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Chief Editor: Syed Farooq Shah

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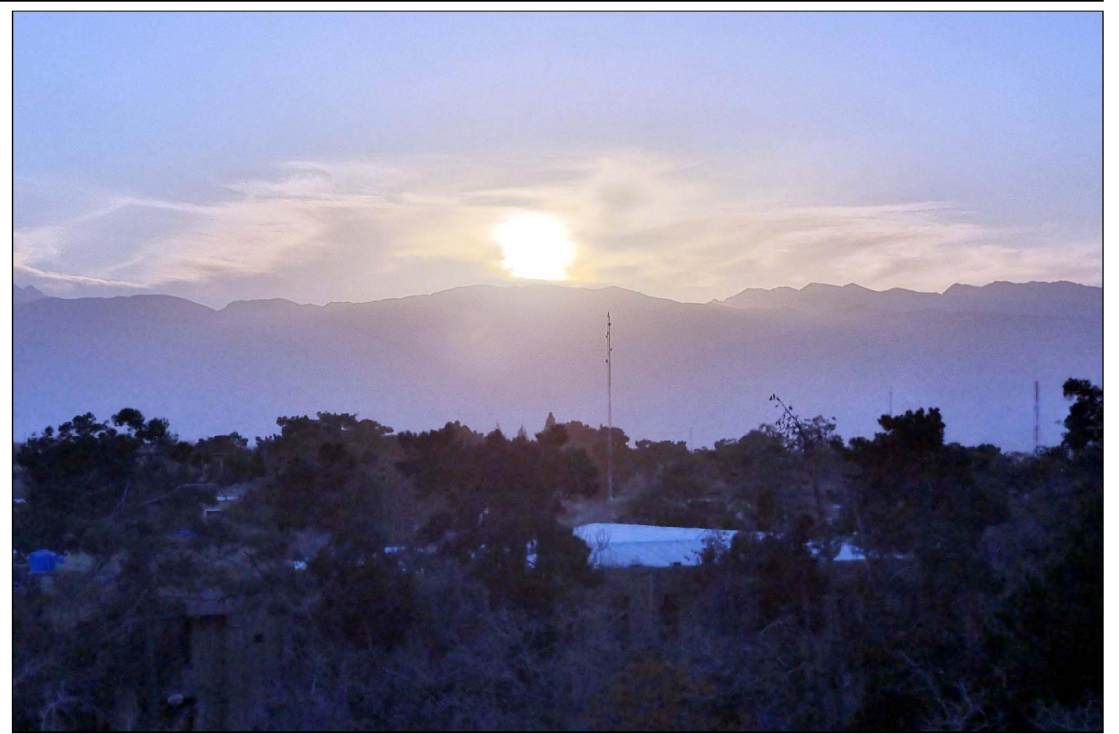
Five terrorist killed in Awaran operation Three terrorists killed for attempting to sneak into Pakistan from Afghanistan

Terrorists tried to infiltrate Pak-Afghan border in KP's Bajaur; Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered; In separate incident, Pakistan Army soldier martyred in border post attack by terrorists from inside Afghanistan

RAWALPINDI (APP): Three terrorists were killed by the security forces on Sunday who were trying to infiltrate the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, in the general area Batwar of Bajaur District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) in a news release said that their movement was picked up by the security forces in the general area Batwar and in the ensuing exchange of fire all three terrorists were killed. Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also re-

covered from them. Meanwhile, a soldier of the Pakistan Army embraced martyrdom while valiantly thwarting terrorists' firing attempt on the border post in the general area of Spinwam, North Waziristan District, KP. The Army troops responded in a befitting manner causing considerable losses to the terrorists. Meanwhile at least five terrorists were killed in an intense exchange of fire during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) conducted by the security forces on December 30-31 in general area Mashkai, Awaran District of Balochistan province. "During the conduct of the operation, after intense fire exchange between

own troops and the terrorists, 'Five Terrorists' were sent to hell. Terrorists' hideout was also busted and a cache of arms, ammunition and explosives was recovered," an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release on Sunday said. The sanitization operation is being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area. "Security Forces of Pakistan, in step with the Nation, remain determined to thwart attempts of sabotaging peace, stability and progress of Balochistan," the ISPR said.



Beautiful eye catching view of glimpse last sunset of year 2023, captured over the horizon of Quetta



QUETTA: Caretaker Health Minister Dr. Amir Muhammad Khan Jogezeai visiting different wards of Children Hospital

Acceptance or rejection of nomination papers constitutional process: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (INP): The caretaker Federal Minister of Information, Murtaza Solangi, has said that the approval or rejection of nomination papers of the candidates is a constitutional process, and any decisions in this regard fall within the legal framework.

In an interview with a private TV channel, he said the majority of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidates have successfully submitted their nomination papers.

He clarified that the acceptance or rejection of these papers is a constitutional process. He said that the caretaker government has no involvement in these matters, and only the Election Commission of Pakistan can act in such electoral affairs.

Reiterating the adherence to constitutional boundaries, Murtaza Solangi emphasized that all

political parties, including PTI, receive fair coverage based on ethical editorial policies.

He further noted that registered political parties are receiving unbiased coverage on state media, adhering to ethical journalistic standards.

Murtaza Solangi also expressed the commitment to provide necessary support to the Election Commission for financial and administrative facilitation. He informed that the Election Commission's financial needs were initially met with an allocation of 10 billion rupees, followed by an additional disbursement of 17.4 billion rupees.

Talking about the progress in the negotiations with Baloch protesters, the Information Minister revealed that in the first phase, all children and women were safely released.



KARACHI: Members of National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) are enlightened candles to express solidarity with martyred innocent people of Palestine and against Israeli cruel and inhumane acts, during protest demonstration at Karachi press club

GoB abandons public ceremonies on New Year due to Palestine situation

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Government of Balochistan had abandoned the public gatherings and ceremonies on eve of New Year due to the tragic incidents occurred in Palestine that claimed lives of large number of Palestinians.

In an official statement issued here on Sunday, the caretaker Provincial Minister for Information, Jan Achakzai said that we are going to abandon all public ceremonies of the New Year following the directives of caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar.

Jan Achakzai said that we would encourage the people to observe the occasion remembering the aggrieved Palestinians in

their prayers and give charity to the deserving people.

The Minister Information said that let express solidarity and support the Palestinian brethren and sisters who are grieved and in pain.

We still remember those people who embraced martyrdom and bring hope and sympathy with them, adding he stressed.

Jan said that we share the grief with Palestinian people. He said that Pakistan has always raised voice for the right of freedom of the Palestinians at every front.

He said that recent barbarism and massacre of innocent Palestinians has exposed the naked face of Israel.

Protection of life, property of citizens priority of govt: Jamali

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial Minister for Home, Mir Zubair Jamali has directed to take action without any discrimination against those involved in the aerial firing, hooliganism and one wheeling on the occasion of New Year.

According to an official handout issued here on Sunday, the Minister Home said that special teams have been constituted for prevention of the one wheeling and aerial firing.

The Minister Home asserted that no dangerous activity would be acceptable against the law in the name of recreation.

He said that protection of life and property of the citizens is topmost priority of the government.

The Minister also directed to deploy the additional personnel for maintaining flow of traffic.

He also directed to take well care of the life and property of the people especially families, women and children.

The patents should keep strict vigil on the activities of their children and don't let them part of any illegal act, adding he stressed.

Fully prepared to hold peaceful, transparent elections: PEC

QUETTA (INP): Provincial Election Commissioner Balochistan Ijaz Anwar Chohan has said that the commission was fully prepared to hold peaceful and transparent elections.

In a statement issued on Sunday, he said that all necessary arrangements for general elections to be held on February 8, 2024 have been finalized.

Ijaz Anwar Chohan further stated that a monitoring cell has been established to look into the issues.

He said that all security arrangements have also been finalized.

President felicitates Nation, Muslim Ummah on new year

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi Sunday felicitated the Pakistani Nation, the Muslim Ummah and the international community at the beginning of the new year 2024.

In a message, he said, "I would like to extend my heartfelt felicitations to the entire Pakistani Nation, the Muslim Ummah and the international community at the beginning of the new year."

"As we bid farewell to the passing year and welcome the dawn of a new year, I pray to Allah Almighty that may the coming year bring prosperity, political and economic stability for Pakistan as well as the entire world."

"At the beginning of the new year, we should not forget our brothers and sisters in Palestine who continue to face the brutal and barbaric attacks at the hands of the Israeli forces."

He urged the international community to take urgent steps to stop genocide in Gaza and work for just and lasting peace in Palestine.

"Similarly, my thoughts are with the people of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir, who have been enduring atrocities and the longest siege by the Indian occupation forces."

"It is essential that the international community should take practical measures to resolve these longstanding disputes in accordance with the UN resolutions to promote global peace and security."

Gilani says: PPP key player for formation of govt

MULTAN (APP): Former Prime Minister and PPP Central Leader Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani said on Sunday that no government could be formed in the country without the Pakistan Peoples Party.

He said this while talking to journalists on the occasion of the participation of a good number of people from the Christian Community in PPP.

Gilani stressed the need for a level playing field in politics. He called on the Election Commission to ensure transparent elections.

Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani thanked the Christian community in South Punjab, particularly in Multan, for their support for PPP.

Rejection & acceptance of papers: Two judges of High Court appointed for hearing of appeals

Independent Report

QUETTA: Two judges of Balochistan High Court (BHC) have been appointed for hearing of the appeals against acceptance or rejection of the nomination papers of the candidates in the province.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan, Judges of the High Court including Mr. Justice Hashim Khan Kakar and Mr. Justice Muhammad Aamir Nawaz Rana have been appointed for hearing

Fazlur Rehman escapes armed attack in Dera Ismail Khan

Monitoring Desk

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: In a disturbing incident on Sunday, the convoy of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman was targeted in a brazen attack at the Yarik Interchange in Dera Ismail Khan, party officials said.

The assailants opened fire on the convoy, aiming from two sides, according to preliminary information. Fortunately, all individuals, including Maulana Fazlur Rehman, emerged unharmed from the attack.

The JUI-F chief was reportedly passing through Dera Ismail Khan as part of his election campaign when the incident occurred. After the attack, Fazl successfully reached his ancestral home in Abdul Khel, where he is reported to be safe.

JUI-F spokesperson Aslam Ghori condemned the attack, describing it as a

cowardly act. Ghori expressed frustration over what he perceives as a lack of concrete action by the administration despite repeated warnings about the threats faced by the party's leadership.

"We have repeatedly warned that the situation is not favourable for our leadership," Ghori stated in a press release. He criticized the administration for writing threat letters daily without taking effective measures.

Ghori urged an immediate investigation into the incident, questioning the institutions responsible for ensuring the safety of political figures.

Furthermore, Ghori highlighted the deteriorating law and order situation in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, expressing concerns about the escalating security challenges faced by political leaders in the wake of general elec-

tions, scheduled for February 8.

Contrary to initial reports, Regional Police Officer (RPO) DI Khan Nasir Mehmood Satti stated that Maulana Fazlur Rehman is safe. Satti clarified that the JUI-F chief was present to refuel his vehicle and that the firing was not targeted at him. According to Satti, the gunfire was directed towards the Toll Plaza, adding a different dimension to the incident.

Taking notice of the reports, the interior secretary has called for a report on the incident. "Miscreants will not be allowed to spread chaos and sow discord in the country," said the spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior.

He said full security will be provided for political activities during election campaign, adding that all possible steps will be taken to ensure law and order and safety of the people.

Nomination papers of 1,941 candidates out of 2,419 accepted

Independent Report

QUETTA: The nomination papers of 1,941 candidates have been accepted for the general elections in Balochistan province after completion of the process of scrutiny.

According to the sources of Election Commission of Pakistan, a total of 2,419 candidates had filed their nomination papers for the elections on different seats of provincial and National Assemblies from the province.

However, the papers of 479 candidates were rejected.

In all 612 male and 19 female candidates filed papers for 16 seats of the National Assembly.

At the outset, papers of 539 out of total 631 candidates were accepted.

Three killed, 15 injured as coaster hits tree

NASIRABAD (INP): At least three people were killed and 15 others including women and children injured when a coaster carrying wedding guests hit a tree on Sunday.

According to details, the accident took place on Indus Highway where a coaster with wedding guests onboard returning from Karachi got out of control due to over speeding and crashed into a tree near village Chanhar in Nasirabad.

Caretaker CM congratulates KPC's newly elected office bearers; expresses best wishes

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki has congratulated the newly elected office bearers of the Karachi Press Club, Saeed Sarbazi, Shoaib Khan and others.

In a felicitation message issued here on Sunday, the Chief Minister expressed best wishes for the newly elected president KPC, Saeed Sarbazi, Secretary Shoaib Khan and other office bearers.

Mir Ali Mardan Domki said that KPC always played key role in highlighting the national issues.

He said that the election of office bearers through democratic process reflects the democratic approach.

The Chief Minister also said that the role of KPC has also been important in the national media.

Complete shutter down strike observed in favour of dharna in Chaman

Chaman Dharna Committee gives call for shutter down strike all over Balochistan today

CHAMAN: The complete shutter down strike was observed in favour of protest dharna in Chaman on Sunday. The call for shutter down was given by the Chaman Dharna Committee in support of the dharna being staged for last 73 days.

All parties, traders' Laghri ittehad and Anjuman Tajran also endorsed the strike as a result of which, all the trading centers, business concerns and shops remained closed.

Meanwhile, the Chaman Dharna Committee has announced to observe shutter down strike all over the province today (Monday).

In this regard, all the traders and shopkeepers have been appealed to close their shops and other business concerns today.

Needless to mention here that the protest dharna is continued by All Parties Traders Laghri Ittehad at the international highway near Pak-Afghan border.

The protesters are demanding restoration of the across border movement ending the condition of passport and visa. According to the spokesman of Chaman dharna committee, Sadiq Khan, the livelihood of thousands of people is linked with the Chaman border as there's no other source of income for them to make their both ends meet.



GWADAR: Pakistan's Ambassador to Beijing Khalil Hashmi visiting GDA Pak-China Friendship Hospital. Chairman Gwadar Port Authority Pasand Khan Buledi is also present

Pakistan in 2023: Another year of economic turmoil, political unrest, and security challenges

In the wake of last year's devastating floods, the revocation of a brittle truce with militants, the ousting of former-cricketer-turned-Prime Minister Imran Khan, public uproar over rising costs, and persistent economic challenges, 2023 has left Pakistan at a crossroads. As Pakistan navigates through these interwoven dilemmas, the economic turmoil, political instability, and security challenges form a symphony of uncertainty — underlined by the looming 2024 general elections.

Pakistan wrestles with an enduring economic crisis, striving to fulfill its external financial obligations to avert default. Soaring inflation and minimal foreign exchange reserves have contributed to the economic downturn. Despite the steady flow of capital into the nation, top-level mismanagement and institutionalized corruption have steadily depleted foreign exchange reserves and increased the overwhelming debt. Ongoing negotiations between Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have repeatedly stalled due to the reluctance of both the former ruling party and the current coalition government to undergo adequate monetary and fiscal reforms. Several of Pakistan's partners, such as China and Saudi Arabia, have emerged as significant players by providing temporary loan rollovers and financial support.

The economic crisis further exacerbates basic security concerns, including fuel supply shortages and energy austerity measures, that have triggered widespread civil unrest. One significant indicator of a struggling economy is the grounding of nearly 400 flight operations by national flag carrier Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) in the fall. Several credible sources indicate that two decades of Chinese lending to Pakistan has contributed to more of the country's external debt than previously estimated. That Pakistan is one of the top three recipients of Chinese loans is particularly concerning to leading experts.

Political Unrest as General Elections Loom Large

In 2023, Pakistan's domestic politics went through numerous bouts of upheaval. Shehbaz Sharif, the brother of the longest-serving Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, was appointed as the prime minister in April 2022 after Imran Khan was ousted due to allegations of poor governance and policy mismanagement. Khan claims a falling out with the military elites led to his ousting, rallying a series of widespread protests in his defense. Shehbaz Sharif's tenure as the country's leader from April to August resulted in temporary political stagnation. During Shehbaz Sharif's tenure, a turning point occurred on May 9 following the detention of Khan. The

protests, which erupted spontaneously in Lahore, Peshawar, and other major cities, witnessed participants blockading traffic and expressing vehement anti-military sentiments.

The May 9 protests were significant not simply because of the number of protesters but because of what they were asserting. For example, demonstrators in Mardan chanted "death to the Pakistan Army" outside a military facility, accusing the army of corruption. The aftermath of the protests witnessed a severe crackdown, with more than ten protesters killed and 5,000 PTI supporters detained. Khan, though distancing himself from the attacks on military installations, faced internal dissent as some of his party leaders and aides abandoned him, condemning the violence against the army establishment. The military's response to the protests was unprecedented, resulting in three commanders being dismissed and disciplinary actions against 15 top-level officers who exhibited outward displays of support for Khan. This move was one of the strongest actions taken by the military against its own leadership in decades, further intensifying the rift between the army and the civilian leadership.

On August 9, 2023, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif recommended that parliament dissolve to trigger general elections; the dissolution signaled at least an outward commitment to democratic renewal. The turmoil has raised concerns among experts regarding the potential politicization of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) by military-backed elites. The delays in provincial and other polls fuel skepticism about the ECP's impartiality and its ability to ensure fair and timely elections.

In October, Nawaz Sharif returned from self-imposed exile in the UK, marked by a historic rally in Lahore. The timing of his return, combined with previous corruption allegations stemming from the Panama Papers leak, gives rise to credible speculation that he is receiving support from the army — especially considering the military's involvement in the May 9 protests. In November, a court overturned Nawaz Sharif's conviction in a corruption case, requiring only an acquittal from the Panama Papers corruption case to meet the eligibility criteria for participating in the upcoming election.

Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar is currently the appointed caretaker prime minister, and his credible links with the military are widely acknowledged. The appointment of a caretaker prime minister without a mandate raises doubts about governance legitimacy, especially in light of Nawaz Sharif's return and other recent developments.

Nawaz's acquittals and potential political comeback, which ap-

pears to be backed by Pakistan's military, may draw international scrutiny. As Pakistan heads into 2024, democratic nations will likely call for anti-corruption efforts to mitigate the diplomatic backlash against the judiciary's overturn of Nawaz's corruption convictions. These unstable political transitions create significant uncertainty for crucial bilateral and multilateral lenders.

As Pakistan confronts the multifaceted challenges of economic turmoil and political unrest, the rising rates of terrorism pose a critical threat to the country's stability. A recent report by the Islamabad-based Center for Research and Security Studies highlights a surge in militant attacks, resulting in over 700 fatalities in the first nine months of 2023. The provinces bordering Afghanistan, Balochistan and

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, experience 92 percent of all fatalities, most of them security forces. The TTP, the so-called Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), and various Baloch separatist groups typically claim responsibility for the attacks. While the violence is currently concentrated in the northwestern provinces, there are ominous signs of its potential spread to other regions, such as Punjab and Sindh. The impact of this uptick in violence on elections is a concern for all Pakistan watchers.

This symphony of domestic challenges has implications for Pakistan's foreign relations, as they have the potential to alter Pakistan's interactions with key regional players. Pakistan's evolving economic relationship with China, perhaps its most significant strategic partner, is particularly notable as Pakistan formally seeks membership in BRICS — a group of emerging economies that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. As Islamabad seeks to deepen its ties with Beijing, the November high-level security meeting affirmed Pakistan's commitment to safeguard Chinese personnel in BRI projects. That same month, Pakistan hosted an advanced Chinese destroyer during the Sea Guardians naval drill, underscoring the countries' deepening bilateral defense cooperation.

Islamabad's relations with two of its other contiguous neighbors, Kabul and New Delhi, remain fraught. For Pakistan, there are three primary issues that persist in its relationship with Afghanistan. Firstly, sporadic skirmishes typically occur along the volatile Afghanistan-Pakistan border between Pakistani and Taliban forces, leading to temporary cross-border closures, with both sides exchanging gunfire over varying issues. In September 2023, a key cross-border closure caused an estimated \$1 million loss over the span of one week.

Pakistan's diplomatic

efforts to pressure the Taliban to prevent cross-border attacks from militant groups, especially the TTP, reflect the evolving nature of these regional ties. Third, Pakistan's implementation of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan in late 2023 has triggered widespread public unrest. The declaration primarily impacts nearly 2 million undocumented Afghan refugees residing inside Pakistan. Public opposition has emerged as activists express concerns about the policy's implications for cross-border trade and travel, which has led to protest campaigns along the Chaman-Spin Boldak border.

Pakistan's relations with India remain marginalized, with recent cricket clashes highlighting the lopsided nature of the historic rivalry. The two nations' diminishing economic ties and cultural exchanges mirror the broader trend of India prioritizing relationships with other regional players. The surge in nationalism and public hostility on both sides further exacerbates the diplomatic challenges, raising questions about the prospects for future cooperation. As several experts and government officials contend that Pakistan has strategically employed terrorism as a proxy to achieve its objectives against India, a country it perceives as a national security threat, the ripple effect extends to broader regional implications in the medium term. It exacerbates existing bilateral relations and fosters greater mistrust and instability between two nuclear-armed neighbors with a history of multiple wars.

The aftermath of Afghanistan has changed the dynamic between Islamabad and Washington. The U.S. concern about the resurgence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan aligns with some of Pakistan's security interests. The countries continue to cooperate in multiple other areas, including disaster management, security, and trade. However, the broader geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China presents a looming challenge for Pakistan as the U.S. seeks regional allies to counterbalance China. Pakistan's subtle juggling faces increasing scrutiny. The U.S.'s diplomatic and military support for Israel following the October 7 Hamas attack poses another challenge in the bilateral relationship, given Pakistan's firm stance in support of Palestinian autonomy.

At this stage, Pakistan faces economic uncertainties, political transitions, and security challenges amid an escalating militant threat. Given the ongoing upheaval, instability in Pakistan will likely persist after the February 2024 general elections and continue to influence its foreign relations with the U.S., China, and its regional neighbors. — Courtesy South Asian Voice

Deadlock persists between MQM-P, PML-N over seat adjustment

KARACHI (INP): Following the meeting between Muttahida Quami Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) provincial committees, deadlock persisted between both sides over seat adjustment in Karachi, sources said on Sunday.

According to sources, PML-N demanded MQM-P to withdraw Mustafa Kamal from NA 242 Balidia against the party president and former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif whereas they will support MQM-P on provincial seat.

However, the MQM-P delegation refused and asked PML-N to support Mustafa Kamal as he is a strong candidate from NA 242, source said.



PESHAWAR: Members of Civil Society are holding protest demonstration against Israeli cruel and inhumane acts and express unity with the innocent people of Palestine, at Peshawar press club

2023 ends with 69% increase in militant attacks, 81% rise in deaths: PICSS Report

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan witnessed another year of an unprecedented surge in militant attacks as the country saw a staggering 69 percent rise in attacks, an 81 percent increase in resultant deaths, and a 60 percent surge in the number of wounded.

Preliminary data released by an Islamabad-based think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) Sunday shows that the year 2023 witnessed at least 641 militant attacks across the country in which 974 people were killed and 1351 injured. The year 2022 had witnessed 380 militant attacks resulting in 539 deaths and 836 injuries.

The situation could have been even worse if Pakistani security forces had not foiled hundreds of attacks and attempts during the year. Overall, there was a 74 surge in the actions of the security forces against the militants in which around 600 militants were killed and at least 625 were arrested. By combining militant attacks and security forces actions the country saw over one thousand violent incidents in which 1511 people were killed and 1440 injured.

As far as the militant attacks are concerned, the PICSS database shows that the average militant attacks per month rose from 32 in 2022 to 53 attacks per month in 2023 which is the highest monthly average in any year after 2015. There was a consistent decline in militant attacks from 2015 to 2019. The average number of militant attacks per month had dropped to just 13 attacks per month. However, from 2020 onwards a consistent increase has been observed every year.

During the year 2023, militant attacks not only increased in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its tribal districts but also in Balochistan and Punjab. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa witnessed the highest number of militant attacks and resultant casualties during 2023.

PICSS recorded 419 militant attacks in KP in which 620 people were killed including 306 security forces personnel, 222 civilians, and 92 militants while 977 were injured including 525 security forces personnel, 402 ci-

vilians, and 50 militants. Within KP, more violence was recorded from mainland KP than the Newly Merged Districts (erstwhile FATA) as the mainland KP witnessed 235 militant attacks in which 336 people were killed including 213 security forces personnel, 67 civilians, and 56 militants while 589 were injured including 383 security forces personnel, 163 civilians and 43 militants. There was an 84 percent increase in militant attacks in mainland KP.

Erstwhile FATA (newly merged districts of KP) 184 militant attacks in which 284 people were killed including 155 civilians, 93 security forces personnel, and 36 militants while 388 were injured including 239 civilians, 142 security forces personnel, and seven militants. The region witnessed a 59 percent rise in militant attacks in 2023 compared with 2022.

According to the PICSS Annual Security Report, Balochistan faced at least 170 militant attacks in which 285 people were killed including 151 civilians, 114 security forces personnel, and 20 militants while 388 people were injured including 195 civilians, 99 security forces personnel, and four militants. The rise in militant attacks in Balochistan was 65 percent in 2023 compared with 2022.

Sindh also witnessed a 40 percent rise in militant attacks in 2023 as there were 35 such incidents were reported from the province in which 39 people died including 22 civilians, 11 security forces personnel, and six militants while 35 people were injured including 24 security forces personnel, ten civilians and one militant.

An unprecedented rise in militant activities was witnessed in Punjab where 14 militant attacks were reported in 2023 compared to just three in 2022. In Punjab, 20 people were killed in militant attacks including 14 militants, four security forces personnel, and two civilians while 14 people got injured including eight civilians, five security forces personnel, and one militant.

Azad Kashmir, Federal capital Islamabad and Gilgit-Baltistan witnessed one militant attack each during 2023.

Appeals for rejected nomination papers to start today

ISLAMABAD (APP): The process of filing appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers by returning officers for the upcoming general elections will commence on Monday and continue until Wednesday.

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) spokesman, the scrutiny of nomination papers for candidates in the upcoming general elections across the country has been completed.

The Election Commission has already appointed 24 appellate tribunals to handle appeals against the acceptance or rejection of nomination papers by returning officers.

According to the schedule issued by the Election Commission (ECP), Appellate tribunals, headed by high court judges, are set to adjudicate appeals and deliver verdicts by January 10.

The updated list of candidates is scheduled for publication on January 11, and candidates have until January 12 to withdraw their candidature.

The electoral symbols will be allotted on Jan 13 and polling for the general elections will be held on February 8.



QUETTA: Pensions Welfare Association Balochistan Provincial President, Khair Muhammad Shaheen addresses to media persons during press conference, at Quetta press club

CNN's election survey shows PTI leading other parties in terms of popularity

LAHORE (INP): The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) with 7,261 votes emerged as the most popular political party as per the results of an election survey conducted by the City News Network (CNN), in continuation of its years-old tradition, reported on Sunday.

The survey was conducted in the National Assembly constituency NA-127, Lahore on Saturday. The PML-N with 7,087 votes stood on the second position in the survey, which the CNN conducts prior to every general election in order to know the public mood.

Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) secured 1,246 votes and stood on the third position.

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) received 1,152 votes and remained on fourth position.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) with 454 votes was the fifth most popular party with the electorate in the constituency. However, 930 respondents said they would not

vote for any party. A sample of 20,000 votes was taken, while 200 teams consisting of 400 office employees went door to door between 11:00 AM and 4:00 PM to enable people to cast their votes. The mode of balloting was secret.

It is worth mentioning here that the results of the survey that the network had conducted prior to the general elections of 2018 were closest to those of the elections.

The transparency of the survey was ensured.

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PESHAWAR: Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease caused by a Leishmania parasite and exists in three forms including Cutaneous Leishmaniasis (CL), Visceral Leishmaniasis (VL) and Mucocutaneous Leishmaniasis (MCL). According to WHO, an estimated 700,000 to one million new CL cases occur annually around the globe while the disease affects some of the world's poorest people and is associated with malnutrition, displacement, poor housing, weak immune system, climate change and lack of financial resources. Match a photo with APP feature Slugged "Leishmaniasis: a disfiguring skin infection surging in KP

South Africa suffer injury blow ahead of second Test against India

CENTURION (INP): Right-arm pacer Gerald Coetzee has been ruled out of the second Test between hosts South Africa and India, due to pelvic inflammation. In a statement released by Cricket South Africa (CSA), the cricketing body shared that Coetzee developed Pelvic Inflammation which got "progressively worse while bowling" in the final innings of the first Test.

Gerald Coetzee was consequently sent for scans on Friday, which revealed the extent of the injury, the CSA revealed further. Meanwhile, South Africa's Test coach Conrad Shukri decided to release the pacer from the squad

"as a precautionary measure," but it remains uncertain whether he will be fit for the SA20, starting from January 10.

Notably, Coetzee could bowl only five overs in India's second innings before leaving the field with the discomfort. His absence in the final innings, however, did not cost South Africa much as the hosts romped to a thumping victory by an innings and 32 runs.

He did not return to the field in India's batting debacle and Tristan Stubbs took over fielding duties for the rest of the match. Gerald Coetzee marked the second injury blow to South Africa in the ongoing

series as their captain Temba Bavuma was earlier ruled out of the series remainder on Thursday.

As a result, Zubayr Hamza has been called up to South Africa's squad as a batting replacement for Bavuma while Stubbs is also in the squad.

The CSA, thus far, have not named Gerald Coetzee's replacement for the second Test since they have enough pacers in their arsenal in the form of Lungi Ngidi and all-rounder Wiaan Mulder. However, it appears that South Africa may opt to go for Keshav Maharaj as the surface of Cape Town is presumably more spin-friendly.

Ronaldo ends 2023 as top goal scorer

PARIS (INP): Portuguese star footballer Cristiano Ronaldo ended the year 2023 as the top goal scorer with 54 goals as he netted a 90-minute goal during the match between Al-Nassr and Al-Taawoun on Saturday.

Ronaldo, who is turning 39 in a month, played full 90 minutes, he came close to scoring during the match as he hit the woodwork and missed one big chance as well, but the 38-year-old finally found the back of the net in the 92nd minute after connecting with Seko Fofana's cross to score a well-placed header.

Kashmiri leader welcomes South Africa's move to hold Israel accountable for Gaza massacre

ISLAMABAD (APP): A prominent Kashmiri leader has said that South Africa's move to sue Israel in the world court for "genocidal acts" in Gaza and a similar case filed by Gambia against Myanmar for atrocities against Rohingya Muslims were "significant" steps towards addressing human rights abuses committed against civilians.

"Filing of an application at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) may take the veil of secrecy off of the alleged human rights

violations," Dr Ghulam Nabi Fai, Chairman of World Forum for Peace & Justice, said in a statement released on Sunday.

"Perhaps now the global community can share the outrage felt by the people of the region," Dr Fai said, hoping the world would now turn its attention to Kashmir where atrocities of a similar pattern are being perpetrated by the 900,000 Indian forces with impunity.

"The scale of the human rights atrocities in

Kashmir dwarfs those in Kosovo, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and East Timor which have triggered international interventions," he said.

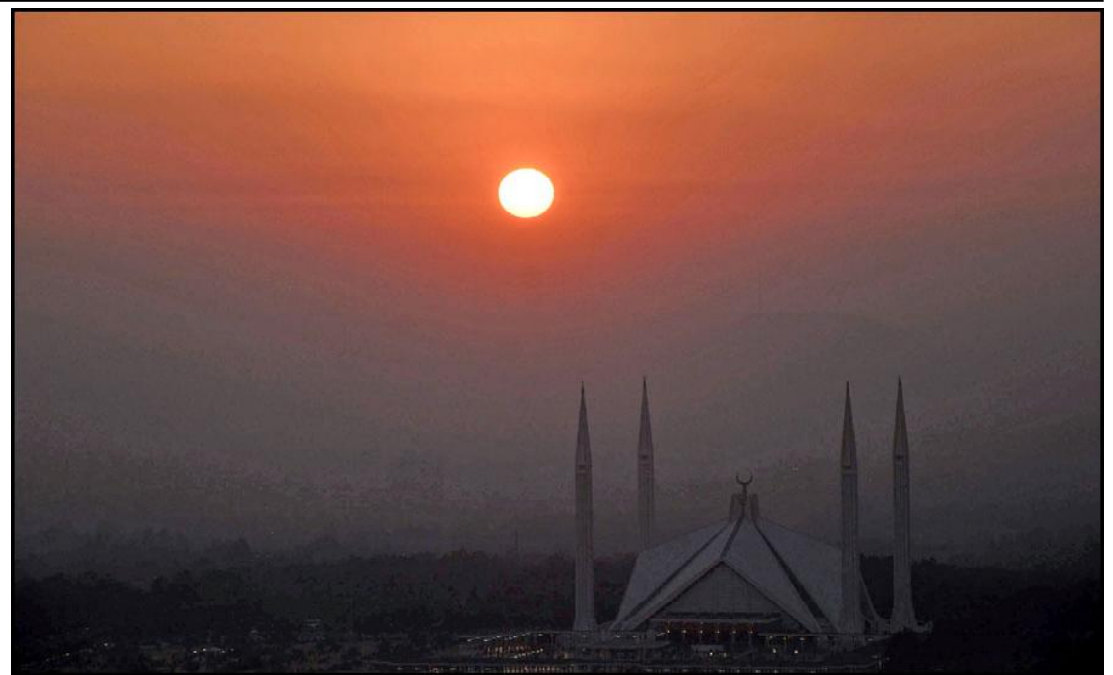
"But the world powers and the United Nations have remained silent, not even employing moral suasion against India's shocking indiscriminate violence in Kashmir as was done in South Africa during its ugly years of apartheid."

Pointing out that Dr Gregory Stanton, President of the Genocide Watch, had

warned the world community in 2021 that the Indian government's actions in Kashmir had been an extreme case of persecution and could lead to genocide, he regretted that there was no response to the sounding of that alarm.

"It is painful to note the virtual immunity Indian law gives to any type of war crime against humanity perpetrated in Kashmir," Dr Fai said.

"Common Kashmiris also asks: Are Kashmiris less human than peoples of other nations?"



ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of last sunset of 2023 in the Federal Capital.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people came to visit Lake View.

Islamabad's 3 constituencies: 122 out of 209 nomination paper approve for elections

ISLAMABAD (Online): List of candidates has been released after scrutiny by the District Returning Officer (DRO) Islamabad. A total of 209 candidates have submitted their nomination papers for the three constituencies of the National Assembly in Islamabad.

39 out of 61 nomination papers from NA48 were accepted while 22 nomination papers were rejected.

Nomination papers of former Deputy Mayor Chaudhry Rafat, Raja Khurram Nawaz, Sheikh Anisr Aziz, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar have been accepted from NA 48. The nomination papers of PTI's Shoaib Shaheen have been rejected from the same con-

stituency.

A total of 75 candidates submitted nomination papers in NA 47. Thirty-six nomination papers were approved by the DRO, while the nomination papers of forty-nine candidates were rejected. The nomination papers of Zeeshan Naqvi of PLMN, independent candidate Raja Khurram Nawaz, PTI leader Babar Awan and Amir Kayani of Stability Pakistan Party were also approved.

The nomination papers of independent candidate Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar from NA forty-seven have also been approved. Nayab Ali, a transgender candidate from the same constituency, will also be able to participate

in the election, while Shoaib Shaheen's nomination papers have also been rejected from NA 47.

A total of 73 candidates submitted their nomination papers in NA-46.

41 nomination papers were accepted by the DRO. 32 nomination papers from NA 46 were rejected. The nomination papers of PPP leader Raja Imran Ashraf, Muslim League-N leader Zeeshan Naqvi and Anjum Aqeel Khan were also approved. Nomination papers of transgender candidate Nayab Ali were also approved. PTI leader Shoaib Shaheen's nomination papers were rejected. The papers of Dr. Babar Awan and his son Abdullah Babar Awan have been approved.

Jail trial, incomplete process, indictment, in-camera hearing, IHC to hear plea on Jan 11

ISLAMABAD (Online): Islamabad High Court (IHC) will start the hearing on the applications against the jail trial in the cipher case, non-completion of process, indictment and in-camera hearing from January 11, 2024.

In the meantime, the court stopped the trial and in the hearing to be held on January 11, the issues regarding the statements of the witnesses will be reviewed.

During the previous hearing, Justice Mian Gul Hasan Aurangzeb remarked that the 1923 law was resorted to in this case. In 1923, the world was ignorant of fundamental human rights.

On the order of the court, Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan, Additional Attorney General Manwar Iqbar Dagal appeared in the court, Federal investigation Agency (FIA) Special Prosecution Team also appeared before the court.

Petitioner's counsel requested the court to stay the trial, to which Justice Mian Gul Hasan Aurangzeb remarked that the notice was being issued, after which the court would look into the matter.

Ex-Chairman PTI's lawyer Usman Riaz Gul read the December 12 order in the court and opined that the trial court is not conducting a trial as per the

requirement of sub-section 3 of Section 13. Word complaint is mentioned in the law not FIR. This is a special law under which judicial action is possible.

The court inquired what is your point? Which requirement is not met? On which the lawyer said that this action is proceeding under FIR instead of complaint, which is legally incorrect, legally, the authorized officer of the government should have filed the complaint directly in the court, but the complaint was not filed here. Rather, an FIR has been registered. Justice Mian Gul Hasan Aurangzeb remarked that this notification fulfills the requirements of Section 13 (6).

Level playing field PTI's court contempt plea is likely to be held this week

ISLAMABAD (Online): Supreme Court (SC) is likely to hear PTI's contempt petition in the matter of provision of level playing field in election this week.

Earlier, Justice Sardar Tariq Masood had decided to hear the petition, but the hearing could not be held due to the incompleteness of the bench.

The most important cases will be scheduled for hearing, hence the hearing of PTI's contempt of court petition in the matter of giving a level playing field in the election is likely to be held this week.

On the other hand, on

the direction of the Supreme Court judge, Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, an inquiry is being conducted by the legal team of PTI regarding the withdrawal of the appeal, about which the report is likely to be submitted to Chief Justice Qazi Faiz.

It should be noted that the Supreme Court had issued instructions to give a level playing field to the political parties on the basis of equality in the general elections, but after not getting relief in this matter, the PTI lawyers filed a contempt of court petition against the Election Commission.

'Kashmiris struggling for right to self-determination'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Political experts and analysts have said that the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) are struggling for the exercise of their United Nations-pledged right to self-determination.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the political experts and analysts in their interviews and statements in Srinagar said the United Nations resolutions on Kashmir and International law give the Kashmiri people the right to struggle for freedom from Indian

bondage. They said the on-going freedom movement, which reflects the sentiments of the general populace of IIOJK, will continue till the implementation of the UN resolutions. India is striving to equate Kashmiris' freedom struggle with terrorism through false flag ops and concerted propaganda but will never succeed in its nefarious designs, they added.

They said the fascist Modi must remember that people struggling for freedom cannot be linked to terrorism.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor preparing tea for his customers in a local hotel.

5 days left for AIOU convocation registration

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is organizing a convocation, and the last date for registration is January 5, 2024.

According to the AIOU, the graduates who have secured at least 70% marks in their respective degree programmes from the semester of Autumn 2004 to the semester of Spring 2022 are eligible for registration. The students are directed to visit the convocation website 'convocation.aiou.edu.pk' to register or learn more about the convocation.

The convocation will take place on January 31, 2024, at the Jinnah Convention Center in Islamabad.

The President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi, will award degrees and gold medals to graduates.

Many distinguished guests, including federal ministers, secretaries, senior officials of HEC, vice chancellors of various universities, rectors,

During winter breaks Parents urged for meaningful kids engagement

ISLAMABAD (APP): An educationist has emphasized the importance of purposeful activities to keep children intellectually stimulated during the winter breaks.

"Winter breaks are not just about leisure; they are

a valuable time to enhance a child's cognitive abilities and creativity," Dr Ayesha told a private news channel, urging the parents to consider activities that foster both academic and personal development of kids.

IRSA releases 27,700 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 27,700 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 37,400 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1476.87 feet and was 76.87 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet.

KSA endows special funding for IIUI

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dr Hathal Homoud Alotaibi, President of International Islamic University continuing his efforts to take the university out of the financial crisis, managed to arrange more assistance from Saudi Arabia as salaries of the IIUI employees for December were managed through the Saudi Financial Support Fund.

According to IIUI officials, the total Budgetary Support in the Shape of "Support for Payment of Salary" from Saudi Arabia to IIUI = 818 Million PKR. This includes Budget Support for FY 2022-23 and payment of arrears & allowances. Also, Payment of Salary for December 2023 = 300 Million PKR.

In addition, Budgetary Support in the Shape of "Support for University Development Projects" makes a total of 86 Million PKR in this regard.

Since his joining in 2020, Dr. Hathal Homoud through his reforms in the light of the strategic plan has led the university to manage salaries, arrears and developmental projects through Saudi funding.

Moreover, a grand mosque during his tenure has already been approved by the Saudi government (with an estimated cost of about \$32 million) at the new campus of the university.

Dr. Hathal has once again reiterated his resolve to take the university out of the financial crisis and assured that academic excellence shall remain a top priority.

IIUI Rector, Dr. Samina Malik while thanking the Saudi Government for the continuous support of the university said that the university is an omen of the strong bond between both border countries.

She said the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has always been generous to support IIUI.

She added that the whole IIUI community is thankful to Saudi Arabia for financial assistance to the university. Dr. Hathal has once again reiterated his resolve to take the university out of the financial crisis and assured that academic excellence shall remain a top priority.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers along with their tools sitting on roadside waiting for clients to be hired for work during morning time at Khanna Pul.

ECP plea against RO suspension by PHC to be held on Tuesday

ISLAMABAD (Online): Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) appeal against Peshawar High Court's (PHC) verdict to suspend Returning Officer Kohat will be heard on Tuesday.

3-member bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faiz Isa will conduct the hearing. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musrat Hilali are also included in the bench.

PHC had issued a notification suspending the appointment of Returning Officer (RO) PK 91 Kohat 2 Irfanullah, which was challenged by the ECP in the Supreme Court (SC) through Advocate Anan Karim Kundi.

ECP took position that PHC gave its verdict without hearing us, at a time when the scrutiny of the nomination papers of the candidates is going on, the verdict is tantamount to derailing the elections process.

ECP further adopted the position that the election schedule of the Election Commission is time-bound, the ECP has to complete the examination of the nomination papers of the candidates by December 30. Election Commission banned transfer and posting of ROs, DRO through a notification on December 15.

department completing investigations on 20,148 cases, while 4,178 cases are still under proceedings.

Transparency in case investigations, maintaining merit, ensuring justice for criminals, and delivering justice to citizens are the primary goals of all these measures.

The police spokesperson said that Islamabad Capital Police is vigilant day and night in combating crime, with several officers and personnel demonstrating exceptional courage in the line of duty, earning them the title of martyrs and Ghazis by facing criminals' bullets.

Combating crime is impossible without the cooperation of the citizens, so citizens are urged to collaborate with the police, a police spokesperson concluded.



ISLAMABAD: Children enjoying the mechanized swing during their winter vacations at Joyland.

Nutritionist calls for reducing sugar intake for optimal well-being

ISLAMABAD (APP): A health expert has emphasized the need to reduce sugar intake to promote overall well-being and combat the rising health concerns associated with excessive sugar consumption.

"Excessive sugar intake is a major contributor to various health issues, including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases," Dr Babar Saleem, a prominent nutritionist told a private news channel.

He highlighted the alarming rates of sugar consumption in the general population, stressing that individuals to take control of their health by making informed choices about what they consume.

Dr Saleem noted that many processed foods and beverages, often staples in modern diets, are laden with hidden sugars, contributing to the health crisis.

He underscored the need to launch awareness campaigns about the risks associated with high sugar

intake and provide practical tips for reducing consumption. "These efforts aim to empower individuals to make healthier food choices and adopt sustainable lifestyle changes," he maintained.

"Reducing sugar intake doesn't mean sacrificing taste or enjoyment. It's about making smarter choices and being mindful of what we consume. Small changes can lead to significant improvements in our overall health," added Dr Saleem.

He called upon the health authorities to encourage food manufacturers to reformulate products to lower sugar content. The goal is to create a supportive environment that facilitates healthier choices for consumers.

The nutritionist urged the masses to read food labels carefully, choose whole, unprocessed foods whenever possible, and limit the intake of sugary snacks and beverages.

23,928 accused arrested; cash, valuables worth Rs 2.49b recovered in year 2023

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police arrested 23,928 persons during 2023 and recovered stolen valuables worth Rs. 2.49 billion, including 568 cars and 1,106 motorcycles from them.

Islamabad Capital Police took various measures to enhance the effectiveness of the operational division, streamline crime control, increase police station capabilities, ensure effective patrols, and prioritize public issue resolutions, a public relations officer said.

He said that, steps included increasing the capacity of station police officers, establishing a Court Compliance Unit, and initiating an Anti-Robbery and Dacoity Unit. Before 2022, there was no separate investigation system in Islamabad Capital Police.

However, significant reforms were made in 2023 to improve the investigation system, notably establishing the Police Bureau of Investigation, which separated investigation and operational matters at the station level.

Moreover, units for investigating crimes against women and children, combating robbery and dacoity, implementing court orders, and ensuring electronic attendance of suspects in courts were part of the investigation unit reforms.

A patrolling system is crucial for crime prevention, leading to the establishment of the new Dolphin Emergency Response Unit in Islamabad. This unit brought police response times down to 8 to 4 minutes. To address public issues, five new police sta-

tions and a division were also established during the year 2023.

In accordance with the government's directives, Islamabad Capital Police conducted multiple operations against illegal resident foreigners, repatriating over 10,000 illegal residents to their home countries.

During 2023, the Islamabad Capital Police arrested 23,928 suspects involved in various crimes, apprehended 6,614 members of criminal gangs in financial cases, recovering stolen valuables worth Rs. 2.49 billion, including 568 cars and 1,106 motorcycles.

Over a year, 2,061 individuals involved in robbery and theft were arrested, recovering more than Rs. 295 million worth of cash and valuables, including 31 cars and 163 motorcycles.

Additionally, 1,947 individuals were arrested for illegal possession of weapons, confiscating 111 Kalashnikovs and rifles, 33 shotguns and carbines, 1,672 pistols, 128 knives, and 8,541 rounds of ammunition. Furthermore, 2,675 offenders and proclaimed absconders were brought under legal scrutiny.

The establishment of specialized investigation units greatly assisted in effectively investigating serious crimes. Courts made rulings on 35 murder cases in 2023, sentencing offenders to death in 20 cases and life imprisonment in 15 cases. This number of judgments in such serious cases was unprecedented before.

Around 24,326 cases were registered in police stations across Islamabad in 2023, with the investigation

department completing investigations on 20,148 cases, while 4,178 cases are still under proceedings.

Transparency in case investigations, maintaining merit, ensuring justice for criminals, and delivering justice to citizens are the primary goals of all these measures.

The police spokesperson said that Islamabad Capital Police is vigilant day and night in combating crime, with several officers and personnel demonstrating exceptional courage in the line of duty, earning them the title of martyrs and Ghazis by facing criminals' bullets.

Combating crime is impossible without the cooperation of the citizens, so citizens are urged to collaborate with the police, a police spokesperson concluded.

Wani grieved over the death of Prof. Shawl

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior leader of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and Vice Chairman of Jammu Kashmir National Front, Altaf Hussain Wani has expressed his profound grief and sorrow over the death of renowned Kashmiri leader Professor Nazir Ahmad Shawl.

In his condolence messages, Wani, while paying eulogizing tribute to Prof. Nazir Ahmad Shawl, for his selfless services and efforts to highlight the Kashmir cause at the international level, said that the deceased leader had dedicated his whole life to the freedom of Kashmir.

Prof. Shawl, he said, raised his voice for the rights of the people of Kashmir at every world forum.

Wani said that the death of Prof. Shawl has caused a great loss to the freedom movement.

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Kashmir killings

While India continues to push the fiction that it has brought normality to held Kashmir through the constitutional subterfuge of August 2019, periodic acts of violence perpetrated by its security forces in the disputed region point to a much darker reality. Over the past few days, the custodial killings of three Kashmiri men, apparently by the Indian military, have highlighted the state-sponsored violence that Kashmiris are being subjected to, while Indian officials have sought to 'pacify' the region in the aftermath of these crimes. The killings occurred after Indian troops were ambushed by fighters, resulting in the deaths of at least four security men. Following this episode, eight civilians were picked up for questioning in the Poonch region. A week ago, the families of three of these detained men received calls to collect their bodies. The families say their loved ones were tortured by Indian forces. A highly disturbing video circulating on social media appears to show Indian troops sprinkling chilli powder on the exposed body parts of detained men. The Indian military says it is investigating, while Defence Minister Rajnath Singh travelled to Indian-occupied Kashmir to 'condole' with the families of the victims, promising them 'justice'.

Sadly, justice has eluded the people of Kashmir since partition; their wishes have been ignored, and India has sought to create new facts on the ground to cement its illegal occupation of what remains an internationally disputed region. The Indian supreme court's recent validation of the BJP government's dubious decision to annul the region's limited autonomy has further emboldened those in New Delhi who wish to subjugate Kashmir like a conquered territory. International human rights bodies have frequently been pointing to the use of torture and violence by Indian forces in the region. Unfortunately, the Indian state uses 'counterterrorism' as a convenient alibi to deny the Kashmiri people their rights, and inflict odious violence upon them. How many more Kashmiris will have to be tortured and killed for the international community to realise that India must be held to account for its cruel policies in the held territory? Instead of taking the path of dialogue and engaging Pakistan and the Kashmiris to arrive at a peaceful solution, India insists on flexing its muscles, and crushing the Kashmiri struggle through the use of gratuitous violence.

By Dr Naazir Mahmood

Karachi is a happening place, and on my recent visit there, I had the opportunity to attend two events that may be of interest to my readers. Ishaque Soomro, a civil-society activist, invited me to the launch of the 2023 report on the state of budget transparency in Pakistan, and Dr Irfan Aziz of Federal Urdu University was the moving force behind a successful conference on the state of the media in the country. The Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) has been working for over 20 years now as a civil society organization that focuses on issues of peace and development in Pakistan. Mukhtar Ahmed Ali is leading this centre, doing some valuable work to inform and influence public policies through advocacy and research. Nearly 10 years ago, the CPDI established its budget study centre to undertake analysis of the federal, provincial and district budgets. It has been releasing its annual reports on budget transparency in Pakistan. Amer Ejaz has produced his fourth report on this essential component of democratic governance. The

How to make a budget transparent

2023 report once again highlights the significance of citizens' participation in budget making. Ultimately, it is ordinary people who are likely to reap the fruits of fiscal transparency or bear the consequences of its absence. All citizens have a right to information concerning public matters, more so if they relate to financial wellbeing. Traditionally, budget-making exercises both at the federal and provincial levels (what to talk of districts) have remained unaccountable to the people of this country. They have a right to know and be present at – or at least have a voice in – the budgetary process that is going to affect them. Public resources are essentially for the benefit of the people, but in Pakistan – like many other countries – they are at the mercy of the bureaucrats (both civil and military) and of the politicians who get support from technocrats hardly interested in public welfare and development. The fourth edition of the report tries to navigate through the fiscal challenges that Pakistan is facing in terms of its transparency. Dissecting and improving financial transparency practices in the country should be one of the primary tasks of any budget-

making team that must involve facilitation of dialogues. Citizens and civil society organizations are the key stakeholders that this report takes into account. The report presents findings of its research that examine processes from the provincial to federal levels and looks at them in the light of international best practices. According to the CPDI report, Pakistan has taken some steps towards fiscal transparency, but the challenges persist and the roadmap for a more transparent fiscal future needs more clarity. Unless a wider citizenry gets engaged in building a 'robust and transparent financial framework', there will be lack of insights and budget-making will remain questionable. Successful governments in the past have failed to initiate fruitful discussion, and there have not been many collective efforts towards a transparent budgetary process. In most cases, budgets have been just about numbers on the paper, and they do not build trust or foster development. For a transparent budget-making exercise, the people of Pakistan must feel themselves a part of their country's fiscal journey as a cornerstone of good governance. The bot-

tom line is promoting greater government accountability and improved public trust. The fiscal landscape in Pakistan lacks budgetary clarity and there is a need for more openness. One of the first key findings of the report is that Pakistan has made some progress in making budgetary documents more accessible digitally. Credit must also go to the last PPP government in Sindh that developed an impressive web portal for budget-related information. The federal government has also taken some steps in the right direction by sharing development project information. Still, both at the federal and provincial levels, updating the portals is a major issue. In most cases, the portals tend to give information that is not up to date. The reports laud the auditor general of Pakistan (AGP) for 'impressively addressing' previous backlogs and sharing current year's data online. "This marks a clear step towards improved transparency." The second finding of the CPDI report for 2023 is that the Citizen Participatory Audit (CPA) has taken the shape of a ground-breaking initiative indicating Pakistan's intent to actively involve its citizenry at least in the audi-

tory process, if not in budgeting itself. The report clarifies that the CPA is still in its initial stages, but its potential impact is significant. The CPA now claims to encourage inputs from the general public and CSOs working in the country, but these claims need more substance for a transition from merely traditional audits to more 'nuanced and project-centric evaluations'. The report also found that there are uniform shortcomings across provincial reporting on debt data. From federal to provincial levels, there is a concerning trend – seen uniformly – that there is absence of crucial debt data. In Punjab, there is a conspicuous lack of details about new debt for the on-going financial years and year-end total debt. Similarly, details about any allocations for debt servicing and repayments are also missing. Punjab's reporting also omits the permissible debt limit as a GDP percentage. The situation became strange as the caretaker governments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab outlived their constitutional duration of 90 days. Sindh's reporting also reflects the same concerns as it is also missing clear data on the current year's

debt and year-end outstanding debt. Data regarding the annual debt requirements and potential creditors is accessible at the federal level, but several vital specifics remain absent, whereas details concerning the cumulative debt at year-end are also missing. The report underscores the concerns about lack of clarity on the acceptable debt boundary relative to GDP. Looking through the lens of international best practices, the report presents an insightful analysis showcasing the potential path ahead for Pakistan. Of a significant value is the practice in Canada that involves a participative and transparent model to budget-making. South Korea's citizen-centric approach to budget formation also gets a relevant mention as a valuable lesson for Pakistan. Finally, in terms of recommendations, the report gives at least four solid suggestions. First, it recommends a unified digital platform for public engagement that should draw from South Korea's successful model. Pakistan may consider launching a centralized digital platform that should foster citizen participation. It may also present details that citizens could easily digest, rather than complicated rigmaroles. —Courtesy The News

By Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

The human journey through millennia has essentially been a battle of ideas. Wars and peace, conquests and defeats, empires rising to glory or falling to the depths of infamy, and evolution in governance and economic systems are all outcomes of that battle. The stronger ideas win, particularly when they have broad ownership in society. Some 2,000 years ago, three Greek philosophers – Plato, his teacher Socrates and student Aristotle – discussed the organising principles of political governance, favouring rule by intellectual aristocracy. In the Middle Ages, European philosophers challenged the prevailing thought on how society was to be governed. John Locke, the 17th-century English philosopher, was one of the

earliest voices of liberalism in Europe, while France's Voltaire believed in the power of reason and religious tolerance. The cumulative effects of these ideas saw Europe embrace democracy, constitutionalism, and liberalism. America's founding fathers sought to organise governance around the ideas of freedom, liberty, democracy and capitalism, which for over two centuries have enjoyed the wider ownership of the American people. Karl Marx's theory of class struggle and revolution led to the creation of the Soviet Union, but failed the downtrodden it intended to serve. Mustafa Kemal built a new Turkey based on the ideas of secularism and Turkish nationalism, which has stood the test of time. World War II was the product of Hitler's flawed idea that the German race was superior to others. The UN was also an idea that rightly emphasised that

Battle of ideas

the world had more to gain from cooperation than confrontation. Deng Xiaoping's idea of pursuing a market economy while keeping the communist system intact has worked well for the Chinese. Lee Kwan Yew built modern-day Singapore on the ideas of meritocracy, pragmatism and clean governance, which took his country from the Third to the First World. The EU, too, was an idea, that brought Europe sustained peace and wealth. Many nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America threw off the colonial yoke thanks to the idea of the right to self-determination. Meanwhile, Narendra Modi is changing India's secular and pluralistic credentials by reviving the RSS idea of Hindutva, creating conditions for commotion in India. The creation of Pakistan was also an idea based

on Allama Iqbal's concept of separate state(s) for India's Muslims. Mohammad Ali Jinnah translated this idea into reality. After independence, however, Pakistan could not implement the Quaid's vision as enunciated by him on Aug 11, 1947. Instead, every successive ruler fielded half-baked ideas on how the country was to be run. Gen Ayub pursued basic democracies, capitalism, and alignment with the West as his governance principles. Bhutto tried to steer the country towards Islamic socialism and a tilt towards China, the Muslim world and developing countries. Gen Zia spent nearly a decade on Islamising laws and governance. Nawaz Sharif liberalised the economy and wanted economic engagement with Pakistan's neighbours. Benazir Bhutto was left-leaning and a strong advocate for labour and human rights.

Gen Musharraf conceived the idea of 'enlightened moderation', whatever that meant. Without a shared national purpose, Pakistan has remained politically unstable and polarised. Economically, policies changed, sometimes drastically under a new government. Socially, extremism, terrorism, and separatism kept governments unnerved. Hence, vertical inequalities (between the rich and poor) and horizontal inequities (among different regions of the country) accentuated. Looking ahead, can Pakistanis rally around an idea that enjoys the consensus of the entire nation and its institutions? One way is to implement the Quaid's vision of Pakistan as a truly democratic and just society. In this spirit, last year, the National Security Policy proposed a citizen-centric national purpose: the safety, security, dignity and prosperity of every citizen. However, this approach can work well only if society is ready to free itself from elite capture. The solution lies partially in instituting effective local governments. No democracy anywhere has thrived without delivering good governance at the grassroots. The size of our provinces must also be rationalised so that the people of smaller provinces do not feel alienated. Job creation for our youth should be at the heart of economic policies. The private sector should be facilitated, not just regulated. Externally, Pakistan should begin to view its relationships through an economic lens. The idea of a Pakistan where all citizens feel safe and have dignity, as well as find opportunities for leading a quality life, can help us regain our lost status in the comity of nations. —Courtesy Dawn

New challenges

By Mohammad Ali Babakhal

In Pakistan, technological innovation has altered the nature of crime, yet law enforcement remains mired in an outdated organisational structure, legal framework, and procedures, reflecting its colonial past. Former colonies with dense populations, like Pakistan, rely heavily on a numerical policing model. This approach is increasingly ineffective against the tougher challenges posed by globalisation and technological advancements. In contrast, organised criminals and terrorists are proficiently utilising technology for nefarious purposes. This scenario calls for a balanced approach, combining traditional numerical policing with innovative, technology-led solutions. Technology can be instrumental in enhancing interactive community relations and preventing and detecting crime. Law enforcement faces new challenges due to disparities between external and internal security policies. Historically, negotiations with militants resulted in escalation of violence against police and negatively impacted the peace index. Bridging the gaps between internal and external security policies is crucial and needs effective communication coupled with a democratic ethos. Historically, some administrative decisions, including administrative and police reforms, impacted the quality of law enforcement in Pakistan. Such decisions negatively impact policing standards and performance. For instance, the merger of FATA with KP increased the number of personnel in KP Police but posed new challenges. Likewise, converting 'B' areas

into 'A' in Balochistan and reversing the decision in 2008 adversely impacted law enforcement. Since its inception, policing in Pakistan has been a contentious subject, oscillating between bureaucratic and political control, which has adversely affected organisational integrity, public interest, and safety. Pakistan's low ranking in the recent Rule of Law Index, particularly in categories like order and security, criminal justice, and human rights, underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms supported by political commitment, public backing, and increased funding. The post-9/11 era has significantly increased the security duties of police, burdening them and affecting their preventive and investigative functions. KP Police Order, 2002, and KP Police Act, 2017, which provide a legal framework for external accountability, are yet to be fully implemented. The US exit from Afghanistan has facilitated militants' access to advanced weaponry. KP Police's establishment of an explosives handling school is a proactive measure in building capacity to counter these threats. However, the rise in militancy has also led to police becoming increasingly militarised, affecting public service delivery and widening the gap between police and community. Pakistan has seen the loss of thousands of police officers in the line of duty, reflecting the militants' deadly proficiency. This situation necessitates a critical examination and improvement of police recruitment, training, and supervision processes. Additionally, the structural design of police stations, especially in areas located in the peripheries, has made them more vul-

nerable to militant attacks. The 'war on terror' has also brought to light several human rights issues, tarnishing the image of the police as custodians of fundamental human rights. The widespread availability of weapons, influenced by both internal and external factors like preferential arms policies and a tribal and feudal social fabric, has aggravated challenges in crime, disorder, and terrorism. A comprehensive, long-term de-weaponisation strategy, including the revision of arms policies and voluntary surrender of illegal arms, is imperative. Pakistan's tendency to over-legislate, often without effective enforcement, undermines the standards of governance. The gap between lawmaking and enforcement is particularly evident in laws where the police are direct or indirect stakeholders. Effective law enforcement demands stakeholder involvement in both the pre-enactment consultation and post-implementation review phases to ensure the effectiveness of laws. To assess the quality of policing, a statistical approach is preferable over solely relying on public satisfaction metrics. The existing training facilities, including the National Police Academy, nine training colleges, and 22 schools, are inadequate to address the modern challenges faced by over 500,000 police personnel. Training modules need to be updated to cater to contemporary issues such as the nexus between militants and organised criminals, sectarian violence, and terror financing. Emphasis should be placed on capacity building and public satisfaction, with a shift towards short-duration, focused online training programmes. —Courtesy Dawn

Pakistan beyond COP28

By Muhammad Asad Rafi

Every United Nations Climate Change Conference – or COP – carries the weight of expectation, the pressure to inch closer to a sustainable and climate-resilient future. COP27 delivered the Loss and Damage Fund, a vital lifeline for communities already bearing the brunt of a changing climate. COP28, which came at the heels of the warmest year recorded in human history, witnessed a different kind of milestone – the mention of "fossil fuels" in the final text, a first in nearly three decades. But the euphoria quickly dimmed upon closer inspection. The language, watered down to "transitioning away from fossil fuels in a just, orderly and equitable manner", lacked the teeth needed to bite into the heart of the issue. Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative reported about fossil fuel expansion and exploration just 24 hours after COP28 concluded, and the International Energy Agency has warned that emissions-cutting pledges made by more than 100 countries and 50 fossil fuel firms at the start of COP28 aren't enough to limit global warming to 1.5 C, a key target enshrined in the Paris Agreement. While the inclusion of fossil fuels in the final text is a step forward, it's a small one, leaving countries like Pakistan, on the frontlines of a climate crisis despite negligible emissions. For Pakistan, transitioning away from fossil fuels might ease the burden on its import bill. However, the scars of climate change – floods, droughts, and heatwaves – run deeper than energy dependence. Even if Pakistan becomes a beacon of green energy, the damage wrought by the current trajectory will be irreversible. The final text's silence on mandatory action, mainly around climate finance and adaptation, from major polluters exacerbated the exist-

ing inequities in the global response to climate change. Finance and fairness, the fuel that drives adaptation and resilience, were woefully absent from COP28's engine room. Developing countries like Pakistan pleaded for resources to leapfrog the fossil fuel era and build climate-proof communities. But the developed world, responsible for this crisis, looked the other way. While the Loss and Damage Fund marks a positive step, it seems akin to a drop in the ocean. The pledges made (\$770 million) barely cover 0.2 per cent of the annual losses faced by vulnerable nations, and its reliance on voluntary contributions is a recipe for uncertainty. While Pakistan's voice resonated loud and clear in Dubai, the time for outward appeals has passed. Vulnerable nations stand at the precipice of a climate cliff and cannot afford to be mere bystanders. Instead, for Pakistan, it's time to turn inward, harness our own resources, and build a climate-proof future based on a combination of governance, innovation, and resourcefulness. This doesn't require billions of dollars; it requires a strategic shift and a commitment to action. First, we must tackle the governance gap when it comes to climate action. Climate change is a multi-headed beast, demanding collaboration across federal, provincial, and local levels. Pakistan's vulnerability to climate change places adaptation at the forefront of our agenda. Unlike global mitigation efforts, adaptation is inherently local. While policymakers often emphasize Pakistan's susceptibility to climate change and its limited access to climate finance, they seldom discuss the structural deficiencies within our nation. What we urgently require are inclusive decision-making processes, not stifling bureaucratic silos. Bridging the governance gap hinges on empowering local

governments and providing them with the necessary resources and authority. This empowerment fosters an inclusive decision-making process that amplifies diverse voices and perspectives, particularly those closest to the ground, serving as a vital catalyst to unlock finance and implement grassroots-level adaptation. Second, the potential of the 2017 Climate Change Act remains untapped. It is time to breathe life into this vital document by establishing the Pakistan Climate Change Authority (PCCA), which can become the engine of climate action in Pakistan. The Act not only embodies our commitment to addressing climate change but also grants the PCCA extensive powers and responsibilities. Under its mandate, the PCCA can lead the charge in both mitigation and adaptation efforts, taking a proactive role in shaping our climate policies. Moreover, the PCCA is well-positioned to play a crucial role in crafting bankable projects that not only benefit our environment but also our economy. By leveraging its authority, the PCCA can attract both domestic and international support, fostering collaboration and partnerships that drive sustainable initiatives. Third, Pakistan cannot afford to wait for the mirage of foreign finance to shimmer into reality. While international funding is crucial, we must also take charge of our own climate destiny. It is imperative that we proactively climate-proof every existing and upcoming development project. This responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the Ministry of Planning and provincial planning departments. These entities wield the authority and influence to ensure that every step we take in our development journey aligns with a sustainable and climate-resilient future. Let's start with what we have, and what we can. —Courtesy The News

CM KP emphasises role of journalists in Society

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Justice (retd) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah on Sunday underscored the pivotal role journalists play in identifying societal issues, raising awareness, and fortifying democracy.

He expressed these views during a meeting with a delegation of journalists from Abbottabad.

The chief minister emphasized the media's significance as a pillar of the state and acknowledged the vital function of journalists in highlighting prevalent issues. He commended their role in steering public awareness and contributing to the robustness of

democracy. The meeting was attended by key officials, including Commissioner Hazara Division Syed Zaheer-ul-Islam, Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad Khalid Iqbal, DPO Omar Tufail and others.

The CM asserted that journalists have the power to contribute to the eradication of corruption and steer the country out of crises.

He urged journalists to foster unity and consensus among themselves, providing leadership to the public and collectively working towards eliminating societal evils.

Highlighting the importance of mutual

understanding and love in society, the chief minister stated that such qualities invite the descent of blessings from Allah. Conversely, societies lacking unity, love, and compassion may face a withholding of divine mercy.

Expressing optimism for the continued positive role of journalists in Abbottabad, the chief minister hoped they would actively contribute to the well-being and prosperity of the journalistic society. He reassured the delegation that the provincial government is committed to addressing journalists' issues and promoting their welfare through every possible means.



HYDERABAD: Sindhi writers, intellectuals and Sindhi folk singers throwing rose petals in the Indus River during last sunset of 2023 at Almanzar Picnic Point.

PML-N to put country on right track: Atta Tarar

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz leader Atta Ullah Tarar said on Sunday that Nawaz Sharif had always steered the country out of crisis in the past.

Addressing a workers' convention here on Sunday he said that Lahoris love Nawaz Sharif and always supported the PML-N through thick and thin. He said the PML-N Quaid had started the journey of serving people in 1980. "Bilawal is contesting from Lahore's constituency NA-127," he said and questioned what work the PPP had done in Karachi for the welfare of people.

Speaking on the occasion, PML-N leader Khawaja Saad Rafique said, "February 8 is a day when there will be a competition between those who believe in country's development and who put the country's progress in the reverse

gear." He said that Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif believed in doing practical work instead of making hollow slogans.

Khawaja Saad said he had recently visited Karachi, adding that it had been badly neglected. "The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government remained in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for ten years but did nothing for the betterment of the people there," he claimed.

PML-N Lahore General Secretary Khawaja Imran Nazir said that the PTI did nothing except weakening the country's economy and telling lies.

He said, "On February 8, one voice will be heard from Khyber to Karachi and that is of Nawaz Sharif." PML-N candidate from NA 128 Hafiz Nauman and others also spoke.

Admin sets up 13 centers in Murree to facilitate tourists

RAWALPINDI (APP): Murree district administration on the directives of the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chatta has set up 13 centers at 13 different places in Murree at Satara Meel, Lower Topa, Jika Gali, GPO, Kashmir Point, Kuldana, Kali Matti, Masiyari, Sindhan, Sunny Bank, Bhorban, Thanda Jungle and Saharbagla to facilitate the tourists.

According to a Commissioner Office spokesman, the Commissioner Rawalpindi Division had directed the authorities concerned to provide all possible facilities to the tourists during snowfall season.

Under the Murree Contingency Plan, an additional 140 traffic police personnel had been deployed in Murree, he added. The Commissioner had instructed that there

should be no delay in preparations at the local level for the implementation of the plan.

The biggest problem of Murree is traffic jams, he said adding, that the role of police and traffic wardens is the most important. The concerned forum would be approached to ensure the early appointment of a separate DPO for Murree district, he added. A large number of tourists are expected to arrive in Murree on the occasion of New Year's Night. The administration was directed to complete all the arrangements and the officials of the departments concerned should not be allowed to remain absent from their duties.

13 SMDs had been made functional within Murree city and public service messages were being displayed on the SMDs to inform the tourists, he added.

Mayor felicitates newly elected body of KPC

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab and Deputy Mayor Karachi Salman Abdullah Murad congratulated President Saeed Sarbazi and General Secretary Shoaib Ahmed and other elected officials on the success of The Democrats Panel in the annual elections of Karachi Press Club.

In a message, they said that the democratic and journalistic traditions of the Karachi Press Club are commendable.

Everyone recognizes the dynamic role of the Karachi Press Club in strengthening democracy in the country along with working for the welfare of the journalist community. All the pro-democratic forces appreciate the services of the Karachi Press Club in this regard. Pakistan People's Party has always stood by the side of journalists in their struggle for rights.

It is hoped that The Democrats Panel will serve the journalistic community even better and promote constructive and objective journalism in the country.

Training civil servants' group from NIM visits Lahore, Sialkot

ISLAMABAD (APP): A group of 14 under-training civil servants from the National Institute of Management (NIM) Islamabad visited Sialkot and Lahore under the leadership of Muhammad Masood Ahmad who was heading the under training officers.

The visit is a part of a senior Management course which is currently in progress at NIM Academy here, a news release on Sunday said. The delegation visited the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce, Sialkot international airport, Forward Sports Sialkot, Sialkot surgical industry.

In Lahore, the delegation visited Akhuwat College University Kasur.



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi inspecting the on-going construction works at Lahore Zoo.

Naqvi inaugurates Jinnah Hospital's emergency unit

CM also inspects upgradation work of Lahore Zoo

Independent Report
LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi Sunday inaugurated the newly equipped emergency ward at Jinnah Hospital Lahore on the eve of New Year 2024.

Addressing the media persons at the hospital premises alongside Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries Dr. Gohar Ejaz, he said that the state-of-the-art emergency unit has been completed within a record time.

The CM said that the Board of Management of Jinnah Hospital, under the guidance of Dr. Gohar Ejaz completed the emergency unit on the last day of the

year. The expansive emergency wing, comprising 120 beds, is now operational and is expected to cater to the needs of more than 2000 visiting patients daily, he hinted, adding that Gohar Ejaz personally supervised the entire project.

He was all praises of Gohar Ejaz and said that Mr Gohar is running Punjab's largest dialysis center. "Jinnah Hospital is at the forefront in terms of treatment facilities."

Mohsin continued that the cancer hospital in Manawan will be of international standard.

Further enhancing the province's healthcare

infrastructure, he said that the renovation work of Children's Hospital Multan and Nishtar Hospital Multan has been completed.

These facilities, along with others, including one in Dera Ghazi Khan, are slated to open in the coming days.

Chief Minister Naqvi expressed concerns about potential medicine shortages, urging caution and proactive measures to avoid running out of crucial medications during emergencies. He addressed the challenges faced by medical stores near hospitals, calling for solutions to this complex issue.

Governor, CM felicitate Unity-Democratic Alliance over winning PPC Elections

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Haji Ghulam Ali and Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (retd) Arshad Hussain Shah on Sunday felicitated the newly elected office bearers of the Unity-Democratic Alliance Panel of Peshawar Press Club (PPC) for the year 2024.

In their separate messages, the Governor and Chief Minister congratulated President Arshad Aziz Malik and his

cabinet. The Governor Ghulam Ali and Chief Minister Arshad Hussain Shah expressed hope that the newly elected cabinet would utilize their leadership and professional skills for the prosperity and advancement of the journalistic community in the province.

They emphasized their responsibility in fostering a positive journalistic environment and promoting excellence in the field of journalism.

2 labourers electrocuted

FAISALABAD (APP): Two labourers were electrocuted while breaking concrete roof of a house in the area of Buchiana police station.

A police spokesman said here on Sunday that two labourers — 25-year-old Muhammad Idrees and 45-year-old Muhammad Afzaal — were busy in breaking litter of an old and redundant roof in a house near Data Chowk Buchiana when they received a fatal electric shock after touching 11-kV electricity wire accidentally which were passing near the building.



KARACHI: Members of Shia Missing Persons are holding protest demonstration for recovery of their loved one as soon as possible, at Karachi press club.

Rs 50,000 fine imposed on KM Hospital for maltreatment of patient

PESHAWAR (APP): The District and Sessions Judge Peshawar Ashfaq Taj imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on Kalsoom Maternity Hospital for the maltreatment of a patient and her relatives. Irshad Ali through his lawyer Anwar Ali Khan Advocate had filed a complaint before the Healthcare Commission Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stating that the staff of the said Hospital had maltreated his patient Zahida Begum and had

taken Rs 50000/- from him in the name of greetings.

The Health Care Commission had rejected the complaint arrived against which the complainant had filed an appeal before the District and Sessions Judge Peshawar through his Lawyer Anwar Ali Khan Advocate, the other day.

During proceedings, the respondent had admitted receiving the said amount having been demanded in the name.

Police arrest weapon smuggler

KOHAT (APP): Kohat police have carried out an operation against anti-social elements and foiled a smuggling bid and arrested weapon smuggler here on Sunday.

A spokesman for the Kohat police revealed that numerous firearms were found in the flying coach's hidden compartments during an intelligence-based operation at the Khagzai checkpoint. SHO Islamuddin and his police squad from the Cantt police station executed the successful operation.

New year dawns with new aspirations, passions, desires for people: Baqar

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Chief Minister Sindh Justice (retd) Maqbool Baqar while felicitating the people on the eve of New Year 2024, has said that the new year dawns with new aspirations, new passions and new desires for the people.

He wished a happy New Year to the people of the Sindh province.

CM Baqar said that

the Sindh was the land of peace and love and may Almighty bless our homeland forever.

He said, "We should unite with each other with love and brotherhood."

He further said that it was the responsibility of all of us to take care of the cleanliness and beauty of our cities. Baqar urged the people to celebrate the New Year 2024 with honour, love and respect for the law.

Minister stresses collective efforts for country's progress

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Caretaker Health Minister Professor Dr. Javed Akram stressed collective efforts for Pakistan's development.

Addressing an award distribution ceremony at a local hotel here on Sunday, he acknowledged that the country was facing challenging times and highlighted the importance of strong leadership who could follow in footsteps of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and steer the country out of multiple crises.

Dr. Akram emphasised equal rights for minorities, underscoring an inclusive vision for a harmonious Pakistan. He called on citizens to actively contribute to the nation's improvement, aligning with Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi's vision.

The event was attended by journalist Sohail Warraich, who also praised efforts to enhance healthcare services in line with the government's commitment to bettering public welfare.



KARACHI: Mayor Karachi, Barrister Murtaza Wahab addresses to media persons during press conference, at Denso Hall Building in Karachi.

Health Deptt launches campaign to combat illegal narcotic drug activities

PESHAWAR (APP): The Health Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, under the guidance of Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam Wazir, on Sunday commenced a targeted campaign in response to the escalating illegal sale, storage, and distribution of narcotic drugs in the province.

According to Secretary Health Mahmood Aslam Wazir, the Department of Health has received numerous complaints regarding the illicit trade of narcotic medicines in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

These substances, falling under Schedule B & G of The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Drug Rules 1982 (amended 2017), require a separate license (Form-11) for authorized sale. Executed by Drug Inspectors, a focused effort unfolded on December 26 and 27, 2023, across multiple districts.

The campaign's findings were promptly reported to the Secretary Health by the Director General of Drug Control

and Pharmacy Services, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

An extensive report reveals inspections of medical stores in various districts, resulting in actions taken against violators of drug laws. In Abbottabad, 43 medical stores were inspected, leading to actions against 9 establishments.

Similar interventions occurred in Bannu, Buner, Chitral, DI Khan, Mardan, Haripur, Mansehra, Lakki Marwat, Nowshera, Orakzai, Dir Lower, Swabi, Kohat, Malakand, North Waziristan, Swat, Charsadda, and Tank, with multiple stores facing consequences for drug law violations.

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FAISALABAD: Leader of Pakistan Muslim League (N) Chaudhry Abid Sher Ali addressing during a public gathering (Jalsa) at Railway colony in the city.

Leishmaniasis - a skin disfiguring infection surging in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Covering herself from head to toe in a traditional dark brown coloured burqa (veil), Asia, a young lady in early thirties, exhibited hesitance in exposing her disfigured cheek to medics for examination at dermatology ward of Ghalania Headquarters Hospital of Mohmand District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Her reluctance to compliance of medical staff requests reflected emotional agony and perturbation she felt after appearance of a deep skin scar on face, impairing her look.

After brief dithering in

uncovering her blemished face, the medical team succeeded in proper examination of the lesion with a diagnosis of Cutaneous Leishmaniasis (CL), a neglected tropical disease (NTD) registering constant surge in northwestern region of the country during the last several years.

Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease caused by a Leishmania parasite and exists in three forms including Cutaneous Leishmaniasis (CL), Visceral Leishmaniasis (VL) and Mucocutaneous Leishmaniasis (MCL).

According to WHO, an estimated 700,000 to

one million new CL cases occur annually around the globe while the disease affects some of the world's poorest people and is associated with malnutrition, displacement, poor housing, weak immune system, climate change and lack of financial resources.

"The disquiet exhibited by Asia is not rare but normal for us as a reaction of psychological trauma being felt by patients of CL, especially female," says Fazoleh, Focal Person for Leishmaniasis in Ghalania Headquarters Hospital.

Apart from badly damaging skin,

Leishmaniasis also serves as a source of distress and inflicts psychological stigmatization on patients by causing disfigurement on exposed body parts mostly face, he added.

Disfigurement due to infection, especially among young women, put them in a pining grief and mental trauma owing to societal norm of giving preference to beauty as a first requisite for a decent marriage, Rahim explains.

"Majority of the female patients experience mental stress after appearance of lesion and feel embarrassment, depression, anxiety and self-contempt," he went on to say.

"The infection leaves patients with mental strain and also shatters their confidence, especially of young girls who are much concerned about their appearance," elaborates Dr Rafiq Hayat Malezai, District Health Officer (DHO) Mohmand District, a hotspot of Leishmaniasis registering more than 4,099 cases till June 2023.

The emotional toll of the disease is also witnessed among male patients, mostly youngsters, especially when the skin ulcer appears on uncovered body parts like face.



KARACHI: Members of Ghousiya Jamat are holding protest demonstration for release of Shah Mahmood Qureshi, at Karachi press club.

Pak earns \$892.972m from IT services' export

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan earned US \$892.972 million by providing different Information Technology (IT) services to various countries during the first four months of the current fiscal year 2023-24.

This shows a growth of 4.45 per cent as compared with the US \$854.918 million earned through the provision of services during the corresponding months of the last fiscal year 2022-23, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported.

During the months under review, the export of computer services grew by 4.81 per cent as it surged from US \$688.078 million last year to US \$721.162 million during July-October 2023.

Among the computer services, the exports of software consultancy

services witnessed an increase of 93.76 per cent, from US \$1.009 million to US \$1.955 million this year while the export of hardware consultancy services also surged by 1.13 per cent, from US \$253.543 million to US \$256.408 million.

The export of repair and maintenance services increased by 3.16 per cent from US \$0.443 million to US \$0.457 million whereas the export and imports of computer software services also surged by 4.01 per cent, from \$190.228 million to \$197.862 million.

Meanwhile, the export of information services during the months under review dipped by 25.18 per cent from US \$1.390 million to US \$1.040 million.

Among the information services, the exports of information-

related services increased by 21.04 per cent, from US \$0.366 million to US \$0.443 million whereas the exports of news agency services however decreased by 41.70 per cent, from US \$1.024 million to US \$0.597 million.

The export of telecommunication services increased by 4.45 per cent as these went up from US \$165.45 million to US \$170.770 million, the data revealed.

Among the telecommunication services, the export of call centres services increased by 8.84 per cent during the months as its exports increased from US \$69.641 million to US \$75.800 million whereas the export of other telecommunication services witnessed a nominal decrease of 0.88 per cent.



LAHORE: A large number of people are busy buying warm clothes outside Impress market during cold weather in Provincial Capital.

SNGPL cuts off another 485 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 operations, 485 unauthorized connections were disconnected, and fines totaling Rs 4.14 million were imposed.

According to a spokesman for the department, in Lahore, the regional team acted decisively, severing 25 connections for illegal gas usage and an additional 24 for compressor-related violations. Fines amounting to Rs 0.08 million were imposed on gas theft. In Rawalpindi, 183 connections were severed for unauthorized gas consumption, and 4 for compressor misuse, with fines totaling Rs 0.11 million.

The crackdown extended to Islamabad, where three connections were disconnected due to illegal gas usage. In Multan, the team disconnected 4 connections for unauthorized gas usage and 36 for compressor violations, resulting in fines of Rs 0.45 million. One FIR was lodged against gas pilferers. In Peshawar and Karak, SNGPL took stringent action by disconnecting 66 connections for direct and illegal gas usage, imposing fines amounting to Rs 2.33 million, and filing 2 FIRs against gas theft. The Mardan team disconnected 20 connections for illegal gas usage, with fines totaling Rs 0.92 million.

Sahiwal witnessed the disconnection of one connection for illegal gas usage and three for compressor violations, along with fines totaling Rs 0.21 million.

Commissioner says: Economic zone of 5000 acres to be set up in Rawalpindi

RAWALPINDI (APP): The administration would set up an economic zone of 5000 acres in Rawalpindi to facilitate the business community, said Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Liaquat Ali Chatta. He informed that the master planning of Rawalpindi includes an economic zone of 5000 acres where the traders would set up the factories and provide economic opportunities to the local people. The Commissioner said that Rawalpindi is a division of six districts covering 22,993 square kilometers.

Rawalpindi division has 22 tehsils and a total population of the division is 11,406 million.

Rawalpindi Division has a literacy rate of 72.25% and there are 12 universities and five specialized institutions in the division, Liaquat Ali Chatta added.

The division has a total of 544 schemes worth Rs 179,576 million under the Annual Development Program (2023-24) and 33 percent funds had been utilized so far on the development schemes, the Commissioner added.

At present, work on various mega projects is underway in Rawalpindi.

Applications sought for wheat production competition

FAISALABAD (APP): The Agriculture Department will receive applications from growers up to January 31 for the wheat production competition 2023-24.

According to a spokesman for Agriculture (Extension) Department, the growers who have 5 acres or more irrigated land are eligible to participate in the wheat competition and the top three position holders at the district level would be awarded prizes. He said that the application forms were available free of cost in the office of the agriculture officer (extension) and assistant director agriculture (extension) whereas it could also be downloaded from the website www.agripunjab.gov.pk.

Photocopies of the form will also be accepted and the applications would be received up to January 31. More information in this regard could be obtained from the agriculture department during the office time or from agri helpline 0800-17000 from Monday to Friday, he added.

Tehmina says: RTORawalpindi collects Rs. 21b in Dec; achieves target

ISLAMABAD (APP): Regional Tax Office (RTO), Rawalpindi, by collecting Rs. 21 billion tax in December 2023 has achieved its revenue target set for this month, said Chief Commissioner Tehmina Amir in a statement issued here on Sunday.

She further said that the RTO Rawalpindi has also realised its quarterly (October-December) revenue collection target.



PESHAWAR: Secretary Energy & Power Nisar Ahmad Khan and CEO PEDO Engr. Naem Khan took oath from the newly elected cabinet of PEDO's Officers Association.

New policies, reforms required for ease of doing business in 2024: APBF

ISLAMABAD (INP): President All Pakistan Business Forum (APBF), Syed Maaz Mahmood has stressed the need for new policies and widespread structural reforms in the upcoming year of 2024 to help investors launch their ventures with ease and comfort, as the country has been lagging behind in the ease of doing business index over the years and especially in the concluding year of 2023.

In his new year message issued on Sunday, he observed that a policy should be finalized after incorporating inputs from real stakeholders of the business community, including the APBF, with the sole aim of facilitating

foreign and domestic investment by removing the unnecessary bureaucratic and administrative hurdles that slow down the process of starting new business ventures and hinder economic growth.

Quoting the figures, Maaz Mahmood stated that in the recent Ease of Doing Business Index, Pakistan is considerably behind peer economies, ranking 108 out of 190. In the regulatory area of Starting a Business, Pakistan ranked 72 out of 190 countries.

The scope of the new policy intervention in 2024 should be limited to NOCs required by federal regulatory agencies for

incorporation and starting operations of a business activity.

This policy should cover business registration and authorization required for business operations. The policy should be applicable on all public sector entities of the federal and provincial governments that regulate businesses.

The business leader said that World Bank Group's Doing Business project provides a measure of the "Ease of Doing Business" through a set of objective indicators that focus on the impacts of laws, regulations and their enforcement across 190 economies.

Newly elected cabinet of PEDO's Officers Association took oath

Employees should work to take PEDO to the highest revenue generating institution of province: Nisar Ahmad, Naem

Independent Report
PESHAWAR: The newly elected cabinet of PEDO's Officers Association (Registered), a subsidiary of Energy and Power department KP has taken oath. Secretary E&P Nisar Ahmad Khan and CEO PEDO Engr. Naem Khan took oath from the newly elected Chairman of the Cabinet Haji Mohammad Ibrar, President Engineer Rahib Ullah Shah, Vice President Engineer Moqem uddin, Finance Secretary Imran Khan and others.

Speaking at the event organized in this regard, Secretary Power Nisar Ahmad Khan said that PEDO is a profitable entity of the province, which brings more than Rs. 4 billion to the province annually. Several energy projects have entered in final stages of completion, the completion of which is expected to generate an

additional income of more than Rs. 10 billion to the province. He stressed on all officers to devote all their energies to make the institution as number one.

The Chief Executive Naem Khan reiterated that he has taken measures to solve all the problems of employees and will continue to work for the welfare of the organization in the future. Later on, the newly elected President, Habib Ullah Shah and Chairman Muhammad Ibrar presented the charter of demand, in which the association has included the gratuity of employees, health facilities for employees and residential colony etc. in the future agenda and expressed hope that they will devote all their energies in the best interest of the organization. They will do their best to solve the problems of the employees.



LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Industries and Chairman United Business Group SM Tanveer being welcomed at Lahore Airport after attending election of FPCCL.

Call for enhancing women's access to finance: Meher Kashif

LAHORE (APP): but they remain unrecognized, being small and informal in nature and lacking the incentives to register their businesses formally or to grow, he observed.

"Our policies must recognise the importance of women entrepreneurship and create an enabling environment that increases women's participation in the formal economy and gives them more opportunities to grow their businesses, he remarked.

Meher Kashif Younis, who is also Chairman Kyrgyzstan Trade House in Pakistan and Vice President Gold Ring Economic Forum, said policy-based loans should support reforms that incorporate women's needs into national policies, such as the State Bank of Pakistan's Banking on Equality Policy that, among a range of measures, requires banks to establish departments dedicated to providing services to women.

The coordinator said the financial intermediation loan, meanwhile, besides creating ample job opportunities in Pakistan. Speaking as a keynote speaker at a seminar on "Better Access of Women to Micro Credit" organised under the aegis of Gold Ring Economic Forum, a strategic think-tank, he added that inclusive, resilient and sustainable development cannot be achieved if women do not have equal economic opportunities and benefits.

Meher Kashif said it's the need of the hour that Pakistan's current financing ecosystem must improve women's access to much-needed finance and empower them to boost their livelihoods while contributing significantly to the economy. There are many women entrepreneurs in Pakistan,

strengthening the economy for medium-sized enterprises and medium-sized enterprises for strengthening the economy besides creating ample job opportunities in Pakistan.

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CTI demands hike in students' stipend to learn skills

LAHORE (APP): Carpet Training Institute (CTI) Chairperson Ejaz-ur-Rehman Sunday urged the government to provide students with scholarships in proportion to the inflation ratio to attract the youth to learn skills.

Talking to the youth receiving training at CTI here, he said, "Young people can secure their economic future by focusing on innovative ideas and the government

should focus on the slogan of 'Talented Nation for Development'."

Ejaz-ur-Rehman said that research should be focused on bringing innovation in the designs of carpet products and for this the internet can be fully utilized. He said that every year hundreds of thousands of youths are entering the market for whom it is impossible to provide employment in the public sector.

Rs10.2b state land reclaimed

FAISALABAD (APP): The revenue department reclaimed 1679 Kanals of state land from land grabbers on the order of the Punjab ombudsman.

A spokesman for the local administration said here on Sunday that citizens had filed complaints before the Punjab ombudsman for the retrieval of state land from the Qabza mafia.

After hearing the complaints, Punjab Ombudsman Major (Retired) Azam Suleman Khan issued orders for immediate retrieval of the state land.



HYDERABAD: Families viewing the furniture during three days Pakistan lifetime furniture's Exhibition.

Industry be prioritized in power, gas supply in winter: PFC

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Furniture Council (FC) has demanded the government to accord top priority to the industrial sector regarding uninterrupted power and gas supplies during the winter season.

PFC Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq made this demand while talking to a delegation of industrialists led by Chaudhary Araib Arain here on Sunday.

He argued that the industrial sector plays a pivotal role in the

economic growth and uninterrupted gas and power supplies are essential for its smooth functioning. It will not only sustain production but also safeguard jobs and contribute to overall economic stability besides help achieve export targets.

Kashif Ashfaq said that timely availability of power is also crucial for agricultural activities, especially during winter, to support processes such as crop drying and irrigation. Ensuring a reliable power supply to this sector.

Drive against overcharging continues

NAROWAL (APP): In the light of the instructions of Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi, the provision of food items at cheap prices is being ensured to citizens throughout the district. In this regard, the performance of price control magistrates is being reviewed on a daily basis.

These views were expressed by the deputy commissioner at an important meeting. DC Syed Hassan Raza said that price control magistrates should play an active role in maintaining stability in the prices of food items and inspect shops on a daily.



LAHORE: Dry fruits are being selling at a roadside stall, as the demand of dry fruits increased in city during the winter season, near Badshahi Mosque in Lahore.

Time to save maize farmers from market exploitation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Amidst impending food security issues, the maize farmers across the country are worried about sufficient return for their crop after facing serious pricing issues.

In absence of proper support price mechanism and strict implementation of policies like in case of wheat and cotton, whenever there is a bumper maize crop, the farmers fall prey to middlemen and hoarders.

As most of the farmers cannot hold their crop, they have to sell this - one of the most essential food crops - on throwaway prices suffering losses or hardly managing to meet their ends.

Maize is among the major crops that can play an important role in catering domestic food requirements and helping trim the import bill of edible oil. But, when its growers do not get proper price, they get disappointed and shift to other crops in next season.

"Maize is called 'Gold Crop' due to its diversified consumption. It is used as human food, animal feed and a vital product for industries. Many Asian and African countries use it as a vital food component to avert food insecurity," remarked Muhammad Ashiq Khan, a member of Farmers' Association Gojra.

Maize Products produce dozens of items from maize that are used in our industrial, pharmaceutical and food sectors. "It is also used in confectionery, bakery, dairy, beverages, snacks and savory products and as feed for animals and poultry birds."

But, during the current season its farmers are in real trouble due to less price as presently the crop is sold at Rs. 1,500 to Rs. 2,000 per maund (40 kg), Ashiq Khan said. "This situation has disappointed farmers who are needed to be steered out of this situation."

Farmers believe that this price does not make them meet their ends after

they had purchased its seed on much higher price and spent money on other inputs. Heaps of maize could be seen all around the Punjab province with farmers in a fix to manage their crop at such lesser rate. "Maize is an important food crop cultivated twice a year. But in absence of support price, its growers are forced to sell it at Rs. 1,800 to Rs. 2,500 per maund," said Dr Fahad Rasul, Associate Professor of Agronomy, University of Agriculture Faisalabad. "This is disappointing for farmers. On this rate they cannot secure money to cultivate next crop and would surely switch to other crops."

He said at a time when the country was spending huge money on soybean import, maize could be utilized to fulfill the requirement of poultry feed industry. "Non-availability of hybrid maize seed is another issue for many growers as shopkeepers sell maize seed at much higher price than the original price printed on seed bag."

For example, Dr Fahad said retail price of one maize seed variety was Rs. 15,000 per bag but it was being sold for Rs 20,000 in black market. "As it is an exhausting crop and farmers spend more on its cultivation and saving it from insect attack, so they need a proper return."



LARKANA: Growers are blocked road as they are holding protest demonstration against Irrigation Department of Sindh and shortage of water in Peersher, Mahar, Phul, Ahando Mirbahar, Maswani Jatoti villages, at Peersher Bypass road.

Gaza death toll reaches 21,822 as Palestinians end dark year amid Israeli attacks

Monitoring Desk
GAZA STRIP: Israelis and Palestinians end a dark year on Sunday, with no end in sight to the deadliest military offensive on Gaza, triggered by Hamas' bloodiest attack on Israel.

There has been no respite from Israel's air raids, artillery fire or ground fighting with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, to the despair of Palestinians surviving the onslaught.

"We were hoping that 2024 would arrive under better auspices and that we would be able to celebrate the new year at home with our families," said Mahmoud Abou Shahma in a camp for displaced people in Rafah, on the Egyptian border.

"We hope that the war will end and that we will be able to return to our homes and live in peace," said the 33-year-old from Khan Yunis, an epicentre of the conflict in the south of Gaza. Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry says the Israeli military campaign has killed at least 21,822 people, mostly women and children—by far the heaviest death toll of any Israeli operation.

On Sunday the ministry reported numerous deaths in overnight strikes on central Gaza's Zawayda and the

nearby Al-Mughazi refugee camp.

The fighting began with Hamas's October 7 attacks, which left about 1,140 people dead in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

Militants also took about 250 people hostage, and Israel says 129 of them remain in captivity.

The Israeli army says 170 soldiers have been killed in combat inside Gaza.

An Israeli siege imposed after October 7, following years of crippling blockade, has led to dire shortages of food, safe water, fuel and medicine in Gaza, with aid convoys able to offer only sporadic relief.

The UN says more than 85 percent of Gaza's 2.4 million people have fled their homes.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned of the growing threat of infectious diseases and the UN says Gaza is "just weeks away" from famine.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Saturday that Israel's war against Hamas will last for "many months"—until the Palestinian militant group has been eliminated.



Fireworks burst from the Sky Tower in Auckland, New Zealand to celebrate the New Year



Residents inspecting the damage outside an apartment building after the overnight Russian drone attack in Kharkiv.

Venezuela says Troops will stay deployed until British military vessel leaves waters off Guyana

Monitoring Desk
MEXICO CITY: Venezuela said Saturday it will continue to deploy nearly 6,000 troops until a British military vessel sent to neighboring Guyana leaves the waters off the coast of the two South American nations.

In a video posted to X, Venezuelan Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino appeared surrounded by military officers in front of a marked up map of Venezuela and Guyana, a former British colony.

Padrino said the forces are "safeguarding our national sovereignty."

"Armed forces have been deployed not just in the east of the country, but across the entire territory," he said. "They will be there until this British imperialist boat leaves the disputed waters between Venezuela and Guyana."

The Defense Ministry confirmed to The Associated Press that the video was made at a military base in Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

The video comes after weeks of tensions between the two countries over Venezuela's renewed claim to a region in Guyana known as Essequibo, a sparsely populated stretch

of land roughly the size of Florida that is rich in oil and minerals. Operations generate some \$1 billion a year for the impoverished country of nearly 800,000 people that saw its economy expand by nearly 60% in the first half of this year.

Venezuela has long argued it was cheated out of the territory when Europeans and the U.S. set the border. Guayana, which has controlled the zone for decades, says the original agreement was legally binding and the dispute should be decided by the International Court of Justice in the Netherlands.

The century-old dispute was recently reignited with the discovery of oil in Guyana, and has escalated since Venezuela reported that its citizens voted in a Dec. 3 referendum to claim Essequibo, which makes up two-thirds of its smaller neighbor.

Critics of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro say the socialist leader is using the tensions to distract from internal turmoil and stoke nationalism in the lead up to presidential elections next year.

Britain's Big Ben marks 100 years of New Year 'bongs'

LONDON (INP): London's Big Ben on Sunday marks the 100th anniversary of its "bongs" to ring in the New Year being broadcast live across the world.

Ever since New Year's Eve 1923 when BBC engineer A.G. Dryland clambered onto a roof opposite the British parliament to record the strikes, live transmission has become an annual tradition.

The unmistakable sound of the "nation's timepiece" has long occupied a special place in national life.

The bongs are heard twice daily — at 6pm and midnight and three times on Sunday — on BBC radio, and at the start of the nightly News at Ten on commercial channel ITV.

Such is their importance that even during the recently-ended five-year restoration programme when they were largely silenced, important exceptions were made. As well as New Year, Big Ben also continued to mark Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday when the nation remembers its war dead.

US forces shoot down ballistic missiles in Red Sea, kill gunmen in attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels

Monitoring Desk
BEIRUT: The U.S. military said Sunday it shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired toward a container ship by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea. Hours later, four boats tried to attack the same ship, but U.S. forces opened fire, killing several of the armed crews, the U.S. Central Command said. No one was injured on the ship.

The Singapore-flagged MAERSK HANZGHOU reported they had already been hit by a missile Saturday night while transiting the Southern Red Sea and requested assistance, CENTCOM said in a statement. The USS GRAVELY

and USS LABOON responded to the call for help, and the Denmark-owned vessel was reportedly seaworthy and no injuries were noted, the statement added.

"This is the 23rd illegal attack by the Houthis on international shipping since Nov. 19," CENTCOM said.

In another statement, CENTCOM said the same ship issued an additional distress call about a second attack "by four Iranian-backed Houthi small boats." The attackers fired small arms weapons at the MAERSK HANZGHOU, getting to within 20 meters (about 65 feet) of the vessel, and attempted to it, CENTCOM said.

Gaza to remain major concern during new year, UN warns

Monitoring Desk

UNITED NATIONS: In a stark warning, the United Nations underscored the protracted nature of the Gaza crisis, asserting that it could remain a major cause of concern in 2024 as well.

The statement, released from the UN's New York headquarters, delineated the pivotal issues anticipated to dominate global attention in the coming year, with the situation in Gaza taking a prominent position.

Commending the Security Council's December 22 resolution as "a step in the right direction," the United Nations urged heightened aid delivery to the embattled Gaza Strip, as the resolution emphasised.

Despite diplomatic strides, the UN highlighted the dire circumstances confronting the civilian population in Gaza and the West Bank, characterising the situation as "desperate."

North Korea's Kim vows to launch 3 more spy satellites

Monitoring Desk

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to launch three additional military spy satellites, produce more nuclear materials and introduce modern attack drones in 2024, as he called for "overwhelming" war readiness to cope with U.S.-led confrontational moves, state media reported Sunday.

Kim's comments, made during a key ruling Workers' Party meeting to set state goals for next year, suggest he'll intensify a run of weapons tests ahead of the U.S. presidential elections in November. Observers say Kim believes a boosted nuclear capability would give him another chance for high-stakes diplomacy with the U.S. to win sanctions relief if

former President Donald Trump returns to the White House.

During the five-day meeting that ended Saturday, Kim said "vicious" anti-North Korea moves by the United States and its followers "have reached the extremes unprecedented in history," pushing the Korean Peninsula to the brink of a nuclear war, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. Kim cited the expansion of U.S.-South Korean military exercises and the temporary deployment of powerful U.S. military assets such as bombers and a nuclear-armed submarine in South Korea — steps the allies have taken in response to the North's weapons testing spree since last year.

Albania's former PM placed under house arrest in corruption probe

Monitoring Desk

PRISTINA: A court in Albania on Saturday ordered that former president and prime minister Sali Berisha be placed under house arrest following investigation on a corruption case relating to his time in office.

Prosecutors accuse Berisha, 79, of using his influence while premier between 2005 and 2009 to favor his daughter's husband in the privatization of a state land. Berisha has denied any wrongdoing.

Berisha now heads

Russia launches fresh drone strikes on Ukraine after promising retaliation for Belgorod attack

Monitoring Desk

KYIV, Ukraine: Russia launched a fresh drone assault on Ukraine on Saturday night, after promising that strikes on the Russian border city of Belgorod earlier in the day "would not go unpunished."

The Ukrainian Air Force said Sunday that it had shot down 21 of 49 drones launched by Russian forces overnight.

Twenty-eight people were wounded in an attack on the eastern city of Kharkiv, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said Sunday. A central hotel, apartment buildings, kindergarten, shops and administrative buildings sustained damage, according to the regional prosecutor's office.

Russia's Defense Ministry said that it had hit "decision-making centers and military facilities" in Kharkiv, reporting that its strike on the Kharkiv Palace Hotel had "destroyed representatives of the Main

Intelligence Directorate and Ukrainian Armed Forces" involved in the "terrorist attack" in Belgorod.

In the Kyiv region that surrounds the capital, a Russian drone attack caused a fire to break out at a critical infrastructure facility, local officials said. They did not identify the facility further.

Shelling in the center of the Russian border city of Belgorod Saturday killed 24 people, including three children. A further 108 people were wounded in the strike, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said Sunday, making it one of the deadliest attacks on Russian soil since the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine 22 months ago.

Russian authorities accused Kyiv of carrying out the attack, which took place the day after an 18-hour Russian aerial bombardment across Ukraine killed at least 41 civilians. Russia's Defense Min-

istry said it identified the ammunition used in the strike as Czech-made Vampire rockets and Olkha missiles fitted with cluster-munition warheads. It provided no additional information, and The Associated Press was unable to verify its claims.

"This crime will not go unpunished," the ministry said in a statement on social media.

In an emergency meeting at the U.N. Security Council demanded by Russia Saturday night, envoy Vasily Nebenzya accused Kyiv of a "terrorist attack." In comments carried by Russian state media, Nebenzya claimed Ukraine had launched "a deliberate act of terrorism directed against civilians."

Ukrainians are bracing for further attacks. A blistering New Year's Eve assault by Russia last year killed at least three civilians.

Massive waves on California coast cause flooding, force evacuations

Monitoring Desk

CALIFORNIA: Massive waves, towering up to 25 feet high, relentlessly crashed upon California's shores, leaving a trail of havoc from Los Angeles down to southern Oregon.

The West Coast faced severe flooding, littering beaches with debris and logs, dis-



rupting roads as far north as Oregon.

These massive waves began pounding the coast, flooding beaches in Los Angeles and spreading chaos as far north as southern Oregon. Logs scattered along roads served as stark reminders of the powerful onslaught. The extreme waves are the result of potent cyclones over the North Pacific combined with unusually high tides, setting the stage for hazardous conditions along the coastline.

The National Weather Service in Los Angeles described it as an unprecedented event not witnessed in many years. Although conditions briefly improved on Friday, forecasters are anticipating another surge in wave intensity on Saturday with a second powerful swell on the horizon.

6 killed in massive fire at glove factory

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR (Maharashtra) (INP): At least six people were killed in a massive fire that broke out at a hand glove manufacturing company in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar in the early hours of Sunday.

According to Kashmir Media Service, Fire Department officials said, "When we reached the site, the entire factory was on fire. Locals informed us that six people were trapped inside. Our officers entered and recovered six charred bodies." "Extinguishing work is currently in progress," he added. Earlier, locals claimed at least five workers were trapped inside the building. Fire Department officials later confirmed the deaths of six people in the fire incident.

Workers said that the company was closed, and they were sleeping when the fire broke out.

"10-15 workers were sleeping inside the building when the fire broke out. Some managed to escape, but at least five were trapped inside," one of the workers had told the media. Meanwhile, fire dousing operations are ongoing, and the exact cause behind the fire is not ascertained yet. More details are awaited.

Final bodies found after China's most serious earthquake in a decade

Monitoring Desk

BEIJING: The bodies of the two remaining people missing in the aftermath of China's most serious earthquake in nearly a decade were found on Sunday, a tragedy that has renewed concern over exposed populations in seismically active zones.

That raises official fatalities from the magnitude 6.2 quake that rocked the northwestern provinces of Qinghai and Gansu almost two weeks ago to 151. The final bodies were found in Qinghai at 1:16 a.m. (1716 GMT Saturday), state media reported.

The earthquake, whose epicentre straddled Qinghai and Gansu, was the most serious in China since a magnitude 6.5 temblor struck the southwestern province of Yunnan in 2014 and killed 617 people.

The tragedy in disaster-hit Qinghai and Gansu, home to many Hui people, a tight-knit ethnic minority characterised by its distinctive Muslim identity, has renewed concern over outdated and poorly built homes.

Many of the homes destroyed were made of earth-wood or brick-wood structures. Their load-bearing walls were constructed

from earth, providing little defence against any earthquake, say local authorities.

Gansu, Qinghai, Tibet, Xinjiang and the rugged highlands in Sichuan and Yunnan are located on the fringe of the geologically complex Qinghai-Tibet plateau. Many populations living near the edge of the plateau, often atop active fault lines, are rural farmers and herders subsisting on very low incomes.

Han Ting, 33, whose village in Gansu was nearly wrecked by the quake, chose to stay put in an emergency tent set up by relief workers because of fears her partially damaged family home could still collapse on her.

"The prefab house assigned to us is also a bit far, so we still choose to stay here in the tent," said Han, one of the thousands of Hui people who live in the area.

"It's not too cold at the moment, and we aren't lacking in daily necessities, and the children have also resumed school."

Even as life started to resume for Han, she could not help but think of her grandfather, who survived the initial impact of the earthquake but died several days later.

Russia jailed more than 200 captured Ukrainian fighters so far: FM Lavrov

MASCO (INP): Russian courts have sentenced more than 200 Ukrainian fighters to prison terms since Moscow started its military operation in Ukraine, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview with the state RIA news agency published on Sunday.

"The courts of the Russian Federation have already sentenced more than 200 representatives of Ukrainian armed formations to long terms of imprisonment for committing atrocities," Lavrov told RIA.

Both sides accuse each other of committing numerous atrocities in the war that

Russia started with a full-scale invasion on Ukraine in February 2022.

The United Nations has found continued evidence of war crimes and human rights violations committed by Russian authorities, including torture, rape and the deportation of children.

In March, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin, alleging Moscow's forcible deportation of Ukrainian children is a war crime. "On our path to justice, the main result of the year is undoubtedly the arrest warrant issued by the

International Criminal Court for Putin," Ukraine's Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin said in a statement on Saturday, summing up 2023.

"A historic decision and a clear signal that no one can be above the law."

The Ukraine Prosecutor General's office has registered more than 121,000 Russian crimes of aggression and war crimes since the war started, according to its website. The UN has also found several cases of Ukrainian authorities committing violations of human rights of people they have accused of collaborating with Russian authorities.



Smoke rises over Gaza, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, as seen from southern Israel



Federal Health Minister Dr. Nadeem Jan addressing National Conference on Integrated Approach for Evidence Based Public Health and Role of National Health Data Centre in Islamabad.

TTP using US leftover weapons in terrorism on Pakistani soil: Analysts

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weapons left over by the US forces in Afghanistan are being used by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in cross-border terrorist activities against Pakistan.

It was evident from the recent terror attacks by the TTP from the Afghan soil in Pakistan that its terrorists were blatantly using the weapons left behind by the foreign forces in Afghanistan to damage peace and security in the region, the well-informed political and defence analysts said on Sunday.

They said the Pakistan Army had been fighting the war against the TTP for the last two decades. However, it was a known fact that its terrorists had full access to the weapons, which the US and NATO forces had left behind after facing humili-

ating defeat in the so-called war against terror. It had significantly damaged the security of the region, particularly in Pakistan, which had seen a surge in terrorist activities since the fall of Afghan defence forces.

An intelligence-based operation was conducted against terrorists in Mir Ali area of North Waziristan district on December 29, 2023. At least, five terrorists, including their commander Rahzaib Khurray, were killed in the exchange of fire during the operation.

Foreign weapons, including M4 Carbine and Ak-47 along with ammunition were recovered from the terrorists. Such type of foreign arms had been used in many terrorist attacks in Pakistan in the past also.

The Baloch Liberation

Army, which attacked FC camps in Nowshki and Panjgur districts in February, 2022, was also using the same weapons.

The attack on the Zhob Garrison on July 12, 2023 also involved the use of American weapons by the TTP. On September 6, 2023, the TTP terrorists armed with the latest American weapons attacked two army check posts in Chitral.

The weapons recovered from the terrorists in the November 4 Mianwali Air Base attack were foreign-made, including RPG-7, AK-74, M-4 and M-16/A4.

Moreover, the night vision goggles and American rifles were also used by terrorists in the terrorist attack in Daraban area of Dera Ismail Khan on December 12.

Improvement in health sector? Govt working on digitalization program

ISLAMABAD (INP): Caretaker Minister for Health Services Dr. Nadeem Jan has stated that the government is working on digitalization program to bring about improvement in health sector as well as tangible results.

Speaking at a seminar titled Role of Digital Health System in Islamabad on Sunday, he said with the coordination of provinces, health related data is being integrated to formulate comprehensive reforms.

The Minister said digitalization program will help in collection of accurate, concise and clear results for future challenges. He expressed the hope that Digital Health Centre will help in reforms and improvement of all programmes being carried out in the country.

Ashrafi calls for accountability of May 9 culprits

LAHORE (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative and Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi demanded punishment for those involved in attacks on the state and military installations on May 9.

Addressing the media at the Lahore Press Club on Sunday, Ashrafi announced a ban on New Year celebrations in solidarity with Palestinians, urging citizens to support them financially instead of fireworks.

Expressing concern about the justice system, he appealed to the Chief Justice of Pakistan to address issues faced by the lower-income population and emphasized the need for a just legal system and the improvement of the Zakat system to combat poverty effectively.

Highlighting the importance of righteous caliphate (Khilafat e Rashida), he stressed the principles of justice, equal treatment for all, and protection of non-Muslims' rights. Ashrafi commended efforts

to enhance security for the Christian community during Christmas.

Addressing contemporary challenges, he called for legal action against triple talaq (divorce) issuers, combating obscenity's role in divorces, and countering fake news damaging homes. Ashrafi urged a focus on justice, education, health, and equal food provision for the implementation of a true spirit of righteous caliphate (Khilafat e Rashida).

He acknowledged the government's efforts to reduce Hajj costs and proposed further reductions. On international matters, Ashrafi revealed military leaders' warnings regarding the global repercussions if an immediate ceasefire is not achieved in Palestine.

He suggested that making Pakistan "green" would improve agriculture, leading to decreased prices of essential commodities. Ashrafi concluded by calling for the punishment of May 9 culprits and the release of the innocent.

Justice Mazhar's plea to stop SJC proceeding to be held on Jan 8

ISLAMABAD (Online): Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) will hear the application filed by Justice Mazhar Naqvi against stopping the proceedings of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) on January 8, 2024.

Earlier, the court had not given relief on stopping the proceedings on December 15, 2023.

First hearing was held in the open court on his petition regarding the complaints against Supreme Court (SC) Judge Justice Mazhar Naqvi in Supreme Judicial Council. Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel observed that lawyer of Justice Mazhar Naqvi raised objection to the formation of the bench. The matter of the three-member committee is administrative.

Following the objection, the court asked the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to follow the right direction to get "bat" symbol for the upcoming elections.

Addressing the workers' convention in Lahore, Saad said: "The PTI should count their feats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) for the last 10 years. The uproar has caused us to rule the country for 40 years. How could we rule the country for 40 years as the country witnessed martial law four times? The PTI founder was also a part of the martial law."

Speaking about the upcoming polls, he said: "We will lock horns against those who put the country into crisis."

Follow rules to get 'bat' symbol, Saad tells PTI

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Khawaja Saad Rafique on Sunday asked the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to follow the right direction to get "bat" symbol for the upcoming elections.

Addressing the workers' convention in Lahore, Saad said: "The PTI should count their feats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) for the last 10 years. The uproar has caused us to rule the country for 40 years. How could we rule the country for 40 years as the country witnessed martial law four times? The PTI founder was also a part of the martial law."

Speaking about the upcoming polls, he said: "We will lock horns against those who put the country into crisis."

Firdous says: IPP to change people's fate

SIALKOT (APP): Former Federal Minister for Information and Isteqam-e-Pakistan Party Central Information Secretary (IPP) Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan has said that people of all ages are joining the party caravan and it is a positive change that will change the destiny of Pakistan. In a statement, she said, "The bustle of the elections is at its peak. I am participating in the elections from my native constituencies NA-70 and PP-44 on behalf of the party. Inshallah, we will deliver our manifesto to every home." She said that after the announcement of elections, the process of scrutiny of nomination papers submitted by candidates had been completed. She said the Isteqam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) had become a grassroots level party. "Inshallah, people will repose their trust in the party in the election and we will prove that the country's bright future can be ensured."

to enhance security for the Christian community during Christmas.

Addressing contemporary challenges, he called for legal action against triple talaq (divorce) issuers, combating obscenity's role in divorces, and countering fake news damaging homes. Ashrafi urged a focus on justice, education, health, and equal food provision for the implementation of a true spirit of righteous caliphate (Khilafat e Rashida).

He acknowledged the government's efforts to reduce Hajj costs and proposed further reductions. On international matters, Ashrafi revealed military leaders' warnings regarding the global repercussions if an immediate ceasefire is not achieved in Palestine.

He suggested that making Pakistan "green" would improve agriculture, leading to decreased prices of essential commodities. Ashrafi concluded by calling for the punishment of May 9 culprits and the release of the innocent.



SOHBATPUR: Member Chief Minister Inspection Committee Aslam Tareen being briefed by XEN Ahmed Nawaz Umrani about under construction projects

Rashid vows to challenge nomination papers rejection

RAWALPINDI (INP): Former Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad on Sunday expressed determination to contest his disqualification, asserting that despite his clear success, he will not relinquish his rightful place in the electoral arena. In a video statement addressing the rejection of his nomination papers, Sheikh Rashid stated that he has been relentlessly pursuing a copy of the decision since yesterday to seek recourse from the Supreme Court. Undeterred, he pledged to continue the legal and constitutional battle for his political rights.

The former minister disclosed that he was informed yesterday about his disqualification on the grounds of not paying a meager sum of 942 rupees, supposedly for a stay in a Murree rest house 12 years ago.

Sheikh Rashid Ahmad dismissed the allegations as a "brazen and vile joke," condemning the decision.

PML-N believes serving of people: Fatima

QUETTA (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader of Balochistan Fatima Khan on Sunday said that the Muslim League (N) believed in serving of people, whenever the party came to power, it took practical steps for the development and prosperity of the country. She said that in the general elections of February 8, the PML-N will win from Balochistan with a huge majority.

She expressed these views while addressing the women's corner meeting in Wahdat Colony Quetta.

Fatima Khan said that Pakistan's history was a witness that Pakistan has progressed in every term of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif's government.

She said that under the leadership of party leader and former prime minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, the party was determined to get the country out of the current crisis, for which the entire nation stands with him.



QUETTA: Warm clothes are being selling at roadside stalls as the demand of warm clothes increased in city during the winter season.

BRI, CPEC practical manifestation of win-win cooperation, shared prosperity: Ambassador Hashmi

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan Ambassador to China, Khalil Hashmi has said that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its flagship project - China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is a practical manifestation of win-win cooperation and shared prosperity for both China and Pakistan and the countries participating in the initiative.

On connectivity projects from the Karakoram Highway to the Gwadar port to enhance ties between the two countries, he said, these projects are essentially about connectivity and infrastructure development. But more than that it is a vehicle or a means for people-centred development to use it as a platform to enhance livelihoods for people.

He said the Silk Road is an ancient connection for the people and in the 1960s, the two countries jointly built Karakoram Highway. With the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor coming into play in the last 10 years, we are going into a new high gear which is Phase II of the Karakoram Highway.

Gwadar port is functional and that is also a great example of Pakistan and China working together to build means of transport and livelihood.

In his remarks on the role of infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to enhance people's livelihoods, he said, that in the last 10 years, 236,000 jobs have been created. More than 8,000 megawatts of electricity have been added to our national grid. More than 800 kilometres of high-ways have been built. Nearly, 900 kilometres of

electricity transmission lines have been upgraded.

"I think this is a huge contribution in terms of direct contribution to the creation of jobs but also laying the foundation for people to enjoy the benefits of development on a more longer term and more sustained basis," he added.

About his priorities as the newly appointed ambassador of Pakistan to China, he vowed to help implement the consensus and decisions reached between the leadership of the two countries.

To deepen the very high level of trust that we have between our governments, people and institutions, we will also promote people-to-people connections more specifically in the area of art, culture and tourism, he added.

He said that this year, the Pakistan embassy organized a visit of 15 Chinese tour operators to Pakistan to explore the possibilities of more Chinese tourists going to Pakistan.

And then this year in November, eight Pakistani tour operators arrived in China and participated for the first time in the Beijing outbound travel and tourism fair.

"We have a very unique time-tested, ironclad partnership between our two countries. And this is rooted in the hearts of the people."

Expressing his vision for collaboration between China and Pakistan in the upcoming decade, he told CGTN in an interview that there is an excellent foundation that already exists in the last 10 years or before.

"So, going forward, we have the essential constituents, which is the infrastructure and energy in place."

Expressing a need to intensify focus on industrial cooperation, he said, it means special economic zones, enhanced trade and investment and cooperation in Information Technology and agriculture, adding there are also areas within these bigger fields.

Expressing his resolve to deepen the economic relationship between the two countries, he said, Pakistan and China have signed a free trade agreement. They have signed five protocols on agriculture this year. Pakistan's exports to China have increased. Trade volumes between the two countries has increased.



DERA ALLAH YAR: Inspector General of Police Balochistan Abdul Khaliq Sheikh offering Fateha to condole with relatives of Shaheed Tayyab Umrani

Interviewing 2300 election candidates; PMLN declares democratic milestone

ISLAMABAD (Online): Spokesperson Muslim League-N Maryam Aurangzeb has said in her statement on the social media website that Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) has successfully crossed another democratic and electoral milestone, starting from December 2, 2023.

The series of interviews of the Parliamentary Board has been completed today.

2300 candidates from across the country were interviewed.

The parliamentary board under the chairmanship of party leader Nawaz Sharif and President Shehbaz Sharif conducted this democratic exercise involving long sittings, the process lasted for about 184 hours, in which all the candidates, male and female, were heard with great satisfaction.

He said that the recommendations and suggestions of the candidates were considered. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) is the only party in the country which went through such a large, extensive and comprehensive process of consultation.

Khosa alleges 90% nomination paper of PTI's candidates rejected

ISLAMABAD (INP): PTI leader Latif Khosa has alleged that nomination papers from a staggering 90 percent of Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidates have been rejected.

Latif Khosa, while speaking on a TV channel, Khosa claimed that this mass rejection stands in stark contrast to the PML-N, where only a single candidate had faced rejection across the country.

Khosa asserted that PTI candidates are prepared to engage in a robust legal battle against the rejection of their nomination papers. Despite the setback, he highlighted the presence of strong alternative candidates within the party.

The ongoing scrutiny of nomination papers by the Election Commission has been a subject of controversy, with PTI alleging widespread rejection of its candidates on December 30. Media reports confirm that even central figures within PTI, including Imran Khan, have had their nomination papers rejected.

Prominent leaders such as Shah Mahmood Qureshi faced rejection in National Assembly Constituencies NA 151 and 150, while his sons Zain Qureshi and Mehrabano also encountered a similar fate. Azam Khan Swati's nomination papers from Manshehra constituency NA 15, and Zulfi Bukhari's from NA 50 Attock were not spared either.

Irfan Khan, Imran Khan's cousin and PTI candidate from PP-90 in



UTHAL: Doctors examining patients during free medical camp in BHU Sukan by PHC Global in collaboration with Health Department Lasebella

FBR collects over Rs.1trln gross revenue in a single month

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has created history by collecting Rs.1021 Billion in December 2023 and after adjusting refunds of Rs.38 billion issued during the month, reached net collection of Rs.984 billion.

Targets for the month as well as for the first six months of the current financial year were also surpassed, said a news release here on Sunday.

The target for the first six months was Rs.4425 billion (as agreed with IMF), which was surpassed by 43 billion and recorded a collection of Rs.4468 billion.

FBR in the corresponding six months of the previous year collected Rs.3428, thus registering an increase of more than Rs 1 trillion.

This is despite the fact that refunds of Rs.230 billion have been issued against Rs.177 billion during the corresponding period of the previous year.

Again, within Direct Taxes, FBR during the past two years, has reduced the share of withholding taxes from 70% to 55-58%. However, during December 2023, the share of withholding taxes has been recorded as low as 40%.

It would not be out of place to mention that, FBR collected 1 trillion as an annual collection back in 2007-08. It took 50 years to achieve this milestone. Whereas, in a span of only 15 years, this feat has been accomplished in a single month; through untiring efforts, sheer dedication, and hard work of field formations and top brass of FBR.

Chairman FBR congratulates Member (Customs Operations), Member (IR-Operations), and their teams for achieving this unsustainable task.

He also thanks the taxpayers, without whose continuous support and correct declarations, this target could not have been accomplished.



LAHORE: Special Assistant to Prime Minister and Chairman Pakistan Ulema-e-Islam Council Allama Tahir Ashrafi addressing a Press conference.

PTI all set to take caretaker govt to court over disqualification

PESHAWAR (INP): The Peshawar High Court is now the battleground for a legal showdown following the caretaker government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's decision to include the names of former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) ministers and assembly members in the Fourth Schedule. The move resulted in the rejection of their nomination papers for the upcoming elections.

Prominent figures from PTI, including Dr. Amjad Ali, Salim-ur-Rehman, Mian Sharaf Ali, Gul Zafar Khan, Anwar Zeib, Humayun Khan, and Fazal Hakeem, have filed petitions challenging the decision. Advocates Syed Sikandar Hayat Shah and Muhammad Adil Khan (Senior) have submitted the pleas on behalf of the aggrieved former assembly members and provincial ministers. The petitions target the provincial government, Additional Chief Secretary Home, Inspector General of Police (IGP), and the administrations of the respective districts as respondents. The petitioners argue that they are former Members of Parliament and law-abiding citizens. They emphasize that the District Intelligence Coordination Committees (DICC) of various districts recommended their inclusion in Schedule IV, leading to the rejection of their nomination papers. The rating officers, acting upon these recommendations, cited the Schedule IV listing as grounds for dismissal.



QUETTA: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) Leader, Muhammad Azeem Kakar addresses to media persons during press conference, at Press club.

Chinese language learning brings job opportunities to Pakistani youth: Scholars

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chinese language learning brings job opportunities to Pakistani youth, said Dr. Tahir Mumtaz Awan, Director of the China Study Centre at COMSATS University at the 2023 CPEC and People-to-People Exchange Forum. China is Pakistan's largest trading partner. Proficiency in Chinese can open up job opportunities, especially in sectors related to trade, technology, and infrastructure. According to Dr. Tahir Mumtaz Awan China is becoming an increasingly popular destination for Pakistani students pursuing higher education.

As Pakistan's youth population represents a significant proportion of the country's workforce, investing in their skills development through language