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Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki presiding over an important meeting on the progress on Kachhi canal Phase-II as well as repair, construction and rehabilitation of its flood affected parts in Naseerabad

Rs. 6 billion required for immediate functioning & rehabilitation:

GoB decides to contact PC for rehabilitation of Kachhi canal

Mir Ali Mardan Domki emphasizes upon Planning Commission to expedite pace of approval of PC-I submitted for phase II of project and repair of parts affected due to 2022 devastating floods

Independent Report

QUETTA: The interim government of Balochistan has decided to contact the Planning Commission for rehabilitation of the Kachhi canal.

While presiding over an important meeting on the progress on Kachhi canal Phase-II as well as repair, construction and rehabilitation of its flood affected parts in Naseerabad on Saturday, the caretaker Chief Minister Mir Ali Mardan Domki emphasized upon the Planning Commission

to expedite the pace on approval of PC-I submitted for the phase II of the project and repair of the parts affected due to devastating floods in the past.

The Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan, Additional Chief Secretary planning and development, Abdul Saboor Kakar, Secretary Irrigation Hafiz Abdul Majid, Secretary Agriculture Sohail ur Rehman Baloch and other concerned officials were present in the meeting.

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Right to information a must for transparency and accountability: CJP

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa on Saturday said the access to information was basic right of all citizens and highlighted the Article 19 of the Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech, expression and media.

He said the law made it mandatory for the federal government's organisations to provide the required information to the concerned citizens, adding that the Supreme Court too was bound to follow the Article 19-A — the right to information.

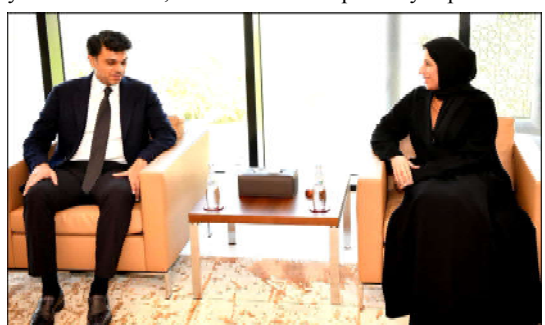
Addressing a seminar, the chief justice said, "Accountability starts with [sharing of and access to] information", adding that the Supreme Court was running on the financial resources collected from the people.

"Every institution using the public money is your institution," he said

and added, "We have presented ourselves for accountability."

The chief justice cited live telecast of Supreme Court proceedings as an example in this regard, as the move leads to openness and transparency, and asked the critics to express their opinion only after watching what is happening in the courtroom. "We should inform the people ourselves about what we are doing."

Access to information leads to transparency, Chief Justice Isa noted and said no one would be able to level baseless allegations after the live telecast. The top court was also working on swift disposal of cases, he informed the audience about the steps being taken to improve the Supreme Court working, which also includes publishing the first ever quarterly report.



DOHA: SAPM Jawad Sohrab Malk meet with Qatar Minister of Education and Higher Education Buthania Bint Ali Al Jabr Al Nuaimi

General Elections 2024:

ECP starts issuing postal ballot papers

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has started the process of providing postal ballot papers to eligible individuals for the upcoming general elections for both national and provincial assemblies. The forthcoming general elections in the country are slated for February 8 next month and the preparations for the event are in their final stages, an official told APP here Saturday.

The election oversight watchdog has specified a

deadline of January 22 for submitting postal ballot paper applications. Eligible voters must download a postal ballot application form the electoral authority's website. Upon receiving the postal ballot, voters should then send their votes to the relevant District Returning Officer (DRO) within the specified time, he said. "The individuals receiving postal ballots will not have the privilege to cast their votes in

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PPP believes in vote power, other parties bank on aliens: Bilawal

By Rana Shahid

KOT ADDU: Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has distinguished his party from others by saying that the PPP completely believes in "vote power" unlike other parties who bank on khalai makhlooq (aliens) head of the February 8 nationwide polls, the PPP top leader formally unveiled the key phase of his electioneering by kicking off rallies in Punjab — the largest province of Pakistan — which is considered to be a Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) stronghold as both major parties expressed high hopes to rule the country

after the sought after elections.

While addressing a public gathering in Kot Addu on Saturday, Bilawal vowed that the PPP would be a "sigh of relief" for the common man and a "pain" for elites if voted to power.

He claimed that his party only believes in vote power, unlike all other parties who pin hopes on khalai makhlooq, a term commonly used to refer to "power centres".

The former foreign minister continued that all parties except the PPP represent elites which provide relief to wealthy personalities and give pain to the poor people.

He also promised that the PPP would prove itself a pro-poor party by returning public support by providing relief to the common people after coming into power. The PPP chief, whose party was a strong partner in the former coalition government led by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) parties, reiterated that the upcoming election contest is between only two political parties — PPP and PML-N.

He also criticised the Nawaz-led party, saying: "I was thinking that all public issues would be resolved after spending a huge portion of development funds in Lahore."



LAHORE: Senior Vice President and Chief Organizer PML (N) Maryam Nawaz presiding over a consultative meeting regarding election activities in NA 119

AC judge Bashir seeks medical leave until retirement

ISLAMABAD (INP): Accountability Court Judge Muhammad Bashir has requested medical leave until his retirement, citing health issues.

According to media reports, concerns about the health of Accountability Court Judge Muhammad Bashir have come to light as he has requested medical leave until his retirement. Judge Muhammad Bashir is set to retire on March 14, 2024.

Sources indicate that Judge Muhammad Bashir has submitted a written request to the Islamabad High Court and the Ministry of Law and Justice for leave from January 24 to March 14.

Child killed in mortar shell explosion

ISLAMABAD (APP): Mortar shell explosion claimed the life of one child and left two women injured on Saturday in the Amangarh area of Nowshera. According to the private news channel, as soon as the incident was reported, the rescue teams reached the spot and the injured including the dead body were shifted to a nearby hospital for medical treatment.

PML-N to provide relief to people after winning polls: Maryam Nawaz

LAHORE (APP): A consultative meeting related to electoral activities was held here at the National Assembly constituency NA-119 on Saturday under the chairmanship of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Chief Organizer Maryam Nawaz to review preparations for upcoming polls.

Maryam appreciated the spirit and hard work of party leaders, office-bearers and workers. She said, "It is time to give solution to problems which people are facing." People would vote for the PML-N as they

know that it was the only party which would fulfill all promises made with them. She said the PML-N would provide relief to people by reducing inflation after winning elections.

She said that practical programme had been prepared to end unemployment and poverty in the country. Maryam said that people should vote the PML-N on February 8 so that pro-programme aimed at ending inflation could be implemented vigorously under the leadership of party Quaid Nawaz Sharif.

CPEC remains foremost in all-weather Pak-China ties: Chinese Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP) — Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong stated on Saturday that Pakistan and China are united in safeguarding their common interests and will continue to support each other on significant issues.

He made these remarks during the inauguration of a photo exhibition and the CPEC Library at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Weidong assured that China would persist in sup-

porting Pakistan against any terrorism threats.

Expressing gratitude, Weidong thanked Pakistan for its steadfast support for the One-China principle, emphasising that the friendship between the two nations was time-tested and enjoyed broad-based support among their people.

Weidong mentioned bringing books from China for the CPEC Library, in

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Funds for transport to be released within couple of days: Comprehensive security plan prepared for peaceful elections in Balochistan, maintains caretaker Chief Minister

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki has stated that the arrangements are being given final touch for conducting peaceful elections in the province.

He mentioned that a comprehensive security plan has been prepared for the peaceful elections in the province.

The Chief Minister added that the necessary funds would be released by the provincial government to the Deputy Commissioners for transport within couple of days.

Mr. Domki was presiding over the meeting to review the law and order situation and steps taken for the elections in Naseerabad on Saturday.

Those who were present in the meeting were included caretaker Provincial Minister for Home, Captain @ Mir Muhammad Zubair Jamali, Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan, Additional Chief Secretary Home, Zahid Saleem, Additional Inspector General of police, Jawad Dogar,

Commissioner Naseerabad, DIG Police and Deputy Commissioners of all six districts.

The meeting reviewed the overall law and order situation besides the preparations for upcoming elections in the province.

Addressing the meeting, Chief Minister directed to ensure provision of all basic facilities at all the polling stations in the province.

He particularly directed the Deputy Commissioners to ensure effective measures for restoring peace in their respective districts.

Meanwhile, during the briefing, it was informed that rate of transport has been kept high in Balochistan than other provinces due to hardships in the communication sector.

Moreover, it was also informed that an agreement has been finalized for installation of close circuit TV cameras at the sensitive polling stations.

The Chief Secretary on the occasion directed all the Deputy Commissioners to nominate focal persons for operating the CCTV cameras within 24 hours.



KOT ADDU: Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addresses to his supporters during public gathering meeting regarding election campaign in connection of the general election 2024

Social media platforms face countrywide disruption

ISLAMABAD (INP): Internet outages on Saturday evening affected internet services and social media platforms across the country.

The users reported connection errors and disruptions saying that almost all the social media platforms didn't work.

Netizens expressed frustration over difficulties connecting to platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. The X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram users have also expressed such concerns.

Google browsing and the internet service providers also experienced disruptions.

No country gives media access to those involved in serious crimes: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Saturday said no country in the world gave media access to those people who were involved in serious crimes.

Speaking to WION News, the minister said the former chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had been convicted and his conviction was not set aside. "He remains convicted and charged with serious crimes," he added.

"As we speak, the PTI remains registered political parties and if people bring them in the federal and provincial assemblies the care-

taker government has no problem. It's the people of Pakistan who have to make this decision," the minister remarked.

To a query, he said all political parties were being treated equally as the state had no favorites. The state media was giving due coverage to all the political parties. "So far, only constitutional body entrusted with holding free and fair elections is the Election Commission of Pakistan that stands committed to hold the elections on Thursday February 8, 2024," said Solangi in response to another query.

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QUETTA: Caretaker Provincial Health Minister Dr. Amir Muhammad Khan Jozzeai along with his team visiting RHC and MCH Center Maikhtar

Five bullet-riddled bodies found in North Waziristan

MIR ALI (INP): Five people were killed in two incidents of firing in North Waziristan, reported on Saturday.

According to police, four dead bodies were found from Mir Ali Bazar in North Waziristan, while a bullet-riddled body was also found near the market.

Officials said that the bodies were taken into custody and shifted to the hospital for identification. The police said that according to preliminary investigation, all the five persons were shot by unknown persons and nothing was found with the bodies to identify them. The police further said that a pick-up van loaded with vegetables and a Mazda vehicle were found parked near the dead bodies.

Provincial Control Room set up for monitoring of elections in Quetta

Independent Report

QUETTA: The Provincial control room has been established by the government for monitoring of general elections in Balochistan here. According to an official notification issued here the other day, Additional Secretary Home, Abdul Nasir Dotani would head the control rooms as it's Incharge.

The Additional Secretary Muhammad Murad Kasi would be the Incharge of Zhob and Loralai divisions while Additional Sec-

retary Anisur Rehman would act as the Incharge of Makran and Kalat Divisions. Similarly, Additional Secretary Hasanullah Tareen would serve as Incharge of the Sibi and Naseerabad Divisions while Additional Secretary Yousaf Mengal would act as the Incharge of Quetta and Rakhshan Divisions.

Needless to mention here is that the Control room would monitor the security arrangements during the general elections in the province.

In view of general elections: Emergency declared in all hospitals of Balochistan

Independent Report

QUETTA: The emergency has been enforced in hospitals of the Balochistan province.

According to the provincial Health Department, the emergency has been enforced in the hospitals to meet any emergency situation in view of upcoming general elections.

The Medical Superintendents and Chief Executive of the hospitals would be responsible for the necessary arrangements in their respective hospitals.

The Trauma Center would be the focal point in case of any emergency.

The provincial Health Department has directed all the staff to remain present in the hospitals.

In addition to this, it has also been issued directives to ensure availability of the medical equipment.

Moreover, the private sector hospitals have also been directed to be functional in case of emergency.



QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan presiding over a meeting regarding B-PEPRA

Fighting across Gaza as Israel drops leaflets seeking its hostages

Monitoring Desk

GAZA: Israel pounded targets across the Gaza Strip on Saturday while its planes dropped leaflets on the southern area of Rafah urging Palestinians seeking refuge there to help locate hostages held by Hamas, residents said.

Palestinian fighters battled tanks trying to push back into the eastern suburbs of the Jabalia area in northern Gaza, where Israel had started pulling out troops and shifting to smaller-scale operations, residents and militants said.

The Israeli military said aircraft struck militant squads trying to plant explosives near troops and fire missiles at tanks in northern Gaza and said it was striking targets

throughout Gaza. In the southern area of Khan Younis, where Israel says it has expanded its operations against Hamas, witnesses said tanks shelled areas around Nasser Hospital overnight, describing the bombardment as the most intense in many days.

Nasser is now Gaza's largest functioning hospital. Israel says Hamas fighters operate from in and around hospitals, including Nasser, which Hamas and medical staff deny though Israel has presented some footage and photos backing its claims.

The Israeli military said that in Khan Younis, it raided a military compound, neutralized ready-to-use rocket launchers and found explosives stashed underground while

an aircraft struck two gunmen there.

The Gaza health ministry said Israeli strikes have killed 165 people and wounded 280 others in the past 24 hours, one of the biggest death tolls in a single day in 2024.

It did not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants in its daily toll. But most of the 24,927 Palestinians killed since the Oct. 7 war began are civilians, health officials say.

Fighting has not been confined to Gaza. An Israeli strike on Syria's capital Damascus on Saturday killed four members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, including the head of the force's information unit in Syria, a security source in the regional pro-Syria alliance told Reuters.

In southern Lebanon, an Israeli strike on Saturday killed two members of Hamas travelling in a car, three security sources in Lebanon told Reuters. There was no immediate comment from Hamas or the Israeli military.

Israel has vowed to annihilate Hamas in Gaza after its fighters burst into Israel on Oct 7, rampaged through Israeli towns and bases, killing 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and dragging 253 hostages back to the enclave.

Israel says its forces have so far killed around 9,000 militants. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday vowed to press on with the war until Hamas is defeated and the remaining hostages released.



LAHORE: Members of Civil Society holds placards during protest against Israel attack on Ghaza, outside press club in Provincial Capital.



KARACHI: Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori talking with mediamen after visiting Zainab and Empress markets

Three-time PM Nawaz Sharif eyeing record fourth term in office: Maryam Aurangzeb

SIALKOT (INP): PML-N Spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb on Saturday said those who had chosen the PTI founding chairman as the favourite "are facing the consequences even now" — a reference to the controversial victory of the PTI founder in 2018 after the removal of three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif a year earlier.

She said three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who eyeing a record fourth term in office, had the solution to all the problems currently faced by Pakistan.

Nawaz Sharif had the formula to get rid of poverty, inflation and power outages, told reporters outside an anti-terrorism court in Lahore and added that the

people would stamp the tiger [the PML-N election symbol] on February 8, which usher in a bright future for the youth of Pakistan.

Marriyum said, "We appear before the court because we know that these cases are bogus. On the other hand, a person doesn't want to be held accountable by the courts despite his involvement in corruption cases and attacking the state institutions, the PML-N spokesperson said about the PTI founding chairman.

It is worth noting that the PTI former chairman has been using delaying tactics in all the cases he has been nominated in by filing motions on technical issues and challenging the court proceedings.

WEF provides a window to PV industry for Pakistan and entire World: Zhong Baoshen

ISLAMABAD (INP): The World Economic Forum, WEF 2024 held in Davos provided a window to PV industry, not only for Pakistan but the entire world, said Zhong Baoshen President of global leading renewable energy company LONGi.

In an interview to China Economic Net (CEN), he emphasized, "It is necessary for us to make our voice heard on this global platform, WEF - to let the world know that the innovation of Chinese companies can promote the global energy transformation process and help the decarbonization transformation."

"Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG7) is key to achieve all United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for a more sustainable future. The decrease of solar power costs is the very foundation for energy equity at the global scale, especially to the underdeveloped regions," Dennis She, Vice President of LONGi, pointed out during the Davos Summit.

Not long ago, LONGi promised to provide photovoltaic systems and solutions to Pakistan starting from 2024, providing safe, reliable and clean energy for public facilities of refugees and host communities, so that these places can study, work and operate businesses and other activities.

It is reported that over 780 million people, about 10% of world's population, live in off-grid regions, most in the Sub-Saharan Desert areas.

At the same time, since China surpassed Germany for the first time in 2013 to become the world's largest photovoltaic application market, China's photovoltaic industry has maintained a momentum of continuous growth.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the world's installed renewable energy capacity will grow rapidly in 2023, soaring to more than 440GW, a year-on-year increase of 107GW, becoming the largest increase in

history.

In December, 2023, LONGi's Jiaxing Production Base in China's East Zhejiang Province has been recognized by the World Economic Forum (WEF) as a Global Lighthouse Factory.

This recognition was the world's first solar module manufacturing base joining WEF's Global Lighthouse Network (GLN). LONGi's Jiaxing Factory was one of the 21 new Global Lighthouse Factories recognized in 2023.

"Many of LONGi's technological innovations are industry-first, and independent patented technologies, and could reduce unit manufacturing costs by 28% within one year, unit energy consumption by 20%," noted the WEF.

Although the photovoltaic industry faces many challenges in 2024 such as overcapacity caused by over-investment, Zhong still shows a positive attitude towards the development prospects.

Seven people killed in Mirpur Mathelo

By Tanveer Ahmed Soomro

MIRPUR MATHELO: Sawand, Sundarai tribal violence left seven people dead, two seriously injured, father and son among those killed who came as guests and died.

The attack by the armed men of Sawand, Sundarai tribe in the police station limits.

According to the tense details of the situation, in the ongoing tribal conflict in the Sawand, Sundarai tribes, the armed men stormed the village Maskan Sawand in the limits of Mirpur Mathelo police station, as a result of the attack. 6 persons including father and son died on the spot while three persons were injured who were immediately shifted to DHQ Hospital Mirpur Mathelo from where the dead bodies were handed over to the next of kin after necessary operations. He was transferred to the Sukkur and Rahim Yar Khan hospitals, where one more injured person succumbed to his injuries and the number of

people killed has increased to 7. Sher Ali, Naseebullah Malik, Abdul Rehman, and Ali Raza are included while the injured include Habibullah, Arbelo, after this incident there is a sense of fear in the area and tension remains between the two tribes.

S S P Ghotki Muhammad Anwar Khetran reached the scene and found out the details of the incident. On this occasion, while talking to the journalists, he said that it is very sad that a case should be registered against the accused involved in the incident as well as their supporters because Cases of these types of incidents are not decreasing as cases are filed against common accused.

To prevent such incidents, cases will be filed against their supporters and together with all stakeholders to end tribal recurrence. Will try to take important steps for, more than 30 people have been killed so far as a result of the ongoing bloody conflict in Sawand, Sundarai tribes.

Masood felicitates Pakistani woman picked to head body caring for Asian Americans

WASHINGTON (APP): Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, Masood Khan, has congratulated Khydeja Alam, a Pakistani-American, on her appointment as Executive Director of the California Commission Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs, which deals with the needs, issues, and concerns of Asian American and Pacific Islander American communities.

"We look forward to working with you in building bridges between Pakistan and the United States", he said during a virtual meeting with Ms. Alam. Ms Alam said, "This opportunity exemplifies and represents everything that I hold dear and dear to my heart. I want to give back to my community." Her family migrated to Hollister, California, from Pakistan in 1996 when she was 13.

"I plan to focus on anti-Asian hate, spearhead outreach efforts to address issues related to cultural language sensitivity with state agencies and prioritize uplifting communities across California," said Ms Alam.

CPEC remains foremost...

Continued from page 1

cluding works by President Xi Jinping on governance and ancient Chinese culture.

Reflecting on his past decade as ambassador to Pakistan, he highlighted the library as a symbol of the strength of their strategic partnership, as evidenced by the various CPEC projects. Recalling the inauguration of the CPEC project by the Chinese president and Pakistani leadership in 2015, Weidong noted the launch of over 50 agreements across Pakistan. He expressed happiness over the completion of various CPEC projects, attributing the success to the strategic guidance of the leadership.

Weidong explained that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aimed to bring shared prosperity to humanity, envisioning it as a means to unite countries in facing economic challenges and turning them into opportunities.

Arriving in Islamabad to attend a CPEC Joint Working Group meeting on Sunday, Weidong stressed that CPEC remained foremost in the all-weather strategic cooperative relationship between Pakistan and China.

Foreign Secretary Syrus Sajjad Qazi highlighted that the China-Pakistan relationship was characterised by common interests, inviting other countries to invest in industry, agriculture, science, and technology projects under CPEC.

He noted that CPEC was a tribute to the wisdom of leaders from different generations who contributed to strengthening bilateral ties. Later, the Chinese minister and Pakistan's foreign secretary jointly inaugurated the CPEC Library and exhibition, showcasing photos of various CPEC projects, including the Friendship Hospital, Vocational School, International Airport in Gwadar, and the East Bay Expressway, a crucial infrastructure project connecting the Gwadar port and free-industrial zone with the national highway network.

Three youth abducted

Independent Report

MIRPUR MATHELO: Three youths were abducted near Mirpur Mathelo, the youth had gone to participate in the annual Urs celebrations of Dargah Jahanpur Sharif.

According to the details of Sufi poet sage Anwar Shah Bukhari in Jahanpur Sharif, a suburb of Mirpur Mathelo. Asif Malhan, Qadir Malhan, and Idrees Malhan, three young men of village Sawan Malhan, have been abducted while going home after participating in the Urs celebrations. The youths have been abducted while the motorcycle and other equipment used by the youths have been found on the road.



QUETTA: Balochistan National Party Central President, Mir Kabir Muhammad Shahi along with others addresses to media persons during press conference held at Quetta press club

GoB decides to contact...

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Addressing the meeting, caretaker Chief Minister stressed the need to start work on construction and repair of the flood affected parts of the Kachhi canal at the earliest so that the agricultural production may be ensured once again in the affected command areas and the families associated with the agriculture sector may be saved from the economic miseries.

The Chief Minister also stressed the ECNEC may issue orders to WAPDA for repair of the Kachhi canal endorsing its decision.

He said that it is direly needed to restore the canal on the position of July 2022.

In addition to this, long term planning should also be made in view of possible flood situation in future, adding he stressed.

Earlier, the high ups of

planning and development department, Irrigation department and Agriculture department and senior project coordinator briefed the meeting about the project.

It was informed that supply of water has been suspended to Balochistan because of the breaches caused in Kachhi canal following the floods hit the area in 2022. As a result of which, the cultivation of crops was affected on the land located in the command area of the canal which otherwise completed in year 2017.

It was further informed that almost Rs. 6 billion is required for immediate operation and rehabilitation of the canal. While on the other hand, release of funds are also necessary for progress on the phase-II as per the PC-I so as to resume work on these important projects of the province.

Five killed in armed attack on Ghotki village

GHOTKI (NP): At least five persons were killed in armed men's attack on a village in Ghotki, police on Saturday.

Police said that unidentified armed men attacked Jam Bajar village leaving at least five persons dead and two injured in the shooting incident.

The deadly incident is result of an ongoing feud between two clans, according to police. "The accused had attacked on a Bethak (meeting place) of the village," police said.

Lawlessness prevails in Ghotki and other districts of upper Sindh owing to geographic proximity with the katcha area (riverine forests) infamous for criminal activities of bandit gangs patronized by tribal chieftains and influentials.

ECP starts issuing...

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person at the polling stations," he said.

The application must be forwarded or endorsed by the voter's office to prevent unauthorized individuals from applying for a postal ballot, as per the ECP. Once an application is received, the returning officer is obligated to send a ballot paper and envelope to the voter by post, in accordance with the Elections Act 2017.

The envelope must display a certificate of posting on its face, with the posting date to be filled in by the relevant post office official when the voter sends it. Following the receipt of their postal ballot, the act states that a voter should record their vote as prescribed. Once recorded, the voter is required to post the ballot paper to the returning officer in the provided envelope, ensuring it arrives before the consolidation of results.

This provision of postal ballot is uniquely crafted to allow government officials, armed forces personnel, in-

Shoaib Malik ties the knot with actress Sana Javed

Monitoring Desk

LAHORE: In a surprising turn of events, renowned Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Malik has exchanged vows with popular Pakistani actor Sana Javed, adding a new chapter to his personal life.

The nuptial ceremony, held on Saturday, January 20, was unveiled to the world through the athlete's social media accounts.

This union comes amidst swirling rumors surrounding Shoaib Malik's relationship with former Indian tennis star Sania Mirza. Just a few days ago, on Wednesday, Sania Mirza shared a cryptic post on her social media, sparking speculations and fueling rumors of potential turbulence in her marriage with the cricketer icon.

The cryptic message shared by Sania Mirza reads, "Marriage is hard. Divorce is hard. Choose your hard. Obesity is hard. Being fit is hard. Choose your hard. Being in debt is hard. Being financially disciplined is hard. Choose your hard. Communication is hard. Not communicating is hard. Choose your hard. Life will never be easy. It will always be hard. But we can choose our hard. Pick wisely."

While the meaning behind Sania Mirza's words remains open to interpretation, it has undeniably stirred the curiosity of fans and media alike.

No country gives media...

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He said the constitutional caretaker government was committed to supporting the ECP in every possible way for election and "we will support the election commission in administrative, financial and security matters".

Every political party was playing role of the victim, he said, adding "if you ask PTI they will say we are not getting level-playing field especially in Punjab and KPK and if you ask Peoples Party they will say we are not getting level-playing field in Sindh. If you ask Maulana Fazlu Rehman of JUI they will say we are not getting level playing field in Balochistan and KPK due to security issues," the minister noted.

He said the caretaker government had no vested interests in any political party. "We are there to provide any kind of support to the election commission which is responsible for holding the elections and creating conducive environment."

"We should wait for the results after elections conducted on February 8. Once people speak their mind when they go to polls to elect a party or a group of party I am sure we will get political stability," the minister said in response to another query. He said it was written in the pre-

amble of the constitution that the country would be run by the people's representatives through credible elections.

As regards the Pakistan and Afghanistan relation, he said it was squarely depended on the behaviours and actions of the interim government of Afghanistan. "If they continue harbor terrorists including TTP, I am afraid the future of those relations does not seem to be right," he remarked. He ruled out negotiation with any armed group until and unless they laid their arms and recognized the constitution of Pakistan as governing document the supreme law of land.

To another query, he said elections were on the cards both in India and Pakistan and "once we have elected governments in both countries and they got fresh mandates, we can hope that they will discuss the issues including long standing disputes both the countries have since three quarters of a century." He said the caretaker government was born out of a constitutional process and would not do anything illegal.

The minister said many countries including western countries had taken extraordinary measures in extraordinary situations during the elections. The incumbent fully believed in the freedom of press and expression, he said in response to another query.



QUETTA: A view of large waste material on the road after cleaning Nnullah Sariab road



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Norway to Pakistan, Per Albert Isaas call on Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Gulbar Khan at GB House.

Iran, Pakistan need to mitigate differences to avoid any future clash: Experts emphasize

ISLAMABAD (APP): Iran and Pakistan have preferred rationality over emotions, which will strengthen their historical brotherly ties otherwise, their adversaries could manipulate the situation.

These were the views expressed by experts at a meeting hosted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) to understand the situation around the unfortunate escalation on Pakistan's western frontier.

The meeting was attended by Khalid Rahman, chairman IPS, prominent security analyst Brigadier @ Said Nazir, and Syed Abrar Hussain, Pakistan's former ambassador to Afghanistan and vice chairman IPS, among others.

The participants unanimously said Islamabad's position was justified, stressing that Tehran should have pursued alternative diplomatic and political channels to address any concerns. Both friendly countries must work to activate peaceful problem-solving mechanisms to avoid a worst-case scenario.

Recognizing the shared threat of terrorism, the speakers emphasized the need for a collaborative strategic framework and active security cooperation grounded in mutual trust. They expressed happiness that Islamabad and Tehran agreed to de-escalate unconditionally and restore full diplomatic ties.

Despite internal and external sensitivities, Pakistan has historically maintained warm relations with Iran, successfully navigating the complexities to balance their ties. These cordial relations must be maintained in the future.

Both countries must realize that any conflict between them will divert global attention away from the war in Gaza, ultimately favoring Israel and its allies and proving harmful to peace and stability in the Middle East.

The speakers said while the clouds of war are already looming over the Middle East, given Israeli aggression against Gaza and elsewhere, any misadventure could draw the conflict to South Asia. This would only benefit the forces that want to keep this region unstable for their interests.

Therefore, the speakers said, both brotherly countries must avoid miscalculations, come closer, and resolve their issues through dialogue, which is also crucial for their internal stability, given their socio-political fault lines.

May 9 incident: Hearing of bail pleas of PTI founder, Qureshi, Sheikh adjourned

ISLAMABAD (Online): The court adjourned the hearing of bail pleas of former Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan, vice chairman PTI Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Sheikh Rashid till January 24.

The three political leaders have filed bail pleas in 12 cases of May 9 incidents, siege and arson cases.

The court had summoned record of the cases from SHOs of all the police stations.

PTI former chairman Imran Khan has filed bail pleas in 12 cases, Shah Mehmood Qureshi in 6 cases and Sheikh Rashid in one case.

The hearing to be held on Saturday has been adjourned being Judge Malik Ijaz Asif of Anti Terrorism Court (ATC) on leave.

Order has been issued to police investigation teams of all police stations and prosecutors to appear before the court on next date.

IHC constitutes new bench on PTI founder petition against his jail trial in NAB case

ISLAMABAD (Online): Islamabad High Court (IHC) has constituted new bench in connection with petition filed by PTI founder against his jail trial in NAB case.

The bench will include Chief Justice (CJ) IHC Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri.

The two members bench will hear the case on Monday January 22.

The bench was changed after justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb had proceeded on leave.

Justice Miangul Hassan remarked on Thursday case will be fixed in available bench in coming days.

Lahore Bar files petition for becoming respondent in intra court appeal

ISLAMABAD (Online): Lahore Bar has filed petition for becoming respondent in intra court appeals.

Lawyer Hamid Khan filed petition on behalf of Lahore Bar.

He has taken plea in the petition that issues of fundamental rights and public interest are pending hearing in intra court appeals. Supreme Court (SC) has already given right to represent to lawyers organizations in the cases pertaining to public interest and basic rights. Order was issued to fix the case in the third week of January. SC is requested to allow Lahore bar to become respondent in the case.

APHC-AJK leaders termed Indian Republic Day as Black Day for Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD (APP): The All Parties Hurriyat Conference Azad Jammu and Kashmir (APHC-AJK) chapter leaders have said that India is not a democratic but a Hinduva terrorist state and a colonial power. According to Kashmir Media Service, the APHC-AJK leaders including Muhammad Sultan Butt, Imtiaz Wani, Shaikh Yaqoob, Mushtaq Ahmed Butt, Zahid Safi, Zahid Ashraf, Advocate Pervaiz Ahmed Shah and Syed Ajiz Rehmani in their statements issued in Islamabad said a country which has snatched all democratic and fundamental rights of Kashmiris has no right to celebrate its Republic Day.

They said India's expansionist designs pose a serious threat to regional and global peace. They said the RSS-backed Narendra Modi-led Indian government is not only hell bent to wipe out Kashmiris and impose Hinduva agenda on them but has declared a war against the minorities, particularly Muslims, in India.

The APHC-AJK leaders termed the Indian Republic Day as a Black Day for Kashmiris. They said over one million Indian troops are committing heinous crimes against humanity with total impunity in occupied Kashmir. They urged the Kashmiris all over the world to hold protest demonstrations on 26 January to draw the world's attention towards the Indian crimes in the occupied territory.



ISLAMABAD: Principal Secretary to the President and renowned writer Muhammad Shakeel Malik presents his book Bey-Ehtiatianâ to Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan, Gulbar Khan at GB House.

India committing massacres in IIOJK to intimidate Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indian military, paramilitary and police personnel have committed scores of brutal massacres in India and illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir in the last three decades to suppress the Kashmiris' struggle for the right to self-determination.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the phenomenon of mass killing of the Kashmiris started with the Magarmal Bagh massacre in Srinagar on this day in 1990 in which Indian troops gunned down 14 innocent people by resorting to indiscriminate firing. So far, hundreds of innocent Kashmiris have been martyred and property worth billions of rupees has been destroyed in over 30 mass killing incidents perpetrated by the troops across the occupied territory since 1989. The massacres of Gaw Kadal Srinagar, Sopore, Handwara and Kupwara are some of the worst examples of Indian state terrorism in occupied Kashmir.

Unfortunately, not a single Indian soldier involved in these heinous crimes has been punished and justice continues to elude the families of the victims. The All Parties Hurriyat Conference leaders including Ghulam Muhammad Khan Sopori, Yasmeen Raja, Farida Bahenji, Syed Bashir Andrabi and Khawaja Firdous in their statements paying glowing tributes to the martyrs of Magarmal Bagh carnage said the Indian brutalities cannot force the Kashmiris to give up their freedom struggle.

They maintained that the sacrifices of Kashmiri martyrs would not be allowed to go to waste and their mission would be accomplished at all costs. They demanded an impartial investigation through some international probe agency into all massacres in the occupied territory to punish the involved Indian troops.

Meanwhile, posters appeared in different areas of occupied Kashmir urging the people to observe India's Republic Day on 26 January as Black Day to convey the message to the international community that India continues to usurp the basic and democratic rights of the Kashmiris for the last over seven decades. They said India has no legal or moral justification to celebrate its Republic Day in Kashmir as it has illegally occupied the territory against the will of the Kashmiri people.

Scores of social and political activists during an interaction with the prominent members of the Indian civil society in Jammu, today, called for comprehensive dialogue among India, Pakistan and genuine Kashmiri leadership to settle the Kashmir dispute, once and for all. United Peace Alliance, an association of several socio-political organizations and activists, organized the event.



ISLAMABAD: People are enjoying eating traditional breakfast Halwa Puri at sector G-8, in the Federal Capital.

Common headaches tied to work stress: Dr Suhail Yaseen

ISLAMABAD (APP): Consultant Neurologist Dr Rao Suhail Yaseen Khan said on Saturday that the most common primary headaches were tension-type headaches, and migraines were often linked to work-related stress.

Talking to Pakistan Television News, he said that recognizing the various types of headaches, their triggers, and their distinguishing characteristics is crucial for treatment.

While some headaches may have secondary causes like infections, fever, or

migraines with specific triggers, chronic daily headaches exceeding a certain frequency were a concern, he added.

Understanding the complexities of headaches, their potential triggers, and associated symptoms is vital for both diagnosis and effective management, he said.

Dr Rao said that headaches have secondary causes, such as infections, fever, or specific triggers. Recognizing these factors contributing to headaches was crucial for developing appropriate treatment plans, he added.

12 outlaws arrested; drugs and weapons recovered

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police apprehended 12 outlaws including four professional baggers from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered drugs and weapons from their possession, a public relations officer said.

He said that, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city.

Following these directions, the Bani Gala police team arrested an accused namedly Abdul Basit, Muhammad Hamad and Fahad and recovered three 30 bore pistols with ammunition from their possession. The Secretariat police team arrested an accused namedly Shahzaib involved in illegally selling petrol.

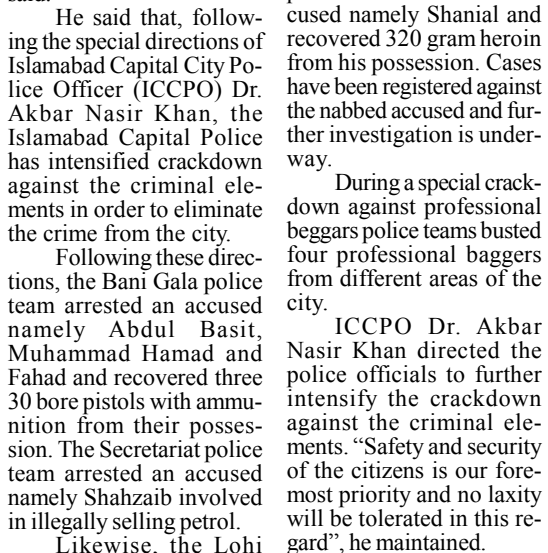
Likewise, the Lohi

Bher police team arrested an accused namedly Asif and recovered 1015 gram hashish from his possession. The Bhara Kahu police team arrested an accused namedly Haris and recovered one iron punch from his possession.

Similarly, the Apara police team arrested an accused namedly Shaniyal and recovered 320 gram heroin from his possession. Cases have been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway.

During a special crackdown against professional beggars police teams busted four professional baggers from different areas of the city.

ICCP Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan directed the police officials to further intensify the crackdown against the criminal elements. "Safety and security of the citizens is our foremost priority and no laxity will be tolerated in this regard", he maintained.



ISLAMABAD: Workers of Capital Development Authority (CDA) planting grass on a green belt along-side Chak Shahzad area, in the Federal Capital.



ISLAMABAD: Commuters on the way at Jinnah Avenue during heavy fog in morning hours, in the Federal Capital.

Wanted member of bike lifter gang arrested; two stolen motorbikes recovered

ISLAMABAD (INP): Islamabad Capital Police Phulgran police team have arrested a wanted member of a notorious bike lifter gang involved in numerous bike theft activities and recovered two stolen motorbikes from his possession, a public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police had categorically started a crackdown against criminal elements in order to save the precious lives and property of citizens.

Following these directions, the Phulgran police team used technical and human resources and succeeded in apprehending a wanted member of a notorious bike lifter gang involved in numerous bike lifting activities in various areas of Phulgran police station. The accused was identified as Saad Abbasi. Police team also recovered two stolen motorbikes from his possession. Cases have already been registered against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway.

Islamabad Capital City Police officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan directed all senior officials for effective crackdown against the accused involved in criminal activities and said that safety of the lives.

Islamabad Capital Police training prog for firearms licensing, renewal continues

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Following the special directions of Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police has initiated a comprehensive training program for the issuance and renewal of firearms licenses, a public relations officer said.

He said that, the program entails the issuance of firearms handling training documents to 77 individuals after completing the course.

Trained personnel of Islamabad Capital Police are giving arms training to the applicant, under the supervision of CPO Law and Order and Training at Police Lines Headquarters.

Trained individuals are also provided with membership to the Police Shooting Club for continuous practice and skill development. Deputy Commissioner Islamabad will collaborate in sharing data related to firearms licenses for effective scrutiny.

Separate regulations have been issued for prohibited and non-prohibited bores categories. These measures aim to curtail the proliferation of firearms and ensure that licenses are only granted to qualified individuals.

Birth anniversary of eminent poet, columnist Jamiluddin Aali observed

ISLAMABAD (APP): His contribution towards promotion of Urdu and establishment of Urdu University in the country, a dream and mission of Baba-e-Urdu (Maulana Abdul Haq), is also duly acknowledged by him.

One of the longest poems in Urdu literature, "Insaan," comprising 4000 verses also goes to Aali's credit and this is besides several, Nazms and Ghazals contributed by him to the Urdu poetry.

Jamiluddin Aali died of a heart attack on November 23, 2015 and was laid to rest in Karachi.

Mushaal deeply saddened over Yasin's uncle demise

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Human Rights and Women Empowerment Mushaal Hussein Mullick expressed her deep grief and sorrow over the sad demise of the maternal uncle of illegally incarcerated Chairman Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Muhammad Yasin Malik, said a press release issued here on Saturday. Mushaal, who is also the wife of Yasin Malik, in her condolence message, said that Muhammad Shafi, maternal uncle of JKLF Chairman, breathed his last due to cardiac arrest. She extended heartfelt condolences to the grieving family, praying that may Allah Almighty grant highest place to the departed soul in Jannah. The SAPM offered prayers to give the bereaved family especially, to the mother of Yasin Malik, the courage to bear the irreplaceable loss with equanimity.

Flight operations disrupted, motorways closed due to fog

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dense fog across the country forced the closure of different sections of motorways and the cancellation of numerous domestic and international flights on Saturday. According to a private news channel, the reduced visibility on runways led to the cancellation of a total of 35 domestic and international flights, leading to changes in the timing and cancellation of numerous flights. Additionally, various sections of key motorways, including M-1, M-2, M-5, and M-14, were temporarily closed due to dense fog, causing disruptions in road travel.

Notable cancellations included the Dubai-Islamabad flight 212, the Multan-Muscat flight PK 171, and the Karachi-Islamabad flights PK 308 and PK 201. Islamabad-Gilgit flights PK 605 and 606 were also among the affected routes.

On the other hand, the National Highways and Motorway Police announced temporary closures of various sections due to dense fog. The affected sections include M-1 from Burhan to Peshawar Toll Plaza, Swabi to Rashakai, and Rashakai to Peshawar Toll Plaza.

M-2 segments from Islamabad Toll Plaza to Thalial Interchange, Chakri to Neela Dala Interchange, and Lilla towards the north were also temporarily closed. Additionally, closures on M-5 from Rahim Yar Khan to Rohri and M-14 from Dawood Khel to Yark and Kot Ballian to Yark added to the travel disruptions. Commuters have been advised to make their travel plans after getting the latest updates from National Highway and Motorway Helpline 130 and its social media platforms.



ISLAMABAD: A view of large numbers of oil tankers stand in a queue at Faizabad flyover as waiting for enters in Rawalpindi, The brazen flouting of a ban on entry of heavy vehicles to Rawalpindi city in the daytime has reached its peak, causing grueling traffic snarl-ups and jams on various major roads during peak hours.

Daily Voice of Masses Independent

Sunday January 21, 2024

Nothing to celebrate

The current account deficit is 'shrinking' and FDI inflows are 'increasing'. New economic data for the first half of FY24, published by the State Bank, shows that Pakistan posted a current account surplus of \$397m last month, for the second consecutive month, which has helped it contain the six-month deficit to \$831m, down from \$3.6bn during the same period in the last fiscal. Likewise, FDI inflows are reported to have jumped by 35pc to \$863m from \$640m in the same period. Indeed, these are welcome developments in these times of economic crises and pain. But how sustainable are these small mercies? Will they help the economy grow and create jobs, and end our balance-of-payments troubles? The improvement in the current account is primarily the outcome of the temporary 'emergency' measures being implemented by the government to restrict imports. The hike in export revenues and an upswing in home remittances and FDI in December helped the country pull off the surplus. Yet the upturn in these areas, though welcome, is negligible, and does not represent a steady trend.

The truth is that the economy is in the doldrums. The recent improvement, if we indeed see it as one, is an artificially constructed deviation from the normal, as our balance-of-payments woes are hardly far away from morphing into sovereign default. The economy contracted in the last fiscal year and growth projections for the ongoing one do not inspire much hope for the future. Exports are stagnating because of low productivity and reliance on one commodity, ie, textiles. Foreign investors here appear to have lost whatever little confidence they had and are departing. Local investors are not ready to invest either, at least not unless their ventures are subsidised. Remittances remain subdued. Poverty continues to rise, as does food insecurity. The population is growing rapidly, and the government has no money to provide education, clean drinking water, health facilities, or other public services. The world in general is done with our unwillingness to clean up our own house. It is frustrating to see the economic fortunes of a large country swing with the influx and exit of a couple of billion dollars from its economy. We have reached this point for a reason. We are here because our rent-seeking ruling elites are not invested in Pakistan's future.

Faisal Bari

Investments in artificial intelligence are massive (\$94 billion in 2021 alone). They will continue as people see profit-making potential in them. We have all heard the rhetoric that AI is going to revolutionise many areas and have a major impact on jobs in several sectors.

Where it might increase marginal productivity (output per worker), it will automate jobs and thus replace workers. This is already happening in some spaces.

AI is expected to have a large impact on education too. There were already over 30 multimillion-dollar-funded AI-in-education corporations in 2022; some analysts expect AI in the education market to be worth more than \$20bn in less than five years.

But the same apprehensions surface in this sector too. Where AI can help create more pathways for personalised and lifelong learning, it will also automate a lot of processes. Teachers fear they might be 'replaced' by AI systems eventually.

These apprehensions

are a bit premature. AI is still developing and it is hard to predict all that it will be able to eventually accomplish. Although there are early indications that some teacher tasks can be automated, there is also a perception that certain functions that teachers perform, and that are relevant to socialisation and the development of deeper, more contextualised learning, won't be easy to automate. The future being unknown, let us see how technology develops and is deployed.

Pakistan is not at the frontier of AI use in education. For now, its most common application is seen in students using GPT-3 to do their assignments or assessments and for writing essays. Professors are using AI-based systems to detect AI-generated assignments/assessments. The main concern so far is the increase in the incidence of cheating.

Submitting someone else's work as one's own is cheating and hurts the learning process. Students, instead of trying to understand a topic, submit something they might not even understand. The struggle is not to stop students from

AI in education

using AI, but to convince them to use it for understanding concepts and deepening their learning instead of cheating.

This is not a major issue. There are programmes that detect cheating and many professors use these. The cat-and-mouse game between programmes that allow students to produce work without detection and programmes that allow professors to detect cheating will continue. Even before GPT, we had issues of plagiarism.

What are more interesting, but have not come to Pakistan in any significant manner yet, are intelligent tutoring systems. ITS allow a person-based introduction of information and then personalised feedback to students and the monitoring of progress by students as well as teachers (dashboards). They open up doors for increasing outreach, reducing the cost per student and allowing more student-specific learning opportunities.

Pakistan, with some 23 million out-of-school children, faces significant issues regarding the quality of school education, and limited and low enrolments

at undergraduate levels. It could really benefit from ITS but it is a distant prospect.

We need good internet connectivity for this: we need students to have computers and tablets at home; we need teachers who are tech-savvy and are not afraid of what ITS could do. We need ITS that are much better than where they are right now. They still have a long way to go before they start delivering well on the promise of personalisation and customisation at low prices.

Existing ITS are better able to work in mathematics and physics, are more geared towards specific task or skill learning, and more suited to preparation for specific examinations. A lot of development still needs to take place before it is possible to see them being used for educating out-of-school children or ensuring improved learning for millions of children.

There are also AI-assisted applications that allow language translation and/or mathematics learning. However, it is not clear if they assist stu-

dent learning or undermine it by taking away the need for learning concepts and other things, very much like calculators did with simple multiplication and division tasks.

Other AI-based educational programmes are being developed in areas like formative assessments, dialogue-based tutoring systems, chatbots, learning network orchestrators, AI-assisted virtual reality or games, and so on. But in most of these areas, we do not have commercial applications yet.

We will only be able to assess viability and efficacy once commercial applications are available and 'cheap' enough to be deployed in Pakistan's education market. And we will only be able to talk of what teacher-displacing impact they are going to lead to when we are closer to that point.

For the moment, most of these are interesting and promising possibilities from the point of view of opportunities to enhance student learning. But their future impact is as yet unclear.

At the same time,

there are many legitimate concerns about AI in education. Apart from its impact on teaching jobs, increased student surveillance, data collection, usage and sharing raise legitimate ethical and legal concerns about confidentiality and safety. As more commercial applications become available, these concerns will need to be addressed as well.

AI has a lot of potential in education. It can, in principle, allow us to reach more children, ensure quality and do it at a much lower cost than the current schooling model. If it delivers on its promise, it will change the education sector significantly and many teacher-related tasks will become automated.

But we are far from there right now. It is not even clear if it can deliver on all these promises. We have only seen GPT-3 so far, and that is not a major game-changer. Given the potential and promise, for the moment, it seems that an attitude of curiosity, rather than fear, makes more sense. -- Courtesy Dawn

Things a 'bat' would make them do

Raouf Hasan

It is only the symbol of a 'bat', but it already has a million stories associated with it. The more the orchestrators try to oust it from people's imagination, the more it hits back in an effortless repertoire of strokes to all parts of the ground. The entire combined effort of the captive and dysfunctional institutions and their aides and abettors have proved patently insufficient to erase an imprint which is engraved deep in people's minds.

What has happened so far makes for a horrifying episode reflecting the involvement of all state organs in a malevolent effort to dismantle the largest political party of the country and the only one with federal stature. What has necessitated it makes for an even more sordid display of arrogance of individuals in dealing with a person with a mind dedicated to freeing his country from the tentacles of slavery and putting it on course to ensuring the welfare of its people. He tried doing it by taking fledgling steps to change a course which has

plunged us into the laps of masters dedicated solely to advancing their own strategic and allied interests.

His perception was that of a humane Pakistan that would deliver its people from the chains of poverty and deprivations they have suffered through generations. That is why he would always ask about the benefits that every project that his government initiated would accrue to the poor and the suffering multitudes. His handling of the Covid crisis makes for an ideal example whereby he remained firm in not depriving people of their meagre earnings by imposing a lockdown. Despite much criticism from his political opponents, his approach was hailed internationally as a singular success story.

There were scores of schemes ranging from the Health Card facility for free treatment in all hospitals of the country to multiple welfare projects under the Ehsaas umbrella which were solely dedicated to bringing relief to people hard pressed under the increasing burden of life. Shelter homes were built for the homeless where they would have freshly cooked meals and reside for the night in-

stead of sleeping on the footpaths. There were interest-free loans and multiple schemes for provision of commodities of basic use at discounted rates.

The two-pronged approach encompassed welfare of people at home and outreach abroad to expand the compass of Pakistan's relations with other countries, more specifically those of the region. Khan always contended that Pakistan would be a willing partner for peace, but never in war. Strangely, more than our external friends and partners, this change of approach bothered some internal forces which were used to pursuing a stagnated policy towards our traditional friends and allies, more specifically those in the West, and had even been their partners in conflicts.

Khan's visit to Russia which coincided with the outbreak of war in the Ukraine, ruffled a few feathers who thought that their stranglehold on Pakistan would weaken with such a change of priorities. But one never thought that things would go as far as they did. There were those that felt threatened by this realignment of foreign

policy which was entirely focussed on advancing Pakistan's interests and those of its people. But one never thought that the threat factor would make them go as far as they ultimately did – dismantling a constitutional, legal, and democratically elected government. They followed that up by initiating efforts for systematically dismembering Pakistan's largest and most popular political party, arresting over 10,000 of its workers, denying them legal recourse, and incarcerating its internationally acclaimed leader by registering over 150 fake, frivolous and fraudulent cases against him.

The story of the 'bat' does not end there. With Khan's ratings on an upswing, it was decided that PTI members would not be allowed to take part in the forthcoming elections. The operation encompassed enforced disappearances, change of loyalties, stopping potential PTI candidates from submitting their nomination papers, abducting their proposers and seconders, having their nomination papers rejected by the returning officers, and doing just about everything to keep the PTI out

of the election race.

When all this did not appear to be working, the PTI was deprived of its constitutional right to enter the election arena with its traditional symbol. Instead, it has been forced to support independents as its candidates with the party having no control over possible change of political loyalties after the elections, executed through a combination of inducements and use of state brutality.

Imran Khan is also being denied facilities that would be allowed to every prisoner. But he remains steadfast in coping with increasing challenges with renewed determination that, notwithstanding the state fascism, the PTI would take part in elections and put up a candidate for every available constituency at the federal and provincial level. After nomination of its candidates was made public, reports started filtering in that they are being subjected to threats and harassment to disown their party and shift their loyalties to other political concoctions which have been artificially tailored to contain an ever-increasing PTI vote bank.

Not content with pre-election manoeuvring, there is increasing speculation that election-day will be marred by extensive rigging. It is also feared that voters of the PTI will either be forced away from the polling stations, or their attendance will be kept at the barest minimum.

There is also the prospect of stuffing ballot boxes with votes in favour of the parties being promoted by the power wielders.

Barely three weeks away from the election, every trick has been used to deprive the PTI of both its candidates and its support base. It has been like wading through a river of fire, yet the frustration of the orchestrators goes on increasing. This is so because they are confronted with the power of faith and conviction. Propelled by the undying sincerity of their leader, Imran Khan, the will of his charges refuses to die, their passion refuses to subside, and their hope keeps lighting up candles along the arduous way.

In such moments of dangling between extremes of despair and hope, Faiz's words carry an indescribable power, like the following from his poem 'Meeting':

Sham elections

Faisal Siddiqi

In the bail petition of Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi in the 'cipher case', Justice Athar Minallah, through an order dated Dec 22, 2023, almost prophetically observed: "Discrimination or intimidation on the basis of political opinions are alien to the concept of genuine elections and even such a perception would be sufficient to ... relegate it to the status of sham elections [emphasis added]."

Furthermore, in the 'PTI level playing field case', Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, through the order dated Dec 22, 2023, while prima facie accepting the allegations of the PTI against the ECP, observed: "A level playing field is essential for healthy competition, ensuring that elections are a true reflection of the people's choice, rather than the result of manipulation or coercion [emphasis added]."

Could anyone have even imagined that, less than a month after these two progressive Supreme Court orders, it would be another SC judgement which would deny electoral participation to a national popular political party like the PTI, by depriving its candidates of a common election symbol?

A 12-member bench of the SC in the landmark 'Benazir Bhutto symbols case' (1989) had held, in essence, that symbols are the very soul of elections and also a fundamental right of political parties under Article 17 of the Constitution because they are central to the voters' right to identify and choose their public representatives in the less-educated societies of South Asia.

It is precisely because of this undisputed and entrenched constitutional jurisprudence that the Peshawar High Court's (PHC) brilliant and courageous judgement of Jan 12,

2024 also based its declaration and direction to allot the election symbol to the PTI on the series of SC judgements in the 'Benazir Bhutto political party case' (1988), 'Benazir Bhutto symbols case' (1989) and the 'Nawaz Sharif case' (1993).

Constitutionally speaking, and in terms of binding judicial precedents in Pakistan, there can be no democracy without party-based elections, there can be no elections without political parties, and there can be no political party participation in elections without election symbols.

The Supreme Court's short order dated Jan 13, 2024 in the 'PTI election symbol case', which upholds the ECP order of Dec 22, 2023, denies the election symbol to the PTI, and sets aside the PHC judgement, has given five main reasons for its order.

Firstly, the SC reasons that the PHC had no territorial jurisdiction because petitions by the PTI challenging the earlier ECP order of Nov 23, 2023, declaring the PTI intra-party elections of June 10, 2022, illegal, were pending in the Lahore High Court. Thus, the PTI should have filed its petition challenging the ECP order of Dec 22, 2023, before the LHC.

But even this hyper-technical objection is erroneous because the SC itself accepts that both the PHC and LHC had concurrent jurisdiction to examine the legality of the ECP order of Dec 22, 2023. Moreover, the SC has completely failed to examine that, in terms of the Salahuddin Tirmizi SC judgement (2008), it is the PHC which had primary jurisdiction because the second-last petition (No. 5791-P/2023) with regard to intra-party election proceedings pending before the ECP was filed in December 2023 before the PHC and not the LHC.

Secondly, the SC reasoned that the ECP order

denying the election symbol to the PTI was not a case of victimisation, because the ECP had been calling upon PTI to hold elections since May 24, 2021, when the party was in the federal government, and 13 other parties' intra-party elections had also not been accepted by the ECP. This SC reasoning is erroneous for three reasons: (a) only those who are oblivious to events throughout 2023 to date would consider the ECP as being fair towards the PTI; (b) the SC judgement of Dec 22, 2023 in the 'level playing field case' itself acknowledges the prima facie validity of the unfair treatment towards PTI; (c) is the ECP action against these 13 other insignificant parties even comparable to the PTI's case? Even otherwise, 13 wrongs don't make it right. Thirdly, it was said there was no proof showing even a semblance of intra-party elections being held. But this was never even an allegation by the ECP, which had accepted that intra-party elections were held, but not in accordance with the PTI's constitution. Therefore, the SC had no jurisdiction to give such a finding.

Fourthly, few PTI members were denied nomination papers and the election notice did not mention the exact venue in Peshawar and even that venue was changed. But this was never even an allegation made by the ECP. Therefore, the SC had no jurisdiction to give such a finding. Fifthly, the PHC had wrongly held that the ECP did not have the jurisdiction to adjudicate on the internal legality of a political party's intra-party elections. But rather precisely, the PHC has held that Section 209 of the Election Act, 2017, doesn't confer any jurisdiction on the ECP to question the substantive and procedural internal legality of such intra-party elections. On the other hand, the SC fails to point out any provision which confers such a substantive jurisdiction.

Elections in the age of AI

Wasif Shakil

Former prime minister Imran Khan may have been wrong about many things, but his statement that "this is an era of artificial intelligence (AI)" is right on the money.

There's no denying that this cutting-edge generative AI technology can create parallel and augmented realities or content, which can easily be employed to spin the narrative, especially before and during elections, through social media platforms.

More than half of the world is going to the polls this year including major economies like India, the US, Pakistan and several other Asian and European countries. In this context, a recent World Economic Forum (WEF) report declares AI-powered misinformation as the world's biggest short-term threat.

"The widespread use of misinformation and disinformation, and tools to disseminate it, may undermine the legitimacy of newly elected governments. Resulting unrest could range from violent protests and hate crimes to civil confrontation and terrorism," the report warns.

The dangers highlighted by the WEF's Global Risks Report are based on a survey of nearly 1,500 experts, industry leaders and policymakers. These risks are real as deepfake videos are rife on social media across the globe, and Pakistan is not an exception. A few weeks ago, short video clips of Indian Premier Narendra Modi singing in regional languages and Indonesian presidential candidates Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan speaking in fluent Arabic went viral on Instagram and TikTok.

Although the use of AI by Pakistan's political parties is not new in the country, the PTI recently used it to perfection when it cloned its founder's voice to generate a virtual mes-

sage for their followers, which was broadcast during an online – or virtual – rally.

Other than the PTI – which has been deprived of its iconic electoral symbol of cricket bat ahead of the February 8 polls – major parties including the PML-N, PPP, MQM-P, and Jamaat-e-Islami seem far behind in the use of high-tech tools as they remain focused on using traditional media to spread their message.

With a staggering 57.1 million young voters aged between 18 and 35 – out of nearly 127 million total voters – the national political landscape is poised for a significant transformation in the upcoming polls. This age group connects itself with technology, spends most of its time on social media platforms, and is massively dependent on it to form its views about political parties and national politics.

In a recent interaction with journalism students at one of Karachi's leading private universities, I was shocked to learn about the state of media literacy when they shared their knowledge about the sources of information they rely on – which mostly comprises unverified and non-traditional media outlets. So, those political actors who are proactive and use new tools of information are more likely to sway young voters towards them. There are risks that generative AI can also emerge as a powerful weapon for spreading mass discord in society. Until recently, producing fake imagery was not that easy. However, technological development and advancement achieved during the past few years made it possible to generate high-quality AI-generated content in real-time.

Although in Pakistan multiple factors influence an election outcome at the local level, an information ecosystem affected by disinformation can create

disturbances and disharmony in an already tense environment.

Imagine a scenario where an AI-generated video of Imran Khan is released on Election Day, urging his followers to launch protests or target political rivals – what could happen then? The country lacks the mechanism and tools to counter such a deadly scenario other than just slowing down internet connectivity and blocking apps.

We witnessed what happened on May 9 – which was the outcome of months of narrative building after the PTI's removal from the government. In a country like Pakistan where fake news and disinformation are prevalent and where no section of society is spared from dangerous social media trends, AI is most likely to change the way elections are contested here.

AI-generated content may boost the existing believability of highly localized misinformation thus denting election credibility and paving the way for a new wave of crises.

In countries like Pakistan, where we have little or no control over information manipulation, social media giants are also responsible for ensuring that the country's political landscape is safe from any interference. Content moderation and enforcement of policies in countries like Pakistan are not as efficient as in the US or European nations. Consequently, internet users here are more likely to come across lots of harmful content than other regions.

The Election Commission of Pakistan, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority and other agencies must develop liaisons with social media giants like Meta, Google, X, TikTok, and Microsoft to ensure that the polls are held peacefully without any hindrance created by AI-generated fake content.

CM chairs cabinet meeting, says all parties allowed to run elections campaigns

Independent Report

LAHORE: Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi presided over the 36th provincial cabinet meeting at the CM Office, here on Saturday. Addressing the cabinet meeting, the CM said all political parties and independent candidates would be permitted to hold their electoral activities. Conduct of free and fair elections would be ensured under any circumstance, he added. In the light of the code of conduct, issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), all candidates would be allowed to hold their rallies, going door-to-door and displaying banners and posters. All political parties would be provided level playing field, Naqvi promised.

The CM underscored that action would definitely be taken in case of making a speech against the Pakistan Army or the institutions. "Holding free and fair elections is my prime responsibility which I will duly fulfill. We will fully cooperate with the Election Commission in order to ensure holding of elections in a peaceful and fair environment," the CM added. Approval was granted during the Cabinet meeting for allocation of Rs 4.10 billion for making foolproof arrangements for elections and providing security. Approval was accorded for allocation of funds worth Rs 8 billion for establishment of Punjab Cancer Care Hospital at Manawan Lahore. Approval was also granted to undertake new measures

for treatment of patients under the Sehat Sahulat Programme. The CM, during the meeting, ordered stopping increase in lab test fee in big hospitals. Approval was granted for allocation of additional funds for early completion of Akbar Chowk flyover project. It was also decided to undertake remodeling of choking points so as to improve traffic flow on various boulevards and roads of Lahore. Remodeling work at choking points would be completed at the cost of Rs 700 million. The decisions made during the 16th meeting of the Cabinet Standing Committee for Finance and Development were endorsed in the cabinet meeting.



KARACHI: Caretaker Chief Minister Justice (Retd) Maqbool Baqar presides over a meeting to discuss Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) and e-marking systems to enhance transparency, and accuracy in the examination grading system at CM House.

Political alliances can't defeat PPP in general elections: Maula Bux

HYDERABAD (INP): Senator and Central leader of Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Maula Bux Chandio on Saturday said that various political alliances can not defeat PPP and claimed that they would be a substitute for the People's Party in upcoming general elections. He expressed these views while talking to media men at Hyderabad Press Club on Saturday. Maula Bux Chandio said that various alliances had been formed against the Pakistan Peoples' Party but they could not defeat

the Pakistan People's Party. He said that the idea to compete Pakistan People's Party in the General elections was a success of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Bilawal Bhutto. Maula Bux Chandio said that all claims were made about Bilawal Bhutto that he was immature in Politics but He is not a child and loyal to the country like his grandfather and Mother who never compromised on principles.

Imran petition against jail trial in contempt of EC case fixed for hearing

LAHORE (Online): The petition of PTI founder against contempt of Election Commission (EC) proceedings and jail trial has been fixed for hearing in Lahore High Court (LHC). A 3-member bench of LHC led by Justice Alia Neelum will hear the petition on January 22, Monday. PTI founder has filed petition in LHC through his counsel Sameer Khosa advocate seeking court's

order for halting his jail trial in contempt of election commission case. Federal government, election commission and superintendent Adiala jail have been made respondents in the petition. The court has been requested through the petition to nullify election commission decision regarding jail trial besides issuing order for open and free and fair trial.



KARACHI: Director General of Press Information Department (PID) Iram Tanveer visited Karachi Press Club and met the newly elected officials. Members Rana Javed, Shazia Hassan, Munasdeeqi, Noor Muhammad and Shoaib Ahmed welcomed the DGPID on their arrival at the club. Iram Tanveer congratulated the newly elected officials on their success.

Tourism department plans ITZ in Mankyal

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism Department KITE Project DoI is all set to develop the first-ever Integrated Tourism Zone (ITZ) in Mankyal Swat, on Public Private Partnership (PPP) basis, aimed at promoting sustainable tourism and accelerating socio-economic development in the province. The KP Government has declared three tourist spots as Integrated Tourism Zones (ITZs) to promote the tourism industry in the province. The new ITZs include Mankyal (Swat), Ghanool (Mansehra), and

Madakalashit (Lower Chitral) respectively, said a spokesman on Saturday. KP Government to establish Integrated Tourism Zones in the province in partnership with the World Bank through KITE Project DoI. Tauseef Khalid development of ITZs would promote tourism, and create job opportunities, besides generating good revenue for the national exchequer, Tauseef Khalid We are working under an integrated strategy to promote tourism as an industry in the province, which will also stabilise the local economy.

Senior clerk arrested for taking bribe

SARGODHA (APP): The Anti-Corruption Establishment Sargodha arrested on Saturday a senior clerk of the Directorate General Public Relations (DGPR) for taking bribe. According to a press release issued by the ACE office, a citizen Tariq of Chak No 115-NB, submitted an application to ACE Regional Director Mudassar Hanif Bhatti and stated that Senior Clerk Faizan Abid had demanded Rs 1.2 million as bribe from six people to get them job of grade-IV in the Education Department Sargodha. He said that Rs 1 million had already been paid and he was demanding Rs 200,000 more to give the appointment letters. The official ordered Circle Officer Anti-Corruption Sargodha Asif Iqbal to conduct a raid.

LHC moved against increase in driving license fees

LAHORE (Online): Notification on increase in driving license fees has been challenged in Lahore High Court (LHC). The petition was filed by Ghulam Abbas Haral advocate in LHC Saturday. Care taker Punjab government, IT Punjab and others have been made respondents in the petition. The petitioner has taken plea in the petition that enhancement in driving license fees runs contrary to law. The caretaker government is not authorized to increase the prices by imposing additional taxes. The caretaker government cannot increase the prices to run daily routine matters. The petitioner has prayed the court to nullify the notification regarding enhancement.

One killed, another injured as tractor-trolley overturned

MULTAN (APP): A person was killed while another sustained injuries after a tractor-trolley turned turtle near Dunyapur bypass here on Saturday. According to Rescue officials, a tractor-trolley turned turtle near Dunyapur bypass and two persons stuck under it. Upon receiving the information, Rescue teams rushed to the spot and rescued the stranded people by lifting the trolley through crane.



PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Haji Ghulam Ali addressing the CECOS University Convocation in Hayatabad.

Governor lauds initiative of AG Punjab for developing the E Pension System

Independent Report

LAHORE: Accountant General Punjab Numana Gulrukh Fareed met the Governor Punjab here today at the Governor House Lahore. Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman congratulated Numana Gulrukh Fareed on assuming the office of Accountant General Punjab and expressed his best wishes to her. He appreciated the initiative of Accountant General Punjab for developing the E Pension System to facilitate retired government employees. Governor Punjab said that the officers should have a passion to facilitate and serve the people in the public offices. He emphasized that it is very important to have a clean

environment at the workplace and treat people with courtesy. On this occasion, Accountant General Punjab Numana Gulrukh Fareed informed the Governor Punjab in detail about the measures and reforms taken for the convenience of the people. She said that reforms and promotion of IT in the office of the Accountant General of Punjab is her top priority. The Accountant General of Punjab said that an online system of pension has been introduced for pensioners in 16 districts. Later, Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman attended the inauguration ceremony of Health Network Icon 2024 at Indus Hospital Lahore as Chief Guest.

Governor attends convocation in CECOS varsity, urges students to focus research, innovations

Independent Report

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali here Saturday highlighted the significance of modern technology and said that we could meet the challenges of the existing era of transformation by venturing into emerging fields of science and technology. He was addressing the annual convocation of CECOS University Hayatabad as a Chief Guest. The ceremony among others was attended by the caretaker minister for education, Dr Qasim Jan, President CECOS University, Engineer, Muhammad Tanveer, faculty and senate members besides students

and parents. Governor said that educated youth could play a role in achieving goals of development and prosperity adding that global challenges demand that our youth must venture into contemporary fields of technology and education. He congratulated students and parents and stressed upon students to set targets for their lives and work with dedication to achieve them. He said that youth should bring positive societal changes by utilizing their skills and capabilities. KP Governor also urged students to focus innovations and research on new technologies aiming

for the progress of the country and nation. He said that certain elements are trying to misguide youth and added that we must join hands and work in cohesion to foil certain attempts. He also appreciated the efforts of university administration and faculty members for providing quality education to students and expressed that efforts would be continued to prepare students for combating the challenges of the competitive world. The governor distributed certificates and degrees among 129 students who completed studies in civil engineering, electrical engineering.

PPP to clean sweep general elections: Abbasi

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Senior leader of Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) and ex-advisor to Governor Punjab, Nawabzadi Saira Abbasi has said that PPP would win upcoming general elections with majority.

Talking to media persons here Saturday, she said that PPP had still been enjoying fully support of masses. "People have reposed their trust in the leadership of Chairman, PPP, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari," she said, adding that PPP would clean sweep the upcoming general elections to be held on 8th February 2024. She said that PPP had announced a people-friendly manifesto which had got status of most popular manifesto in the political environment of the country. She urged the people to vote for PPP to fulfill their dream of economic stability.

60 percent desilting work completed

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Irrigation Department has completed 60 per cent work of desilting of canals in the province. According to official sources here on Saturday, under-training officers at the Civil Services Academy participated in the ongoing desilting campaign. Superintending Engineer Sarfraz Khalid and XEN Rana Tariq Saif briefed the officers about advantages of canal desilting. A spokesman for the Irrigation Department said that canals desilting operation.



KARACHI: Maulana Nauman Naeem of Jamia Banuria Alamiya meeting with Sindh Governor Mr. Kamran Tesori at the Governor's House.

Commissioner directs to ensure implementation of ECP's Code of Conduct

KARACHI (APP): The Commissioner Karachi Muhammad Saleem Rajput has directed all District Returning officers to strictly ensure the implementation of the Election Commission of Pakistan's code of conduct in letter and spirit. He said this while presiding over a meeting with senior officers of the Election Commission of Pakistan at the Cabinet Committee Room, Sindh Secretariat late Friday night. The meeting reviewed arrangements made for holding general elections in the Karachi Division in February 2024. The meeting was attended by Joint Provincial Election Commissioner (Admn) Ali Asghar Siyal, joint Provincial Election Commissioner (Election)

Nazar Abbass, Regional Election Commissioner Abdul Rehman Arain, concerned DROs and ROS the Karachi Division. The Commissioner asked all DROs and ROS to hold meetings with participating candidates at their offices and make sure that ECP's Code of Conduct is implemented. The meeting also took notice of complaints of Code of Conduct violations, especially the use of public places and roads for the display of panaflex banners and pamphlets of the candidates belonging to different political parties. All contesting candidates were asked not to use city roads and other public places for election campaigns as sticking banners and pamphlets over public places.



LAHORE: Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi inspecting under Construction Works at Fatima Jinnah Institute of Dental Sciences at Jubilee Town.

Flood survivors families PRC-KP launches cash distribution of 67.2m

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan Red Crescent Society Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PRC-KP) on Saturday launched a campaign of cash distribution under the recovery for the flood survivors families in Dera Ismail Khan district. In the first phase, 2,100 families are provided Rs 32 thousand cash per family in two installments of 16000 rupees to ensure transparency, cash is being provided to registered families after entering into an agreement with private bank with the support of IFRC. In this regard, Chairman PRC-KP Habib Malik Orakzai has said that the flood 2022 has left

stories of destruction behind. "We are grateful to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with their support, we have been able to provide assistance to Dera Ismail Khan district flood affected vulnerable families, which was severely affected by the floods in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa." He further said that for the distribution of money in a transparent manner, the affected areas were selected with the help of the district administration, where our officials and volunteers went door to door and completed the registration.

Police arrest member of armed robbers group

HARIPUR (APP): To respond to an alarming rise in armed robberies, Haripur police Saturday have made progress in apprehending accused linked to these criminal activities. Over the past few days, a surge in incidents related to armed robberies in the areas of the Khilabat Police Station prompted immediate action from District Police Officer (DPO) Muhammad Omar Khan. After receiving reports of a planned robbery near Check Post No. 3, Camp, Superintendent of Police (SP) Khilabat, Sadiq Shah, collaborated with intelligence officials to plan a targeted operation. In the early morning, a specialized team, led by the Intelligence Officer, conducted a raid under FIR No. 392/34 PPC. The operation specifically targeted Allah Muhammad, son of Sultan Gull, a resident of Camp No. 3, and his associates suspected of planning a highway robbery. As the police team approached the location, the suspects opened fire, prompting a controlled response from law enforcement to ensure their safety.



LAHORE: Activists of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan hold a protest in favor of their demands outside press club in Provincial Capital.



LAHORE: Accountant General Punjab Nouman Gul Rukh Fareed meeting with Governor Punjab Muhammad Baligh-ur-Rehman.

Restoration of 20 beds ward at LRH demanded

PESHAWAR (APP): The Leprosy, TB and Blindness Relief Association has demanded the restoration of the 20-bed ward at Lady Reading Hospital (LRH) reserved for treatment of Leprosy patients in the province. The leprosy ward at LRH was the lone facility in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where patients from across the province were getting proper treatment and medicine free of cost, shared renowned surgeon Dr Arif who is serving voluntarily as President of Leprosy, TB and Blindness Relief Association KP. Talking to newsmen during his visit to Peshawar Press Club, Surgeon Arif disclosed that after the demolition of the lone Leprosy Ward at LRH a couple of years earlier,

patients of this chronic skin disease are suffering due to lack of proper treatment. The leprosy patients are now referred to the skin ward of LRH where only four beds are reserved for patients which is insufficient and the majority of the patients are compelled to return to their homes where they could not get proper treatment and care, Dr Arif explained. He said the leprosy patient needs months of proper treatment and healing which was provided at LRH ward, but now the patients are not able to get admission and have to stay at their homes. About the number of patients, he said, around 100 patients come every year and in total there are thousands of patients in Khyber.

Pakistan's economy to grow 2-2.5pc in FY23: Shamshad

ISLAMABAD (INP): Caretaker Finance Minister (FM) Shamshad Akhtar on Saturday noted that the country's economy is projected to grow by 2-2.5 per cent in the current fiscal year 2023-24.

Virtually addressing the 'IPO Summit 2024', organised by Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), the interim finance minister said despite challenges, Pakistan has made significant progress towards macro-economic, exchange rate and financial stability.

Shamshad Akhtar

projected that growth is to rebound in the positive trajectory in the range of 2-2.5pc, with agriculture expected to grow by 5.6pc and industry by 2.5pc during the current fiscal year.

The minister said the capital markets cannot thrive under very high interest rate regime. "The SBP [State Bank of Pakistan] is conscious of the fact that we will have to move to lower the interest rate subject to inflation coming down," she noted.

She further said that

foundation has been laid for attracting foreign direct investment.

Akhtar also acknowledged the uptrend at PSX since start of the current fiscal year. The bourse gave a return of 55% at PSX in 2023 while the benchmark KSE 100 Index ended at over 62,450 points in December 2023.

On the external front, the caretaker minister said that the FX reserves have reached \$9.1b due to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) tranche and multilateral flows.

Earlier on Jan 17,

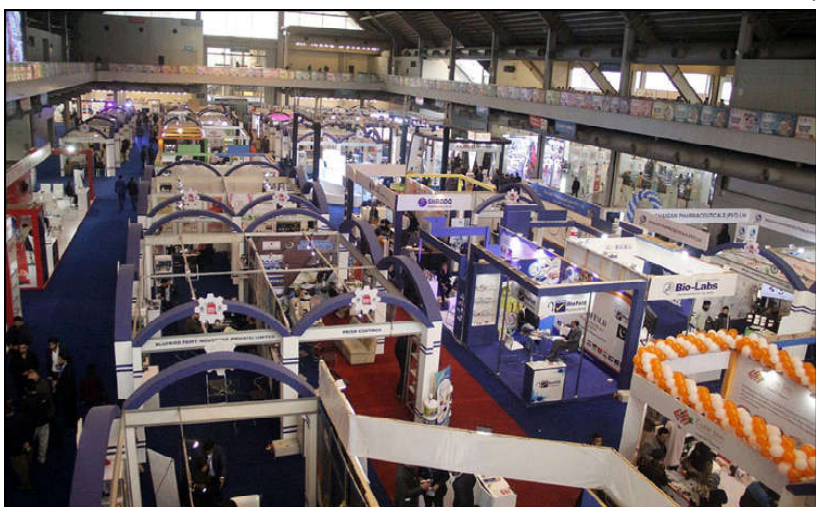
Pakistan received \$700 million loan tranche from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under the nine-month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA).

The development came after the Executive Board of the IMF completed the first review of Pakistan's economic reform programme supported by the SBA. T

The Board's decision allowed for an immediate disbursement of around \$700 million, bringing total disbursements under the arrangement to about \$1.9 billion.



LAHORE: President Chamber of Commerce and Industry Kashif Anwar presenting souvenir to Pakistan High Commissioner in Rawanda during his visit to LCCI along with delegation.



LAHORE: A view of Stalls of Various Companies during Engineering and Healthcare Exhibition at Expo Center Lahore.

ICCI, NUST discuss collaboration to improve competitiveness of industry

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Ahsan Zafar Baktawari along with his delegation visited the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and discussed with its Rector Lt. Gen. Javed Mahmood Bukhari the collaboration to enhance the Industrial competitiveness and academia industry's linkages.

He also discussed collaboration for improving the competitiveness of the local industry through strong academia-industry linkages, said a press

release issued here on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, Lt. Gen. Javed Mahmood Bukhari, Rector NUST briefed the ICCI delegation about the role of NUST in promoting future leaders and job creators for a positive impact on society and the economy. He said that NUST has created an ecosystem to promote research, innovation and productivity.

He said that academia has cutting-edge research while industry faces practical challenges and problems, therefore, close cooperation between

NUST and ICCI would help resolve issues of industry and produce innovative products for exports. He said that NUST and ICCI should join hands in students' mentorship programs to give them practical skills and experience that would improve their employability.

Speaking on the occasion, the President ICCI stressed for close academia-industry linkages to address industrial problems and improve the competitiveness of industry that would help enhance industrial activities and exports.

Secretary reviews mineral department's performance

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Mines and Minerals Department (MMD) Secretary Babar Amman Babar Saturday reviewed the initiatives and achievements of the previous year.

Around 1,500 officers and officials from attached departments across the Punjab participated via video link.

During the meeting, the new initiatives and achievements were considered and important instructions were issued by the secretary to improve the performance of the department.

Implementation of the orders from Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Minister for MMD Ibrahim Hasan Murad and the Chief Secretary from time to time was also reviewed. The participants in the meeting were told that during the

last year, forty important new initiatives were taken and achievements were made.

The secretary said that the department had achieved best revenue collection targets during 2023, adding that the department collected 19 percent more revenue than its revenue target.

This year, double revenue is being collected from the previous financial year, he said.

Besides, a revenue plan of Rs150 billion has been made for the next three years. He pointed out that 13 billion dollars could be earned from value added export of Himalayan pink rock salt in Punjab province alone. He said that strict measures had been taken against the theft of minerals on the instructions of the Chief Minister.

China's policy bank loans 7.6 bln yuan for high-standard farmland

BEIJING (Xinhua/APP): The China Development Bank (CDB) issued a total of 7.6 billion yuan (about 1.07 billion U.S. dollars) in loans in 2023 to support farmland cultivation.

These funds were mainly used to back the high-standard farmland cultivation and farmland infrastructure upgrading projects in Sichuan, Hunan, Guangxi, Jiangsu, Xinjiang, Guizhou, Chongqing and Liaoning during the period, the bank said. In addition, the bank has established special-purpose loans for farmland cultivation to guarantee food security. Looking forward, the CDB said it will focus on shoring up the weak links, making good use of the special-purpose loans, and taking steps to support agricultural modernization with better financial.

Seminar titled "The Impact of Population on Economic Development" held

HARIPUR (APP): Addressing the critical issue of population growth and its impact on economic development, a seminar titled "The Impact of Population on Economic Development" Saturday conducted at the district office of Haripur.

The event was organized by the District

Population Welfare Office and was supervised by the University of Haripur.

During the seminar, District Population Welfare Officer, Muhammad Ashfaq, brought attention to the detrimental effects of the escalating population on economic development. He provided valuable insights

into the current population statistics of the country and engaged in a comprehensive discussion on the anticipated challenges in the future.

In the seminar students enrolled in the departments of Public Health and Nutrition, as well as Environmental Sciences.



MULTAN: People selecting and purchasing old warm clothes from vendor at Hussain Agahi.

VP NBF for need of 5pc annual agricultural growth through AI

ISLAMABAD (APP): Vice President of the Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad on Saturday highlighted the urgent need for a consistent 5 percent annual growth in the country's agriculture sector backed by AI integration.

In a meeting with President Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Atif Ikram, he stressed the importance of a dual strategy involving both vertical growth, by increasing per-acre crop yields and horizontal growth by expanding cultivation through corporate farming to tackle the challenges of feeding a growing population and ensuring national food security. Currently,

Pakistan's per-acre yield falls below the global average due to limited access to modern machinery and digital support services for farmers, he said.

Jawad urged the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a revolutionary tool to transform the agriculture sector, particularly in horticulture. Artificial Intelligence (AI), he argued, could address climate change challenges, optimize crop patterns, attract talent, and have a positive impact on the sector. Emphasizing the urgency of incorporating AI into the Green Pakistan Initiative, Jawad criticized the tendency of policymakers to spend excessive time in discussions.

SCCI President says: BFC is fully operational in Sialkot

SIALKOT (APP): Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President Abdul Ghafoor Malik said that the Business Facilitation Centre (BFC) in Sialkot has been established and is now fully operational since its inauguration on January 13 by Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi.

In a statement, Abdul Ghafoor Malik said that the primary objective of the Business Facilitation Centre (BFC) is to provide efficient one-window services to the business community of Sialkot. "This will be achieved

through 17 dedicated counters that are equipped to handle the issuance of NOCs from various departments, including but not limited to Environment Protection, Civil Defence, Forestry Wildlife and Fisheries, Industries Commerce Investment & Skills Development, Punjab Small Industries Corporation, Local Government, TMA, Police, and Health Department. Members can also receive any NOC that is to be issued from Lahore directly from the BFC Sialkot thanks to interconnectivity of all the



LAHORE: Vendors displaying potato sacks for bidding at vegetable Market.

Artificial inflation hits hard amid extreme winter in south Punjab

MULTAN (APP): As extreme weather conditions grip south Punjab, people are facing an unprecedented surge in the prices of daily essentials, particularly vegetables, rice, chicken, eggs, LPG and some other items.

The inflationary trends have left residents, including Shafiq of Chah Inamwala, Salman of Sharifpura, Asim of Pir Bukhari Colony, Talal of MDA Chowk, Liaqat of Pul Bararan and many others, expressing deep concern over the affordability of basic necessities.

The price of onion, a fundamental ingredient in every cuisine, has skyrocketed to Rs 200 per kilogram, placing additional strain on already stretched household budgets. Similarly, the historic increase in the price of eggs, now ranging between Rs 45 to 50, is a cause for alarm, especially for those relying on them for breakfast. Chicken is being sold at Rs 600 per kilogram.

Vegetables such as

Tomatoes, Spinach, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Peas, Carrot and others are also beyond the common man's reach due to the exorbitant prices.

The citizens lamented that these essential items have become out of their reach, severely impacting their ability to maintain a balanced and nutritious diet.

Adding to the woes, the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) has surged well beyond the government-set rate of Rs 255 per kilogram. In various suburban areas of the city, LPG is being sold at an alarming Rs 300 to 320 per kilogram, further burdening households already grappling with financial challenges.

The demand for wood for fuel purposes has also witnessed a sharp increase, with its price shooting up to Rs 1800 for a 40-kilogram bundle. This surge is forcing citizens to explore alternative, more expensive sources of fuel, aggravating their economic hardships.

'Mera Brand Pakistan' launched in Karachi

KARACHI (INP): "Mera Brand Pakistan," an initiative by the Pakistan Business Forum powered by Jamaat-e-Islami and Alkhidmat among others, have been launched at the Expo Center in Karachi, here on Saturday.

The two-day event features a trade fair, discounted bazaar, free rides and juices for kids, conferences, giveaways and fun activities.

Caretaker Sindh Health Minister Saad Khalid Niaz inaugurated the expo.

Jl Karachi Ameer Engr Hafiz Naeemur Rehman also visited the expo and talked to the media. He was flanked by

PBF Karachi President Sohail Aziz, PBF Karachi General Secretary Amir Rafi, and other prominent figures from the business community.

Speaking on the occasion, Engr Hafiz Naeemur Rehman said that the idea behind "Mera Brand Pakistan" was to promote and enhance our local brands. He urged all the citizens to visit the expo.

Usually the international brands enjoy an edge over local brands because of huge support in investment and technology, he said, adding that the PBF through this initiative

to local brands to compete with the foreigners.

He said that it is an obligation for Pakistan brands to use this opportunity to fill the gap through up gradation and enhancing their quality and increasing their reach and supply.

He said our 26,000 people were massacred in Gaza and the Muslim World leaders have been maintaining a criminal silence, whereas the global forces are supporting the Israeli terrorism and genocide. However, he maintained, the people with conscience all across the world have been supporting Palestinians.

Gold rates increase by Rs. 300 per tola

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs. 300 and was sold at Rs. 215,300 on Saturday compared to its sale at Rs. 215,000 on last trading day. The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs. 257 to Rs. 184,585 from Rs. 184,328 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs. 169,203 from Rs. 168,976, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of per tola and ten gram Silver remained stagnant at Rs. 2,600 and Rs. 2,229.08 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$5 to \$2,050 from \$2,045.



LAHORE: A man being briefed about Loader Rickshaw during his visit to Engineering and Healthcare Exhibition at Expo Center Lahore.

Election 2024 brings boom to floriculture business in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): Besides advertising and printing business, election 2024 has brought a boom to the floriculture business in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the supporters of electoral candidates used it to attract voters besides expressing love with their leaders.

Fawara Chowk, the flowers and rose petals business hub at Peshawar Cantonment where shopkeepers associated with the floriculture started roaring business these days. "The sale of flowers and rose petals have increased manifold in Peshawar due to the ongoing election campaign and will further shine once the poll day becomes closer," said flower seller Omar Khayam while talking to APP.

Associated with the flower business for the last 10 years, the motivated flower sellers wake early in the morning and continue

the preparation of flower bouquets and petals to fulfil the demands of election candidates and their supporters.

"Before the election, his flower sale was about Rs2000 to Rs2500 per day that now jumped to Rs10,000 to Rs12000 per day," he said.

Omar said that he engaged five extra labourers to fulfil huge orders placed by the supporters of candidates.

"My father has also visited Pathoki Qasor district to bring fresh stock of flower petals to meet overwhelming demands."

"I purchased five kilograms of rose petals on Saturday that would be showered on my favourite leader who would address a public meeting at my huja today," said Bahadar Khan, former Nazim of Pabbi while taking to APP.

He said that it was a nice way to express love with leaders.



MULTAN: Women vendors selling bangles on roadside at Shamsabad.

LESCO detects 402 power pilferers on 133rd day of anti-theft campaign

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) detected a total of 402 connections from where the consumers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts: Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara, on the 133rd day of the anti-power-theft campaign.

A LESCO spokesman told the media here on Saturday that the company also submitted FIR applications against 402 electricity thieves, out of which 158 cases were registered at the respective

police stations, while 19 accused were arrested. On the 133rd consecutive day of the anti-power theft campaign, the spokesman added, large commercial consumers were also found involved in electricity theft and all of them were also disconnected. Among the seized connections were 15 commercial, one agricultural and 386 domestic. All the power pilferers were charged with a total of 353,269 units as detection bill amounting to Rs 10,810 million.

Apprising the media about some major pilferers.

Poultry rate surges to Rs 660 per kg

BAHAWALPUR (APP): The rates of poultry meat have surged to maximum level as it was sold at Rs 630 to 660 per kilogram in Bahawalpur on Saturday.

The poultry meat which was earlier sold at Rs 400 to 450 per kilogram, now, had gone out of reach of poor people as its price has surged to Rs 630 to 660 per kilogram in Bahawalpur.

The egg were sold at Rs 480 per dozen while brown egg (desi egg).

Women and children are main victims of Gaza war, with 16,000 killed, UN says

Monitoring Desk
UNITED NATIONS: Women and children are the main victims of the Gaza war, with some 16,000 killed and an estimated two million displaced since Hamas' surprise attack on Israel, the U.N. agency promoting gender equality said Friday.

As a result of the more than 100-day conflict, UN Women added, at least 3,000 women may have become widows and heads of households and at least 10,000 children may have lost their fathers.

In a report released Friday, the agency pointed to gender inequality and the

burden on women fleeing the fighting with children and being displaced again and again. Of the territory's 2.3 million population, it said, 1.9 million are displaced and "close to one million are women and girls" seeking shelter and safety.

UN Women's executive director, Sima Bahous, said this is "a cruel inversion" of fighting during the 15 years before the Hamas attack on Oct. 7. Previously, she said, 67% of all civilians killed in Gaza and the West Bank were men and less than 14% were women.

She echoed U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' calls for a hu-

manitarian ceasefire and the immediate release of all hostages taken captive in Israel on Oct. 7.

"However much we mourn the situation of the women and girls of Gaza today, we will mourn further tomorrow without unrestricted humanitarian assistance and an end to the destruction and killing," Bahous said in a statement accompanying the report.

"These women and girls are deprived of safety, medicine, health care, and shelter. They face imminent starvation and famine. Most of all they are deprived of hope and justice," she said.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets with Brazil's Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira at the Itamaraty Palace, in Brasilia, Brazil.

Brazil backs Beijing's 'One China policy,' foreign minister Wang Yi says

Monitoring Desk
BRASILIA: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi welcomed Brazil's recent support for Beijing's "One China policy" that states Taiwan is an inseparable part of China, in a sign of stronger bilateral ties with South America's largest country.

At the end of a two-day visit to Brazil, Wang made a stop in the northeastern Brazilian city of Fortaleza to meet Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva at an air force base before departing to Jamaica by the late afternoon.

There were no details of their meeting.

In Brasilia earlier, Wang said their two countries, both members of the BRICS group of leading

emerging economies, must work together to build a multi-polar world based on peace and security.

Brazil's Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira said he and Wang discussed the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza and how they can be resolved, with China's top diplomat saying the two trade partners need to build closer levels of confidence.

China-Brazil relations were ruffled during the far-right government of former President Jair Bolsonaro, and have improved under Lula, a popular leftist leader in his third term.

Wang and Vieira signed a visa agreement between the two nations extending their validity from five to 10 years.

Biden says Palestinian state still possible after Netanyahu call

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden said Friday it was still possible Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could agree to some form of Palestinian state, after the two leaders spoke for the first time in nearly a month amid tensions over the Gaza war.

Their call came a day after Netanyahu said he opposes allowing Palestinian sovereignty in the wake of the conflict with Hamas, deepening Israeli divisions with key backer Washing-

ton over the conduct of Israel's offensive and what comes next.

But Biden said after the call that it was not impossible Netanyahu might come round to some form of so-called two-state solution, mooted for decades as a way to end tensions in the Middle East, despite the Israeli premier's comments. "There are a number of types of two-state solutions. There's a number of countries that are members of the UN that... don't have their own militaries."

Fire in China school dorm kills 13 boys

Monitoring Desk
BEIJING: A fire in a central China school dormitory killed 13 students and injured another. Prompting the authorities to call for screening fire risks in crowded places, state media said on Saturday.

The Friday night fire killed third graders in a boys' dormitory of Yingcai School in Henan Province, according to China Newsweek, a weekly magazine published by China News Service. Third graders in China are usually 9 years old.

Firefighters quickly extinguished the blaze in a village in Nanyang city, and the head of the school was taken into custody.

US carries out fresh strikes against Yemen's Huthis

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: The US military carried out another round of strikes against Yemen's Huthi rebels on Friday, targeting missile launchers that were preparing for attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, the White House said.

Washington is seeking to reduce the Iran-backed Huthis' military capabilities, but the Yemeni rebels are still able to continue their attacks despite a week of strikes, and they have vowed that they will keep targeting merchant vessels.

The Huthis began striking Red Sea shipping in November, saying they were hitting Israeli-linked vessels in support of Palestinians in Gaza, and subsequently declared American and British interests to be legitimate targets as well.

"This morning, US forces conducted three successful self-defense strikes against Huthi targets in

Yemen," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

"This is the fourth preemptive action that the US military has taken in the past week against Huthi missile launchers that were ready to launch attacks," Kirby said.

"These actions were... done in self-defense, but it also helps make safer international waters for both naval vessels as well as merchant shipping."

The air campaign against the Huthis began last week with American and British strikes on nearly 30 sites in Yemen using more than 150 munitions, while US forces later attacked a Huthi radar site in what was described as "a follow-on action" to the previous strikes. Since then, American forces have carried out further air raids against missiles that Washington says were ready to launch and posed a threat to both civilian and military vessels.



Cordoba province's Security Minister Juan Pablo Quinteros, Argentina's Minister of Security Patricia Bullrich and Minister of the Interior Guillermo Francos hold a press conference on the detention and extradition of the relatives of Ecuadorian criminal Jose Adolfo Macias, alias Fito, in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Iranian and Hezbollah commanders help direct Houthi attacks in Yemen, sources say

Monitoring Desk
DUBAI: Commanders from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and Lebanon's Hezbollah group are on the ground in Yemen helping to direct and oversee Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, four regional and two Iranian sources told Reuters.

Iran - which has armed, trained and funded the Houthis - stepped up its weapons supplies to the militia in the wake of the war in Gaza, which erupted after Iranian-backed militants Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, the four regional sources said.

Tehran has provided advanced drones, anti-ship cruise missiles, precision-strike ballistic missiles and medium-range missiles to the Houthis, who started targeting commercial vessels in November in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, the sources said.

IRGC commanders

and advisers are also providing know-how, data and intelligence support to determine which of the dozens of vessels travelling through the Red Sea each day are destined for Israel and constitute Houthi targets, all the sources said.

Washington said last month that Iran was deeply involved in planning operations against shipping in the Red Sea and that its intelligence was critical to enable the Houthis to target ships.

In response to a request for comment for this story, the White House pointed to its previous public comments about how Iran has been supporting the Houthis.

In his weekly news conferences, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani has repeatedly denied Tehran is involved in the Red Sea attacks by the Houthis. The IRGC public relations office did not respond to request for comment.

China urges end of 'harassment' of vessels in Red Sea

Monitoring Desk
BEIJING: China called for an end to "harassment" of civilian vessels in the Red Sea on Friday (Jan 19) after attacks on ships by Houthi rebels in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Houthi aggression against vessels in and around the Red Sea has led to retaliatory strikes in Yemen by US and British forces.

Some shipping firms are avoiding the crucial trade artery, causing delays along international trade routes.

And Beijing on Friday emphasised the area was an "important international trade route for goods and energy."

"We call for an end to the harassment of civilian vessels, in order to maintain the smooth flow of global production and supply chains and the international trade order," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said. In an interview published on Friday, a senior Houthi official promised safe passage for Russian and Chinese vessels through the Red Sea.

Mexico and Chile ask International Criminal Court to investigate possible crimes in Gaza

Monitoring Desk
MEXICO CITY: Mexico and Chile have asked the International Criminal Court to investigate possible crimes against civilians in Gaza and the Oct. 7 Hamas attack in Israel.

Mexico's Foreign Relations Department said in a statement that it filed the request "because of a growing concern about the recent escalation in violence, especially against civilians."

There have been widespread claims of breaches of international law by Hamas and Israeli forces since war erupted.

The Palestinian

foreign ministry expressed approval of the decision.

"The referral underscores the pressing requirement for the Court to carry out its mandate, addressing, investigating, and prosecuting the gravest crimes that are of concern to the international community," stated the ministry on Friday.

Israel launched a military operation in the Gaza Strip following the Oct. 7 attack, in which 1,200 people were killed and some 250 people taken hostage by Hamas militants.

Iran's desire for 'a seat at the table' felt in Davos

Monitoring Desk
DAVOS: At a dinner in the Swiss ski resort of Davos this week, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani hosted business and political leaders to showcase Iraq's improved security and finances.

As the private event was about to end, two attendees told Reuters, news reached some guests that Iran had fired ballistic missiles at what it said was an Israeli "spy headquarters" in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Ethnic killings in one Sudan city left up to 15,000 dead: UN report

Monitoring Desk
UNITED NATIONS: Between 10,000 and 15,000 people were killed in one city in Sudan's West Darfur region last year in ethnic violence by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied Arab militia, according to a United Nations report seen by Reuters.

In the report to the UN Security Council, independent UN sanctions monitors attributed the toll in El Geneina to intelligence sources and contrasted it with the UN estimate that about 12,000 people have been killed across Sudan since war erupted on April 15, 2023, between the Sudanese army and the RSF.

The monitors also described as "credible" accusations that the United Arab Emirates had provided military support to the RSF "several times per week" via Amdjarass in northern Chad. A top Sudanese general accused the UAE in November of backing the RSF war effort.

In a letter to the monitors, the UAE said 122 flights had delivered hu-

manitarian aid to Amdjarass to help Sudanese fleeing the war. The United Nations says about 500,000 people have fled Sudan into eastern Chad, several hundred kilometers south of Amdjarass.

Between April and June last year El Geneina experienced "intense violence," the monitors wrote, accusing the RSF and allies of targeting the ethnic African Masalit tribe in attacks that "may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity."

The RSF has previously denied the accusations and said any of its soldiers found to be involved would face justice.

The RSF did not immediately respond to a request for comment by Reuters.

"The attacks were planned, coordinated, and executed by RSF and their allied Arab militias," the sanctions monitors wrote in their annual report to the 15-member Security Council. Reuters last year chronicled the ethnically targeted violence committed in West Darfur.

Hezbollah warns Israel against continued 'aggression'

Monitoring Desk
BEIRUT: A top official from Lebanon's Iran-backed militant group on Friday warned Israel would "receive a real slap in the face" if it expanded the conflict along the Lebanon-Israel border.

Since the surprise October 7 attack by Hamas on southern Israel, there have been near daily exchanges of cross-border fire between the Israeli army and militant group Hezbollah, an ally of the Palestinian militants.

Israel has repeatedly bombarded border villages, with the violence killing more than 195 people in Lebanon, including at least 142 Hezbollah fighters, according to an AFP tally.

On the Israeli side, 15 people have been killed, of whom nine were soldiers and six civilians, according to the Israeli army.

"If Israel decides to expand its aggression, it will receive a real slap in the face

in response," Hezbollah's number two, Naim Qassem, said in a statement.

Any restoration of stability on the border is contingent on "the end of the aggression in Gaza," he added.

"The enemy must know the party is ready, that we are preparing based on the principle that an endless aggression can happen, just like our will to push back the aggression is infinite."

His remarks came after Israeli air strikes "completely destroyed" at least three houses in southern Lebanon on Friday, the official Lebanese news agency NNA and the mayor of the affected border community said.

The agency reported four houses were targeted "since this morning by the Israeli air force in Kfar Kila", a village near the Israel-Lebanon border, while three were "completely destroyed".

Argentina arrests, deports relatives of fugitive Ecuador gang leader 'Fito'

Monitoring Desk
BUENOS AIRES: The wife and children of fugitive Ecuadorian drug trafficker Jose Adolfo Macias were detained in Argentina on Thursday evening and returned to Ecuador early Friday, authorities said.

Argentine Security Minister Patricia Bullrich told a press conference on Friday that authorities detained eight people - including some non-relative associates of Macias - who arrived in Argentina on Jan. 5 and moved into a home in the province of Cordoba that they had purchased in November.

Macias, whose alias is "Fito," disappeared on Jan. 7 from the Ecuadorian prison where he was serving a 34-year sentence for various crimes including drug trafficking and murder.

Biden hopeful for bipartisan package in Senate on US-Mexico border next week

Monitoring Desk
TEXAS: President Joe Biden signaled that he is hopeful a deal over the US-Mexico border could be worked out next week at least in the Democratic-controlled Senate, and said he was ready to embrace "massive changes." Republicans in Congress have blocked emergency funding for Ukraine in an effort to push new security policies along the US-Mexico border.

They blame Biden's policies for an influx of immigrants into the United States.

"I think next week we're going to be able to work out something, at least in the Senate, and I'm hopeful that it's going to be a bipartisan package," Biden told an audience of mayors gathered at the White House. "Now the question is for the speaker and House Republicans, are they ready to act as well?"

In the House of Representatives, where Republicans hold a slender majority, some headline members have threatened to try to oust Speaker Mike Johnson if he brings a border security

New mosque construction in India's Ayodhya to begin in May, Muslim group says

Monitoring Desk
UTTAR PRADESH: As Hindu devotees prepare to inaugurate a grand temple to one of their holiest deities, India's Muslims plan to begin building a new mosque in the same city later this year, hoping to make a fresh start after a bloody, decades-long dispute. Haji Arfat Shaikh, the head of the development committee of the Indo-Islamic Cultural Foundation (IICF) that is overseeing the mosque project, said this week that construction would begin in May, after the holy month of Ramadan.

Ambiguous Italian court ruling on fascist salute delights extreme right

Monitoring Desk
ROME: Performing a stiff-armed fascist salute is not a crime in Italy unless it risks sparking violence or is aimed at reviving the fascist party, the Supreme Court has ruled in a verdict that delighted extreme-right groups.

In a decision released on Thursday, the court said fascist salutes during commemorative events should not be considered criminal, but it left open the possibility of prosecution depending on the context of the incident.

Legal experts said the ruling would not resolve an issue that has long dogged Italy, which has never fully confronted the legacy of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. The court sentence came just 10 days after a video emerged of hundreds of men making fascist salutes during a gathering in Rome, sparking fury amongst left-wing parties, which demanded a police crackdown on extremist groups.

One such

organisation, CasaPound, hailed Thursday's verdict as "an historic victory" which vindicated their participation at countless rallies that celebrate Italy's fascist past.

"The Roman salute will be considered an offence only if there is an actual concrete danger of the reconstitution of the fascist party, which is absolutely excluded in the case of commemorations," it said in a statement.

The Supreme Court was called to review the issue following a 2016 event in Milan where eight militants were arrested for making fascist salutes. Acquitted in an initial trial, they were subsequently found guilty when prosecutors appealed the verdict.

Thursday's ruling means the appeal will have to be reheard, with a fresh conviction looking highly unlikely.

However, the Supreme Court left open the door to future prosecutions given Italy's inconclusive legal framework.



Rescuers look for survivors in Harni lake where a boat carrying children and teachers who were on a picnic capsized in Vadodra, India.



KARACHI: The Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed in a group photo with Ulama, Bishops, Pandits, Sikh, Parsi and other Minority leaders during 'Interfaith Harmony Conference' organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Aneeq Ahmed says: Establishing harmony based society holds key significance

KARACHI (APP): The Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed has placed a great emphasis on establishing harmony based society, which is based on patience, love and brotherhood.

While addressing an 'Interfaith Harmony Conference' organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony at St. Patrick's Cathedral here on Saturday, he said that the people should give up strictness in their behaviours and come forward with the message of

brotherhood for a liveable society. The Caretaker Minister alluding to the minorities said, 'We will work jointly.' He said we all agreed to make the society a better place to live in. He further said that no religion taught killings and bloodshed but they taught love and peace. He said that the law had great importance and it played a significant role in society. Aneeq said, 'We have faith in all heavenly holy books and the Holy Quran is the custodian of all these books.'

He said that non-muslim brothers had rendered great services and beautified the metropolis. Vehemently condemning the Jaranwala incident, the Minister said that the incident should not have taken place. He said that the Ulema opened the doors of the mosques to their Christian brothers soon after the incident of Jaranwala to protect them.

He said, on the other hand, that 150 Christians were killed in Manipur of India and the whole of India did not come on the same page to criticise the Manipur incident but the entire Pakistan stood with the Christian community on Jaranwala incident and condemned it. He said, 'We (Muslims) and you (minorities) are united. On the occasion, appreciated the idea of conducting workshops and exchange programmes on interfaith harmony. He said that many programmes on interfaith harmony were in the pipeline. Earlier, Minority leaders including Cardinal Joseph Coutts, Bishop Fredrick John, Sardar Ramesh Singh, Tushna Patel, Mufti Nazir Ahmed, Professor Manoj Chohan and others lauded the efforts of the minister.

Lack of freedom of speech drove country's bifurcation, says Justice Athar Minallah

ISLAMABAD (INP): Supreme Court Justice Athar Minallah on Saturday stressed the need for learning from the history and noted that Pakistan wouldn't have been divided and political leaders, if the freedom of speech was acknowledged.

The only solution was to implement the Constitution, said the judge who added that Pakistan could develop into a great nation by following the Constitution.

Addressing a seminar, he said half of Pakistan's history had been covered by dictatorship where freedom of speech was impossible to exercise.

Pakistan's top court judge listed the freedom of expression as the most ingredient of society, which,

he added, should never be suppressed. "States cannot control freedom of speech," he declared.

Justice Minallah said a totally different image was presented to the people in West Pakistan in 1971. "During the 75 years, every knew what the truth is, but it was stifled," he remarked and regretted that the point Pakistan as nation has reached by doing so.

At the same time, the Supreme Court judge also touched the issue of provincial autonomy, saying many forces were against the 18th Amendment - the changes introduced in the Constitution to restore its soul and transfer powers to the federating units while also making the office of prime minister strong.

The Supreme Court judge played by journalists for promoting freedom of expression and said he had learned a lot from the court reporters.

Describing the desired traits, Justice Minallah said he should be independent and should not be influenced by criticism. "A judge influenced by criticism would violate his oath," he noted. "Judiciary should neither panic nor afraid of [censure]."

He also said that social media should not affect the judges and added, "Being a judge, we are a public property. The truth reveals itself with the passage of time."

Justice Minallah also called for retrospection. "We should ask ourselves,

Bilawal strongly condemns firing at PPP corner meeting, attack on its election office

KARACHI (INP): Chairman of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Saturday strongly condemned an attack on the PPP election office in Lahore and the firing at the Party's corner meeting in Karachi. He said that targeting the election office of PP 162 candidate Manzar Abbas Khokhar with a petrol bomb in Lahore was an open terrorism. The PPP Chairman, in a Bilawal House communication, said that Lahore Police was not registering FIR of the attack on the election

office of the provincial candidate of his constituency NA-127 in Sateokatta.

He said that the shots were fired at the corner meeting of jiyala candidate Agha Rafiullah in Malir. Bilawal also expressed his best wishes for the recovery of two jiyalas and two supporters, who were injured in the firing at the corner meeting of NA-230 candidate Agha Rafiullah.

Targeting the election campaign of Pakistan Peoples Party candidates in Lahore and Karachi was worrying.

Nawaz has got formula to rid nation of inflation: PML-N

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader and former information minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said that Nawaz Sharif has the formula to solve all the problems of the country.

Talking to the media outside the anti-terrorism court in Lahore on Saturday, Marriyum Aurangzeb said that they kept appearing before the court because they knew that these cases were false, but 'one person' did not want to be accountable to the courts.

She said that those who launched a long march, attacked the Jinnah House,

they sued others for terrorism. Referring to former prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan, Aurangzeb said that those who made him 'Ladla' were now facing the consequences.

The PML-N leader said that Nawaz Sharif got a formula to rid the nation of poverty, inflation and load shedding.

She said that the PML-N supremo would put the country to the path of progress. She said that former three-time prime minister provided jobs to the youth, gave cheap electricity and gas.

PML-N supremo cancels visit to Layyah

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Muhammad Nawaz Sharif cancelled his visit to Layyah, city of Punjab.

Party sources said that the visit of the party's supreme leader was cancelled due to weather conditions.

It should be mentioned here that Nawaz Sharif was scheduled to address a public gathering in Layyah.

Earlier, the PML-N chief also delivered a precise address to party activists in Hafizabad without any making claims and pledges.

Bilawal to snatch subsidies from rich, return it to poor: Hina

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) senior leader, Hina Rabbani Khar has said that her party chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari would snatch the subsidies from affluent people and will return it to poor segments of the society.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, she said that PPP was the only political party which stands with masses and enjoy their complete support.

Hina Rabbani Khar said that Bilawal Bhutto as foreign minister recognized Pakistan's viewpoint at international level.

Ambassador Shah, Ugandan PM discuss bilateral ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador Syed Haider Shah, Pakistan's head of delegation, on Saturday called on Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda, Nabbanja Robinah, at Manyonyo Resort on the margins of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit. They discussed matters of mutual interests between Pakistan and Uganda including the bilateral trade, Pakistan High Commissioner to Uganda Muhammad Hassan Wazir posted.



CHICHAWATNI: Amir Jamaat-e-Islami Sirajul Haq addressing a public gathering in connection with general elections

Mir Ali Hassan Zehri says Truth, reality will prevail on Feb 8

Independent Report
HUB: No matter how many accusations the opponents make on us, no matter how many conspiracies they make, with the power of the people and the grace of Allah, we will defeat all their conspiracies because the victory is always for truth and reality on Feb 8.

Truth and reality will prevail, while the defeat will be the destiny of the vested interests.

These views were expressed by Pakistan People's Party District Hub President and candidate for PB-21 Hub and spokesperson of former President Asif Ali Zardari, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri in various public gatherings. On this occasion, he thanked the people of Hub and said that the people of Hub have expressed their trust in me and I will try my best to fulfill their expectations. For this purpose, I only need the support of you people.

He said that Allah chooses any one of us to help and serve His servants and he is a lucky person whom Allah makes a re-

sourer for the people. It is a matter of great pride and I feel humbled and happy that Allah has chosen us to help the suffering humanity and the poor people who are crushed in the mill of circumstances. I have chosen to give 100% effort on my part, but Allah knows how successful we are in this work. While Mir Ali Hassan arrive at Mir Abdul Rehman Lango House on his invitation. Mir Abdul Rehman Lango and other colleagues welcomed Mir Ali Hassan Zehri and were presented with a traditional Ajrak. Along with Mir Ali Hassan Zehri, General Secretary of Pakistan Peoples Party District Hub Sharif Palari, Usman Koh Baloch, Ishaq Reki, Sardarzada Naem Buledi and others were also present.

Mir Abdul Rahman Lango announced his with their hundreds of colleagues support for Mir Ali Hassan Zehri and assured that they will make Mir Ali Hassan Zehri successful with a huge majority in the upcoming elections. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri thanked Mir Abdul Rahman Lango.

Rangers, police arrest TTP terrorist from Karachi

KARACHI (INP): Karachi police and Rangers conducted a joint targeted intelligence-based operation (IBO) and arrested a most wanted terrorist of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militant from Ittehad Town.

The Rangers spokesperson stated that the arrested individual was identified as Abdul Ghaffar alias Amjad and recovered the explosives from his possession.

The law enforcers revealed that the arrested individual was a close associate of the commander of the banned militant organization, Muhammad Ali alias Mufti.

The spokesperson claimed that the detained individual was involved in planning a suicide attack at the shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi in October 2011.

The disclosure unveiled that the group consisted of five suicide bombers, comprising two individuals from Chechnya, one from Azerbaijan, and two locals from Karachi.



QUETTA: Provincial Secretary Health Abdullah Khan visiting Helper Eye Hospital

Siraj vows reforms in bureaucracy after victory in elections

CHICHAWATNI (INP): Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Sirajul Haq has pledged to implement comprehensive reforms in the bureaucracy after securing victory in the election on February 8.

Addressing an election rally in Chichawatni on Saturday, he criticized the prevailing civil structure and VIP culture, characterizing them as remnants of the colonial era. Sirajul Haq regretted that despite the end of British rule, their influence still permeated the country, describing it as a system that needed to be overhauled.

He emphasized that the JI would bring about changes in line with principles derived from the Quran. Asserting that Islam had governed the world for a millennium, he expressed confidence in its applicability today. To establish a system based on the Quran and Sunnah, he urged voters to support the JI,

whose struggle was rooted in these principles.

The JI chief criticized former ruling political parties, labeling them as dynasties subservient to the United States and implementing policies dictated by Washington. He accused these parties of remaining silent on Israeli atrocities in Gaza and human rights violations in Occupied Kashmir, highlighting their failure to advocate for the causes of Palestine and Kashmir. He vowed that the JI, if elected, would genuinely represent the issues of Kashmir and Palestine.

Siraj contended that the country was not founded for the rule of dynasties and dictators but for the people of Pakistan to determine leadership through free and fair elections. He criticized the tested parties for creating artificial rifts and deceiving the masses.



QUETTA: A view of different Political Parties flag hanging on the road for upcoming general election.

SC takes notice of issuance of prohibited bore licenses in country

ISLAMABAD (Online): Supreme Court (SC) has taken notice of issuance of prohibited bore licenses in the country.

Order has been issued to registrar SC to register the matter under article 184(3) of public interest.

Attorney General (AG) and advocate generals have been issued notices in this regard.

Report has also been called from all home secretaries and IGs within one month.

SC in its written order regarding bail of an accused in arms theft case remarked a prohibited bore license surfaced during the hearing of the case. The said license was issued by DIG Mardan was shown to the court.

Question was raised in the order DIG Mardan issued the permit for keeping prohibited arms under what powers. Can the license for prohibited bore be issued this way.

It was said in the order if the prohibited bore license can be issued then who will issue it. How many licenses have been issued. Is the easy availability of prohibited bore license in line with article 9 of the constitution.

SC ordered registrar office to register the matter under article 184(3) of the constitution besides issuing notice to attorney general and advocate generals.

The court has summoned report from all provincial home secretaries and IGs within a month.



QUETTA: Special Secretary Health Mujeebur Rehman Qambrani presiding over a meeting of Health Department regarding elections



NASEERABAD: Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki presiding over a meeting of officers regarding preparation of general elections

Mari Petroleum Ltd unearths significant gas reserve in Sindh

KARACHI (INP): Mari Petroleum Limited has announced the discovery of a new gas deposit in Sindh, set to contribute 6.57 million standard cubic feet of gas per day.

In an official statement, the company disclosed that the breakthrough occurred during the drilling process at Gazage Formation Two, reaching a depth of 1,014 meters. The newly identified gas reservoir is expected to yield 6.57 million standard cubic feet of gas daily, boasting a gas pressure of 306 pounds per square inch. The entirety of the shares in this area, representing a 100% stake, belongs to Mari Petroleum Limited.

PML-Q issues party tickets for NA, PA seats

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) on Saturday issued party tickets on National Assembly and provincial assemblies seats for general elections 2024.

PML-Q has issued 17 tickets to candidates contesting for NA seats, 32 for Punjab Assembly seats, four each for Balochistan and KP assemblies and 10 for Sindh Assembly.

The party has failed to make seat adjustment with any party for 2024 elections.

On Friday, Chaudhry Salik Hussain said Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) has decided against seat adjustment with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for the general elections 2024 over 'dual standards'.

The decision was taken in an emergency meeting of the PML-Q held with Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain in the chair.

ECP faces shortage of 167,737 personnel for election security

ISLAMABAD (INP): A new challenge has surfaced in ensuring law and order during the upcoming general elections, with a projected shortfall of 167,737 personnel for duty at polling stations.

According to reports, all four provinces have conveyed to the federal government that there will be a deficiency of 167,000 personnel required for election duty at polling stations. A suggestion has been put forth to mobilize forces from Azad Kashmir to address this shortage.

The country needs a total of 535,402 security personnel for election duty, yet the provinces and Islamabad will only have 367,669 security personnel available on polling day. The federal government has been officially notified about this inadequacy in security personnel.

On the breakdown, it is revealed that Islamabad will have 4,500 security personnel, Punjab 130,000, Sindh 15,000, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 89,959 on the day of polling. Additionally, Balochistan will deploy 38,210 security personnel for election security.



QUETTA: Chief of Balochistan Grand Alliance and candidate of NA 263 Nawabzada Haji Mir Lashkari Khan Raisani addressing a election campaign meeting

Provocative TV talk case LHC reserves judgment on acquittal pleas of Marriyum others

LAHORE (Online): Anti Terrorism Court (ATC) Lahore has reserved judgment following the completion of arguments on acquittal pleas of PML-N leader Marriyum Aurangzeb and others in provocative TV talks case.

The case against PML-N leaders Mian Javed Latif and Marriyum Aurangzeb came up for hearing before Judge Naveed Iqbal of ATC Lahore Saturday.

Both the PML-N leaders appeared in the court for attendance.

The counsels for the accused took the plea during the hearing of the case the case was registered with the delay of 5 days.

He told the court provocative talk was made on TV. Name of TV channel has not been mentioned in the case. The legal formalities were not reviewed correctly while registering the case. The claimant has deviated from his statement. There is no witness of the case now.

Later the court reserved judgment on the acquittal pleas of Marriyum Aurangzeb and other accused persons on completion of arguments.

It is pertinent to mention here the case against PML-N leaders was registered in Green Town police station in 2022.

Marriyum Aurangzeb while talking to media men outside ATC said we appear in the court for the very reason that we know these cases are false. One person does not want to become accountable to courts.

She went on to say those who launched long march, attacked Jinnah house and they get register terrorism case against others. Those who had made him darling are also suffering now.

She held Nawaz Sharif has formula to get rid of poverty, inflation and load-shedding.

She claimed people will affix stamp on election symbol tiger on February 8.