Policy which will enable private-sector companies to offer affordable internet services in Pakistan, while enabling increased investment in the country's national space program.

He expressed confidence that 5G services in the country would be launched by July this year and 300MHz spectrum would be offered for auction.

SNGPL cuts off another 347 connections for gas theft

LAHORE (APP): In a relentless effort to curb gas theft, Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) conducted a series of targeted raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Islamabad.

During the crackdown, around 347 unauthorised connections were disconnected, and fine of Rs 3.47 million were imposed. SNGPL's spokesperson told media here on Sunday, in Lahore, the regional team disconnected 13 connections on illegal use of gas while another 23 on use of compressor. In Rawalpindi and Islamabad the team disconnected 98 connections on illegal use of gas and amount of

Rs 0.30 million have been booked against gas theft cases. In Multan 25 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while another 25 on use of compressor. The team also imposed fine of Rs 0.050 million against gas theft cases.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 93 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and also imposed fine of Rs 3.05 million against gas theft cases. In Mardan the regional team disconnected 4 connections on illegal use of gas while another 12 on use of compressor.

In Sahiwal, three connections were disconnected on compressor use.



RAWALPINDI: A vendor is displayed kid's toys attraction for customers alongside a Murree road, in the city.

KP-EZDMC launches mobile app to facilitate investors

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) has launched a digital mobile app to make the services of the company easily accessible to investors and industrialists.

country, to introduce such a unique kind of comprehensive and useful app for industrialization in the public sector.

The app was formally launched by the KP Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Dr Aamer Abdullah at the headquarters of KP-EZDMC, the other day, said an official press release issued here on Sunday.

here that the Provincial Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Dr Aamer Abdullah had assigned this task of online availability of the services to the company, which has been achieved by the IT section of the company within a short period of two weeks. Addressing the launching ceremony of the app, the provincial minister appreciated the performance of the management and whole team of the company and termed it a visible step towards the facilitation of industrialists and investors of the industrial sector in the province.

The launching of the digital mobile app is being considered a milestone towards the facilitation of investors and industrialists as the required services, facilities and information of the company would now be available on it. With this initiative, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has become the first province in the

It is worth to mention



QUETTA: Central President Anjuman-e-Tajiran Balochistan Rahim Kakar, Hzarat Ali Achakzai, Yaseen Mengal inaugurate a shop at Art School Road.

Inflation continues to hurt economic growth as inflation above 40pc: PIAF

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chairman Pakistan Industrial & Traders Associations Front (PIAF), Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol has warned the authorities that rising inflation continued to hurt economic growth, demanding a careful policy to keep it in control, as the prices of essential commodities continued to stay away from the reach of the financially vulnerable segments, with data showing the annual short-term inflation well

above 40 percent.

In a statement issued on Sunday, he said that the government computes the Sensitive Price Indicator on a weekly basis to evaluate the price fluctuation of necessary commodities by evaluating the rates of 51 items collected from 50 markets in 17 cities of the country. The SPI report for the week ending on January 4 reflected an increase in the rates of 19 commodities, decrease in nine and stability in 23.

Quoting the data, PIAF Chairman Faheem Ur Rehman Saigol observed that trade and industry have suffered from the double-edged sword of food and energy prices with transport inflation peaking to a record 65% while the annual inflation rate increased to 24.9% in 2023.

The SPI for the current week ended on 04th January, 2024 increased by 0.81 percent, the PBS said in its report.



LAHORE: People busy selecting and purchasing old warm clothes from roadside in the city.

Silwat says: Business Facilitation Centre to be functional soon

FAISALABAD (APP): Divisional Commissioner Madam Silwat Saeed said on Sunday the Business Facilitation Centre would be made functional soon to facilitate the business community of Faisalabad.

PIEDMC directed to submit report on 5000 acres Rwp Economic Zone

RAWALPINDI (APP): Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chhatta has directed the Punjab Industrial Estate Development and Management Company (PIEDMC) authorities to complete the survey of the 5000 acres Economic Zone site on the Rawalpindi Ring Road and submit a report next week.

presentation on the proposed site at Rawalpindi Ring Road Economic Zones and the facilities to be provided to the businessmen.

The task of site survey for establishing an economic zone on 5000 acres land along the Rawalpindi Ring Road had been given to PIEDMC Lahore, the Commissioner informed. The officers concerned were also instructed to arrange a visit of the PIEDMC delegation immediately to the site and provide them with all the necessary information and support.

Addressing an online meeting with caretaker Provincial Minister for Industries SM Tanveer, she said a state-of-the-art business facilitation centre was established at Commissioner's Complex to resolve business related issues speedily.

At the centre, services of various departments would be provided under one-roof and the business community would get its problems solved easily.

Pakistan's sesame export to China registers 117.85pc increase in last year

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan registered a remarkable surge of 117.85 percent in Sesame seed export to China last year as sesame seeds amounting to \$250 million was shipped to China from January to November 2023.

This unprecedented growth has positioned Pakistan as a major player in the global Sesame seed market, with Chinese consumers increasingly embracing the quality and flavor of Pakistani sesame, according to a senior official at Pakistan Embassy Beijing.

Pakistan's export of sesame seeds to China was \$250.85 million from January to November 2023, compared to \$117.85 million in the same period last year. This marks an increase of more than 112 percent.

Overall, Pakistan's export of sesame seeds to China in 2022 was \$128.44 million, while it was \$120.44 million in 2021. According to details, Pakistan exported 143,527.875 tons of sesame seeds to China from January to November 2023, whereas in 2022, it was 84,985.321 tons. China imported 92,516.55 tons in 2021 and was one of the key destinations for sesame seeds exports.

China's forex reserves rise to 3.238 trln USD: data

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): China's forex reserves totaled 3.238 trillion U.S. dollars as of the end of December 2023, rising by 66.2 billion U.S. dollars, or 2.1 percent compared to the end of November, according to data released on Sunday by the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE).

PCMEA calls for devising long-term export policy

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporters Association (PCMEA) Senior Vice Chairman Usman Ashraf said on Sunday that the government should formulate short and long-term policies in consultation with stakeholders to solve the problems faced by the hand-woven carpet industry and to promote exports.

Shahid Hasan Sheikh, Faisal Saeed Khan and other members also attended the AGM.

Usman Ashraf added, "In order to solve the problems of manufacturers and exporters, the Association is enhancing contacts with related institutions including the State Bank and with foreign embassies to remove the difficulties faced in obtaining visas, which have yielded positive results."

In a statement, the SAFE said that, affected by factors such as the monetary policies of the world's major economies as well as expectations, the U.S. dollar index saw a decline in December while global financial asset prices generally increased.

He made this demand while addressing the PCMEA Annual General Meeting here. Carpet Training Institute (CTI) Chairman Ejazur Rehman, senior central leader Abdul Latif Malik, senior member Riaz Ahmed, Major (Rtd) Akhtar Nazir, Saeed Khan,

In the meeting, the performance of the association for the year 2023 was reviewed, and the participants also presented various suggestions for the current year, on which the progress was reiterated.

Balance of loans in Shanghai up 6.1 pct at end of November

SHANGHAI (Xinhua/APP): The balance of loans in Shanghai, including all currencies, rose 6.1 percent year on year to 11.07 trillion yuan (about 1.56 trillion U.S. dollars) at the end of November, official data showed. Of the total, the balance of loans in Chinese yuan went up 7.9 percent year on year to 10.48 trillion yuan, according to the People's Bank of China, Shanghai Head Office. The balance of foreign currency loans stood at 82.1 billion.

Solid economic plan needed as uncertainty looms in 2024: Anjum

ISLAMABAD (INP): Former President FPCCI and Chairman Businessmen Panel (BMP), Mian Anjum Nisar has called for solid economic plan from all the stakeholders, terming the new year of 2024 as the uncertain one in view of deteriorating energy crises following the tough conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund amidst upcoming elections, making this

period more complicated and unstable for the economy.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, he said that all political parties should provide their economic stability plans to avert further losses and delays, warning that numerous global issues are impacting world economies. He said the upcoming government should prioritize resolving the energy crisis.

On Orthodox Christmas Putin vows to back soldiers who 'defend' Russia

Monitoring Desk
MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin vowed on the eve of Orthodox Christmas to back soldiers who "with arms in hands" defend Russia's interests, ordering his government greater support of those who fight and calling on his people to be merciful and just.

"Many of our men, our courageous, heroic guys, Russian warriors, even now, on this holiday, defend the interests of our country with arms in hand," Putin said at a late Saturday meeting with families of Russian soldiers who have died in Ukraine.

Russia lunched its full-scale invasion on Ukraine in February 2022, in what Kyiv and its Western allies said was an unprovoked imperialistic land grab.

Nearly two years later, the war, which has killed thousands and displaced millions, has shifted to increased air strikes at each other's territories as both sides have struggled to make significant gains along the frontline.

State television footage showed the Russian leader attending with a small group of families of soldiers killed an intimate mid-night service, known as

the Divine Liturgy, later on Saturday at a chapel at his residence in Novo-Ogaryovo outside Moscow.

There was no call from Putin this year for a ceasefire in Ukraine to coincide with the holiday, which many Orthodox Christians celebrate on Jan. 6-7 - as was the case a year ago. Ukraine said on Saturday that a Russian missile strike killed 11 people and injured 10 in and around the eastern Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk, while a Russian-installed official accused Kyiv of shelling parts of Donetsk now under Moscow's control.



An elderly woman puts ballot paper inside a ballot box after casting her vote in the morning during the 12th general election in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Blinken meets Jordan's king

Monitoring Desk
AMMAN: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met Sunday with Jordan's king and foreign minister and visited a World Food Program warehouse in Amman as he pressed ahead with an urgent Middle East diplomatic mission to prevent Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza from spreading.

On his fourth visit to the region in three months, Blinken stressed the need for Israel to adjust its military operations to reduce civilian casualties and sig-

nificantly boost the amount of humanitarian aid reaching Gaza while highlighting the importance of preparing detailed plans for the post-conflict future of the territory, which has been decimated by intensive Israeli airstrikes and ground offensives.

After a day of talks with Turkish and Greek leaders in Istanbul and Crete, Blinken met Sunday with Jordan's King Abdullah II and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi seeking buy-in for US efforts to tamp down resur-

Americans divided on US role in Mideast crisis

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: A recent Gallup survey shows that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is rapidly becoming unpopular in the United States, so is the war he has unleashed on Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

The survey's assessment of Americans' views on Netanyahu, who faces charges of fraud, bribery, and breach of trust are getting increasingly unpopular.

Netanyahu's unfavourable rating of 47 per cent surpasses his favorable rating of 33pc, marking a significant reversal in trend since 2019.

Republicans continue to view him more favorably (55pc), while Democrats (14pc) and independents (30pc) show lower favourability.

Pentagon chief's hospitalisation kept under wraps for four days

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin is in hospital since Monday for an unspecified medical matter, the Pentagon said late on Friday, without detailing why he was being treated or why it kept his hospital stay secret all week.

Austin, who is 70, sits just below President Joe Biden at the top of the chain of command of the US military and his duties require him being available at a moment's notice to respond to any manner of national security crisis.

The Pentagon did not

say whether Lloyd Austin ever lost consciousness before or after he was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Jan 1, or the extent to which his duties were assumed by his deputy, Kathleen Hicks.

Those duties include being ready and available to respond to an incoming nuclear attack.

The Pentagon said Austin suffered "complications following a recent elective medical procedure".

"He is recovering well and is expecting to resume his full duties today," Maj Gen Patrick Ryder.

Harris calls on Black South Carolina voters to defend rights

Monitoring Desk
MYRTLE BEACH: Vice President Kamala Harris on Saturday marked the Jan. 6, 2021, attacks on the US Capitol with remarks in South Carolina, where the state's Democratic primary will be held on Feb. 3.

Harris spoke on the anniversary of the deadly attacks after Biden offered scathing criticism of Republican frontrunner Donald Trump's actions that day in a speech near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, on Friday.

The vice president delivered the keynote address at the 7th Episcopal Dis-

trict AME Church Women's Missionary Society annual retreat in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

"Three years ago today, on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob violently attacked the United States Capitol they used brutal force and fear to try to overturn the results of a free and fair election. They tried to overrule the votes of millions of Americans," Harris said.

"On that day, we saw violence, chaos, and lawlessness, but some so-called leaders still tried to mislead and gaslight by saying it was a peaceful protest," she said.



South Korean marines walk past a shelter sign in Yeonpyeong island.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin attends the Orthodox Christmas liturgy at a cathedral on the territory of the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow, Russia.

Gaza has simply become 'uninhabitable', says UN

Monitoring Desk
GAZA STRIP: Israel bombed southern Gaza on Saturday as the UN warned that the besieged Palestinian territory has been rendered "uninhabitable" by three months of war.

Top Western diplomats were in the region as part of a fresh push to boost the flow of aid into Gaza and address mounting fears of a wider conflict.

The Egyptian Red Crescent on Friday said 1,200 water purifiers, 100 oxygen cylinders, one oxygen generator, 1,000 solar-powered items, 24 power

generators and 418 medical supplies had been blocked by Israel from reaching Gaza since the conflict started. The fighting, triggered by the October 7 attacks on southern Israel by Hamas, has sent tensions soaring across the region, and shows no signs of abating with the conflict entering its fourth month.

Civilians in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip have borne the brunt of the violence as the scale of the destruction has triggered mass displacement and a deepening humanitarian crisis.

North Korea's Kim Jong Un sends sympathy messages to Iran, Japan: KCNA

Monitoring Desk
SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un sent messages of sympathy to the leaders of Iran and Japan on Saturday, state media said, after the countries were hit with deadly bombings and earthquake respectively this week.

Two bomb blasts in Iran claimed by Islamic State killed nearly 100 people on Wednesday, while the death toll in Japan's devastating earthquake on New Year's Day is nearing 100.

Kim expressed condolences to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio

Kishida with the hope that affected areas would be restored to stability soon, according to state media KCNA.

He also expressed sympathy to Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and reaffirmed North Korea's stand in "opposing all sorts of terrorism", KCNA said.

North Korea on Friday fired more than 200 artillery rounds near a disputed maritime border with South Korea, prompting the South to take "corresponding" action with live fire drills.



LONDON: Metropolitan Police officers clash with protesters during a pro-Palestine demonstration in front of the Palace of Westminster. The protesters called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

New York prosecutor seeks \$370 mn from Trump in fraud case

Monitoring Desk
NEW YORK: New York's attorney general is seeking \$370 million from former president Donald Trump in a fraud case which has seen the real estate mogul accused of inflating the value of his properties, court documents showed Friday.

Trump, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, and his two eldest sons are accused of fraudulently inflating the value of real estate assets to receive more favorable

bank loans and insurance terms.

"Record evidence... supports disgorgement of \$370 million, plus pre-judgment interest," said the filing, significantly more than the \$250 million that New York Attorney General Letitia James previously said she would seek.

"The myriad deceptive schemes they employed to inflate asset values and conceal facts were so outrageous that they belie innocent explanation."

Snow hinders rescues and aid deliveries to isolated communities

Monitoring Desk
WAJIMA: Rescue teams worked through snow to deliver supplies to isolated hamlets Sunday, six days after a powerful earthquake hit western Japan, killing at least 126 people. Heavy snowfall expected in Ishikawa Prefecture later Sunday and through the night added to the urgency.

After Monday's 7.6 magnitude tremor, 222 people were still unaccounted for, and 560 people were injured. Hundreds of aftershocks have followed, rattling the Noto Peninsula, where the quakes are centered.

Taiyo Matsushita walked three hours through

the mud to reach a supermarket in Wajima city to buy food and other supplies for his family.

The home where he lives with his wife and four children, and about 20 nearby homes, are among the more than a dozen communities cut off by landslides.

Power was out, and in a matter of hours, they couldn't even use their cell phones, he told Jiji Press.

"We want everyone to know help isn't coming to some places," Matsushita was quoted as saying by Jiji Press. "We feel such an attachment to this community."

Jordanian army says it killed 5 drug smugglers in clashes on the Syrian border

Monitoring Desk
AMMAN: The Jordanian army said Saturday that it killed five drug and weapon smugglers and arrested 15 in a day of clashes with armed groups of smugglers attempting to cross into Jordan from Syria. The army statement said the clashes broke out before dawn between Jordanian border guards and armed organizations "that practice smuggling and rely on systematic infiltration operations."

EU Council President Michel says to step down in July

Monitoring Desk
BRUSSELS: Belgian politician Charles Michel has announced he will step down as European Council president after running in the European Parliament elections set for June.

The surprise move will heighten speculation about who will be the next EU leader as negotiations begin for a new round of top jobs in November.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen of Germany, who like Michel was appointed to her post in 2019.

Bangladesh PM Hasina votes in general election boycotted by opponents

Monitoring Desk
DHAKA: Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cast her vote on Sunday soon after polls opened in a general election boycotted by the main opposition party and which is set to give the ruling Awami League-led alliance a fourth straight term in power.

At least four people were killed late on Friday night in a passenger train fire that the government called arson, after several polling booths, schools and a Buddhist monastery were set ablaze days before the election.

There were no reports of violence on voting day, however, as nearly 800,000 security forces guard polling

booths, assisted by troops nationwide.

Accompanied by her daughter and other members of her family, Hasina voted at City College in the capital, Dhaka, minutes after polling began at 8am (0200 GMT). Polling will run for eight hours, followed by the counting of votes and initial results are expected early on Monday.

"Bangladesh is a sovereign country and people are my power," Hasina said after voting, adding that she hoped her party would win the people's mandate, which would give it a fifth term.

"I am trying my best to ensure that democracy should continue in this country."

US regulator orders inspections on some Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes after panel blows out mid-flight

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: The US air safety regulator said on Saturday that it had grounded some versions of Boeing's 737 MAX 9 jets pending inspections, causing dozens of flight cancellations a day after a panel blew out of one of the planes over the western US state of Oregon.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) "is requiring immediate inspections of certain Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes before they can return to flight", the agency said on X.

It added that around 171 aircraft worldwide would be affected, with each inspection taking four to eight hours.

Alaska and United Airlines fly the largest number of MAX 9 planes, while Turkish Airlines has a smaller fleet.

As of Sunday, all three airlines had grounded their jets for inspection.

Boeing has so far de-

livered about 218 of the 737 MAX planes worldwide, the company told AFP.

US-based Alaska Airlines grounded all 65 of its Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes on Friday after a flight carrying 171 passengers and six crew was forced to make an emergency landing.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said a sealed-over door panel had opened and come off mid-flight.

Alaska Flight 1282 had departed from Portland International Airport and was still gaining altitude when the cabin crew reported a "pressurisation issue", according to the FAA.

The plane quickly returned to Portland and there were no major injuries.

Images posted on social media showed a side panel of the plane blown out, with emergency oxygen masks hanging from the ceiling.

Italian foreign minister calls for formation of EU army

Monitoring Desk
ROME: The European Union should form its own combined army that could play a role in peacekeeping and preventing conflict, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said.

In an interview with Italian newspaper La Stampa, Tajani said that closer European cooperation on defence was a priority for the Forza Italia party that he leads.

"If we want to be peacekeepers in the world, we need a European military. And this is a fundamental precondition to be able to have an effective European foreign policy," he said in an interview published on Sunday.

"In a world with powerful players like the United States, China, India, Russia - with crises from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific - Italian, German, French or Slovenian citizens can only be protected by something that already

exists, namely the European Union," he added.

European defence cooperation has risen up the political agenda since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine almost two years ago.

However, efforts have been more focused on NATO expansion, with EU nation Finland joining the alliance last year and Sweden also on track to become a member.

Tajani also said the 27-nation EU should streamline its leadership and have a single presidency, rather than the current structure of a European Council president and a European Commission president.

The foreign minister became leader of Forza Italia following the death of Silvio Berlusconi last year.

European Parliament elections in June will be the first gauge of the party's popularity after the loss of its charismatic former leader.

Global food prices eased 10pc in 2023, says Food and Agriculture Organisation

Monitoring Desk
UNITED NATIONS: Global food prices experienced a notable decline in 2023, further easing concerns over food inflation worldwide.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reported on Friday that its Food Price Index (FPI) concluded the year over 10 per cent below its December 2022 level.

The index fell to 118.5, the lowest since February 2021, down 1.5pc from November and 10.1pc from December 2022. The overall index for 2023 was 13.7pc lower than the average value for 2022. Notably, the international sugar price index was the only one higher over the year, despite experiencing a significant drop of 16.6pc in December due to increased sugar production in Brazil and reduced use of sugarcane for ethanol production in India.

The Cereal Price Index saw a 1.5pc increase in December 2023, driven by

rising prices of wheat, maize, rice, and barley, primarily due to shipment limitations faced by exporters. However, for the entire year, the cereal index was more than 15pc below the 2022 average, reflecting well-supplied global markets.

The Vegetable Oil Price Index declined by 1.4pc in December, reflecting subdued purchases of palm, soy, rapeseed, and sunflower seed oil.

For 2023, this index was 32.7pc below the previous year's level, with soy oil particularly affected by reduced demand from the biodiesel sector and improved weather conditions in major growing areas of Brazil.

The FAO Sugar Price Index witnessed a substantial 16.6pc decline in December, reaching a nine-month low, although still up 14.9pc from December 2022. The drop was attributed to the brisk pace of sugar production in Brazil and reduced sugarcane use for ethanol in India.

Federal Govt to be contacted for approval of WB's proposed projects from ENEC, says caretaker CM

Independent Report
QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki has stated that the federal government would be contacted for approval of the projects proposed with cooperation of World Bank in the irrigation sector from ENEC.

This would ensure implementation on the WB's projects without any delay. The caretaker Chief Minister was presiding over the meeting about on-going development projects in irrigation department here on Sunday.

The Additional Chief

Secretary Planning and Development, Abdul Saboor Kakar, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister, Rashid Razaq Khan, Secretary Irrigation, Hafiz Abdul Majid and other concerned high ups participated in the meeting. The Secretary Irrigation briefed about different development projects including those of World Bank. Addressing the meeting, Chief Minister stressed that it is very necessary to start implementation on the projects of irrigation other line departments so as to ensure correct use of the available resources timely.

In this regard, a special committee led by the Additional Chief Secretary development would ensure implementation on the projects after preparing suggestions, he said.

He also directed to propose projects for overcoming the depletion of underground water table.

Moreover, the correct use of available resources should also be ensured to meet the public requirements in irrigation sector under master plan.

The Chief Minister also directed to complete all the schemes of public importance including Bhag

Kachhi water supply scheme within the minimum possible time so that the local people may benefit from them. Meanwhile, the caretaker Chief Minister also chaired high level meeting of Balochistan Development Authority here the same day. The Chairman BDA briefed the meeting about overall performance of the Authority besides the issues being faced by it.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister directed to take steps for bringing improvement in performance of BDA by decreasing the non-development expenditures so as to create balance.



Pakistan Navy Ship escorting merchant vessel in Arabian Sea.



QUETTA: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki chaired a meeting to review ongoing projects of Irrigation Department.

Senator Abdul Qadir welcomes decision of restructuring FBR

QUETTA (APP): Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Petroleum and Resources and Economic Affairs, Senator Muhammad Abdul Qadir on Sunday welcomed the decision of the restructuring of FBR to make it able to achieve the goals.

In a statement issued here, he said that another major challenge for the FBR is to increase the scope of the tax net.

He said that over a million people do not pay tax at all, adding that unless they are brought into the tax net, it will not be possible to achieve the revenue collection targets.

He said that a policy board consisting of bureaucrats, technocrats and tax experts should be formed which would be able to achieve the goals for the coming years by examining

all the complexities.

Abdul Qadir said political interference and transfer posting issues in FBR are adversely affecting the performance of the institution.

The FBR's Policy Board will be consisted on highly qualified experts to run the tax authority in a professional manner, so that the tax collection authority can be run in a professional manner, he said.

The Chairman Standing Committee said that the tax machinery would be divided into FBR and FBC. The officers appointed at the district level should ensure 100 percent tax collection in anyway, he added.

He said the promotions and rewards for the best and poorly performing officers in achieving tax collection targets should be implemented.

SC 9-member larger bench to hear ZAB presidential reference today

ISLAMABAD (Online): A 9-member larger bench headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa will hear the Zulfiqar Bhutto presidential reference on January 8 (today). Notices have also been issued to the parties for this. On the other hand, last week, the People's Party submitted a 108-page written response to the presidential reference against the death sentence of former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in the Supreme Court. Lawyer Farooq H. Naik submitted to the Supreme Court on behalf of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. The written reply includes references to various books and also the details of the interview of former Chief Justice Naseem Hasan Shah. Along with the USB and CD of the interview of Chief Justice Naseem Hasan Shah, transcripts of the said interview in English and Urdu have also been submitted.

SIFC efforts to boost economic stability in Pakistan: Nauman

LAHORE (INP): Appreciating the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) efforts, the business community said on Sunday that the revolutionary measures in the Information Technology field could stabilise the economy of the country in a fitting manner.

The initiatives and steps taken by the SIFC in its recent meeting, especially in the field of Information Technology will enhance exports from 40 to 50 percent exports.

The se were the views expressed by renowned chief of Leading Technol-

ogy Company of Pakistan—Pakistan Tech Entrepreneurs Investor and Information Technology Startups—Nauman Saeed while talking to a delegation of Pakistani investors Sunday.

He said Pakistan's IT industry has great potential to expand their business and our startups need to be able to attract bigger investments. Offering his services, Nauman Saeed said that his forum is ready to submit suggestions and ideas in the field of Information Technology to boost country's exports.

Pak Navy deploys warships in Arabian Sea to ward off attacks by Houthi rebels

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan Navy, after recent incidents of breach of maritime security in the Arabian Sea, have deployed their warships.

According to the spokesman for the Pakistan Navy, these ships are constantly patrolling in order to ensure the protection of Pakistan's trade routes.

He has informed that the navy is also conducting aerial surveillance of these routes. "The purpose of patrolling is not only to ensure the safety of Pakistani ships but also those belonging to other coun-

tries," the spokesman has elaborated.

Last month, Yemen-based Houthi rebels had also claimed an attack on a Pakistan-bound ship from Saudi Arabia in the Red Sea.

"Pakistan Navy is well aware of its national responsibility in maintaining maritime peace and order in the region," the statement noted.

Last week India announced it had deployed three warships in the Arabian Sea after a drone hit an "Israel-affiliated" merchant vessel about 200 nautical miles (370km) off the coast

of the western state of Gujarat. No casualties were, however, reported in the attack, which the US blamed on Iran, which the latter dismissed.

Exporters from around the world are in trouble these days because of a spate of attacks on commercial vessels by Houthi rebels in the Red Sea.

The rebels who have vowed to avenge the massacre of Palestinians at the hands of Israeli forces, have said they will target any ship passing through the Red Sea that are bound for the Jewish state.

Minister says ethnic conflicts to benefit country's enemies

ISLAMABAD (INP): Nawabzada Jamal Raisani said on Sunday that people belonging to different ethnic backgrounds lived in Pakistan.

He was addressing participants of the protest demonstration organised by Balochistan Shuhada Forum outside the Islamabad Press Club.

Holding placards in their hands inscribed with slogans in the favour of their

slain relatives, the protesters shouted slogans against India at the top of their voice.

He said a conspiracy had been hatched to create a rift between different ethnicities in the country. "Have we ever realized that the blood that sheds as a result of this conspiracy benefits our enemies," he added. The minister said that militant outfits like BLA exist in Balochistan.

460,881 illegal Afghans returned to their homeland

ISLAMABAD (INP): Repatriation of illegal foreign nationals including Afghans to their homeland is continuing in a dignified and safe manner.

The repatriation operation utilized 23 vehicles to transport 200 men, 164 women and 329 children back to Afghanistan.

As per details, 693 illegal Afghan nationals returned to their country during past 24 hours, taking the total number of returned immigrants to 460,881.

23 vehicles were used to transport 200 men, 164 women and 329 children to Afghanistan.

The apex committee of the National Action Plan (NAP) in a meeting on October 3, chaired by Caretaker PM Anwarul Haq Kakar gave a deadline to all foreign nationals living illegally in the country until October 31 to leave voluntarily or face deportation.

ECP releases list of preliminary polling stations for constituencies

ISLAMABAD (Online): Election Commission of Pakistan has released the preliminary list of polling stations for casting public votes in constituencies across the country.

According to Election Commission of Pakistan's spokesperson, the list of preliminary polling stations according to constituencies has been published, voters and candidates of the constituency can submit objections or suggestions on the preliminary polling list till January 11.

DROs will give verdict on these objections and proposals during January 12 to 17. Election Commission spokesman said that after the decisions on the objections filed on the preliminary lists, the final list of polling stations will be issued 15 days before the general elections.

It should be noted that elections will be held across the country on February 8. Nomination papers have been submitted by the candidates for the general elections.



QUETTA: National Cricketer Ahmed Shahzad meeting with Caretaker Provincial Minister for Information Jan Achakzai, Provincial Information Secretary Imran Khan and DGPR Balochistan Muhammad Noor Khetrana are also present.

Wife of Jam becomes active for poll; would contest from NA-257

Independent Report
QUETTA: As the election process moves on, the candidates contesting polls are becoming active in Balochistan province as elsewhere in the country.

In Balochistan, some female candidates have also come on the forefront to contest and venture the elections.

Among them is also the wife of former Chief Minister and leader of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Jam Kamal Khan, Ms. Maria Jam Kamal.

Ms. Maria Jam Kamal is going to contest elections from NA-257 after her husband Jam Kamal decided to contest polls from two constituencies of the provincial assembly i.e., PB-21 & PB-22.

Maria Jam Kamal has submitted her nomination papers as an independent candidate.

Needless to mention here is that it is for the first time that any family member of Jam Kamal and that her wife is taking part in the general elections.

Shehbaz resolves to restore masses and investors' confidence

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif said on Sunday that his party will take all-out steps in a bid to control ballooning inflation.

The former prime minister held a meeting with the party leaders separately. Prominent among those who met Shehbaz Sharif were Khawaja Saad Rafique, Khawaja Salman Rafique, Mian Javed Latif, Atta Manika, Afzal Khokhar, Mohsin Ranjha, Zulfiqar Bhatti, Sardar Irfan Dogar, Malik Saif ul Malook Khokhar, Chaudhry Tufail Jutt, and Ashraf Jutt.

On this occasion, matters pertaining to the party and the upcoming elections were discussed.

Expressing his thoughts, Shehbaz Sharif said, "We will take revolutionary steps to address the masses' problems."

"Only Nawaz Sharif had fulfilled the promises with the masses. With the exception of the PML-N, all the political parties had deceived the masses," Shehbaz Sharif said.

He expressed his resolve to restore the confidence of the masses and investors. "We will come up with a balanced economic policy," he added.

Few days back, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif directed the party leadership to unveil the economic agenda with the masses.

and the upcoming elections were discussed.

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CHARSADA: President Awami National Party (ANP) Aimal Wali Khan addressing public those who joined party at NA-125 during election campaign.

Hassan Zehri says: PPP has made great sacrifices for democracy

Independent Report
HUB: Senior leader and spokesperson of Pakistan Peoples Party Asif Ali Zardari and nominated candidate for Balochistan Assembly PB-21 Hub Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has strongly condemned the resolution presented in the Senate to postpone the elections.

He said in a newspaper statement that the resolution presented in the Senate is a conspiracy against the upcoming elections and democracy. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri strongly opposed the proposed resolution and said that the anti-democratic resolution is the personal wish of Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjani.

He wants to postpone the elections through their supporters. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that Pakistan Peoples Party created the environment for the elections and PPP was the only political party that fought for the elec-

tions while other parties wanted to escape from the elections. Resolution presented in the Senate is against democracy.

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that Pakistan Peoples Party has made great sacrifices for democracy and those who block the way of democracy and kill the blood on democracy. He said that tense conditions and weather have been mentioned in the resolution, so it can be seen that the conditions in the last elections were much more serious than today's conditions, but still the elections were held.

If such so-called justifications continue to be presented, then elections cannot be held. The Supreme Court has also confirmed the date of the elections on 8th February and the elections will be held on the decided date and Pakistan Peoples Party will win. PPP workers continue their preparations vigorously.

Traffic accident in Mastung claims life of woman, several injured

QUETTA (APP): One woman was killed while several people were injured on Sunday in an accident on the national highway in the Mastung area of Quetta.

According to a private news channel, a wedding convoy met with a tragic incident as one of the cars overturned, resulting in the loss of a woman's life and leaving several individuals injured, including women and children.

Upon receiving the distress call, both police and rescue teams swiftly reached the scene.

The body and injured were promptly shifted to nearby hospitals and rescue operation was started.

According to rescue officials, the condition of six individuals is reported to be critical. Preliminary investigations suggest that the wedding convoy, en route from Quetta to Mangochar, faced the unfortunate incident due to high-speed circumstances.



SHIKARPUR: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Shikarpur, Dr. Muhammad Imran Khan along with Rangers Colonel visiting Kacha area where they started search and targeted operation against the criminals.

Tribunal dismiss appeal, Hammad Azhar, Sanam out from electoral field

LAHORE (Online): After the Returning Officer, the Election Tribunal has also rejected the appeals of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Hammad Azhar and Sanam Javed, maintaining the decision of the Returning Officer to reject the nomination papers and both the candidates have been disqualified from the election field.

According to the details, Justice Tariq Nadeem upheld the decision of the former federal member of the National Assembly Hammad Azhar and dismissed the appeal against the rejection of the nomination papers of NA-129 of the President of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Punjab.

Hammad Azhar's ineligibility to contest the election will remain after the appeal from the Election Tribunal is dismissed.

Leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has announced to approach the Supreme Court of Pakistan against this verdict of the

Election Tribunal and to participate in the upcoming general elections.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's social media activist Sanam Javed's appeal against rejection of nomination papers was dismissed, with which she was out of the electoral field as the Election Tribunal upheld the verdict of the Returning Officer (RO) to reject the nomination papers of Sanam Javed Khan.

In this regard, the judge of Appellate Tribunal, Justice Tariq Nadeem, gave a verdict on Sanam Javed's appeals, in which the Election Tribunal rejected Sanam Javed's appeal against the rejection of Sanam Javed's papers from NA 119, 120 and PP 150.

Regarding Sanam Javed's papers, the objection said that she signed on December 21 and the papers were submitted before the Returning Officer on December 22. Sanam Javed mentioned a joint account in nomination paper.

Tragic accident on Hazara motorway takes 6 dead, 8 injured

HARIPUR (APP): At least six persons died and eight others were injured when a passenger van was struck by construction machinery working on the Hazara motorway for maintenance work near the Shah Maqsood interchange, at the same time, another passenger coaster hit the van.

According to the details, a devastating accident unfolded on the Hazara Motorway near Shah Maqsood, two vehicles from Manshera en route to Lahore. The collision involved a flying coach, a speeding passenger van, and construction machinery, resulting in the loss of six lives and leaving eight individuals injured.

The Rescue 1122 Haripur conducted a one-hour operation, successfully extricating individuals trapped in the vehicles following the collision.

Verdict reserves on Imran's appeal against rejection of nomination papers

LAHORE (Online): In the Election Tribunal established in Lahore High Court Rawalpindi Bench, the verdict was reserved on the appeal against the rejection of the nomination papers of former chairman PTI Imran Khan, which will be heard on January 10. According to the details, Justice Chaudhry Abdul Aziz heard the appeal while Barrister Ali Zafar represented the former Chairman PTI.

At the beginning of the hearing, Justice Chaudhry Abdul Aziz asked Barrister Ali Zafar how long will it take you to complete your arguments? To which he replied that I need 45 minutes to complete my arguments.

Barrister Ali Zafar, opening the arguments, told the court that the court has to decide what the crime is

in moral turpitude, I will divide my arguments into three parts. Barrister Ali Zafar said that this case is different from the moral turpitude case. Justice Chaudhry Abdul Aziz remarked that the moral tribute should be discussed first. The tribunal asked whether the details of the items taken from the coffin were given. We are not discussing the merits of the Tasha Khana case here, the money obtained by selling Tasha Khana's items was stated? Barrister Ali Zafar replied that yes it was stated.

Earlier, while talking to the media outside the Lahore High Court Rawalpindi bench, PTI's lawyer Ali Zafar said that it is not moral turpitude, it is a misdeclaration, it cannot be transferred to disqualification.



QUETTA: Church Missionary Trust Association President, Peter Hami addresses to media persons during press conference, at Quetta press club.