

# Independent

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## Caretaker govt fully prepared & committed to hold elections on Feb 8: Solangi

KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Thursday said that the caretaker government was fully prepared and committed to conduct general elections on February 8.

He was addressing a seminar on "Challenges and Roadmap for the New Government", organized by the Press Information Department.

The minister said that as the government's spokesperson, he had been reiterating the caretaker government's commitment for holding elections as per the schedule given by the Election Commission of Pakistan.

"The election process should continue in any case and major issues facing the country, including

economy, foreign policy, local governments, governance and civil service reforms, should also be discussed to find their solution," he remarked.

Solangi said that despite many flaws in the democratic system and electoral process, everyone was in agreement that the electoral process should not be stopped and elections should be held.

He said that since the formation of the caretaker cabinet on August 17, 2023, the government had been consistently reiterating its commitment that the elections would definitely be held and also on the scheduled date of February 8.

The minister said that speakers in the seminar had highlighted the historical background of elections in Pakistan thoroughly.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar chairs a meeting of the Caretaker Federal Cabinet.

## Despite security challenges, ECP fully ready to stage polls on Feb 8

CEC says any efforts to hinder electoral process and affect security to be dealt with iron fists

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja stated on Thursday that despite existing security challenges, the upcoming elections will be held on February 8. The Election Commission is fully prepared to conduct the elections with the support of law enforcement agencies and the Pakistan Army. He expressed these views while addressing an important meeting held by the Election Commission to discuss the deteriorating law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and its impact on the general elections.

The Election Commissioner made it clear that despite terrorism, security challenges, and incidents affecting the electoral process, the elections will not be postponed and will take place on schedule. He urged everyone not to harbor any misconceptions or doubts in this regard.

He warned that decisive measures would be implemented against any elements attempting to undermine peace and security during the electoral process. Apart from the members of the Election Commission, Caretaker Federal Minister of Interior, DG-IB, Chief Secretary and IG of Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa Province and Balochistan Province, representatives of other agencies, the Secretary Election Commission, and other senior officers participated in the meeting.

Addressing the participants of the meeting, the CEC expressed his concern over the deteriorating law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, especially the incidents of attacks on Election Commission offices and political meetings.

Sikandar Sultan Raja termed terrorism the biggest enemy of the electoral process; however, he expressed full confidence in the law enforcement agencies that they have taken all necessary administrative and security arrangements for the peaceful conduct of the general elections.

He called for providing a secure and conducive environment for political parties, candidates, and voters to participate in the electoral process without fear.

The Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Chief Secretaries of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, and IGs of the respective provinces briefed the Election Commissioner on the security situation and the protective measures taken nationwide and particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and

## Govt approves increase in prices of 146 essential life-saving medicines

Decision taken due to rising prices of raw materials in global market; PM Kakar directs Drap to speed up actions against smuggling of drugs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday directed to improve the performance of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) and accelerate action against drug smugglers and hoarders.

Chairing a meeting of the Federal Cabinet, the prime minister instructed to compile the recommendations for necessary legislation regarding the de-regulation of drug prices and its onward presentation before the Parliament by the next elected government.

Addressing the cabinet meeting, he said the government was taking all possible steps to provide medicines to the common man at reasonable prices.

He further said the government was framing such policies which would benefit the common man and also help develop the pharmaceutical industry.

The cabinet approved the increase in the prices of 146 essential life-saving medicines, keeping in view the rising prices of their raw material in the global market under the hardship category.



QUETTA: Vice Chancellor University of Balochistan Dr. Shafiq Ahmed and Vice Chancellor Bolan University of Medical & Health Sciences Dr. Shabbir Lehri meeting with Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar

## 'If anyone can resolve missing person issue, it's me', says Bilawal

Independent Report

KHUZDAR: Former foreign minister and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, addressed a fervent crowd in Khuzdar on Thursday, asserting himself as the key to resolving the issue of missing persons in Balochistan. Bilawal claimed that no other federal politician empathizes with the pain and suffering of the region's people like he does.

During the public meeting, Bilawal emphasised the PPP's commitment to fighting for the rights of the people of Balochistan, stressing that the party does not bow down to external pressures. "Yes, people know that PPP is the



only party that does not bow before anyone... we are ready to fight all forces but we cannot compromise on people's rights," he declared.

Bilawal further asserted that the PPP is uniquely positioned to address the challenges faced by Balochistan, claiming that if the 18th Amendment and NFC Awards introduced during the tenure of former president Asif Ali Zardari had been fully implemented, many of the ongoing conspiracies in Balochistan would have ceased.

"Our party is once again on the target of terrorists," Bilawal acknowledged, addressing recent attacks in Mastung, Turbat, Bolan, and Khuzdar. Undeterred, he stated, "PPP is a party of martyrs, of the righteous, which cannot bow down to any terrorist."

## Caretaker CM lays foundation of development projects in Balochistan House Islamabad

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki visited the construction projects located in Balochistan House Islamabad on Thursday.

Both the projects would be completed in next couple of years, it was further told. Speaking on the occasion, Mir Ali Mardan Domki directed to ensure timely completion of the development projects maintaining quality of work.

Inspector General of Police Abdul Khaliq Sheikh and other high ups were also present on the occasion.



QUETTA: Police officials cordoned off the area and are ascertaining the nature of the blast after the explosion, at Spinnay road in Quetta.

## PTI's intra-party elections to be held on Feb 5

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI's) intra-party elections will be held on Feb 5 (Monday).

The schedule of the internal elections has been issued. Party's federal election commissioner issued the schedule.

In a statement issued on the social media website, the party said all registered voters will be eligible to take part in voting throughout Pakistan on the designated places for polling to elect a panel or a candidate of their choice.

All the party members registered till Jan 31 would be eligible to take part in voting. Details of the panels taking part in elections will be available on the official website of the PTI.

## EC decides to dispatch ballot papers by air

ISLAMABAD (Online): Election Commission (EC) has decided to dispatch ballot papers by air to remote areas of KP and Balochistan in order to ensure immediate delivery. According to EC spokesperson ballot papers will be sent to Gawadar, Panjgore, Kache, Kharan, Bajore and Kurram Agency by air.

Spokesperson said ballot papers of national and provincial assemblies will be sent in these areas by helicopter. About printing of ballot papers he said the printing work of ballot papers for three seats of national assembly has been started which will be completed soon. The printing work of ballot papers in respect of all the constituencies of all national and provincial assemblies seats has been completed.

90 percent printing of ballot papers work has been completed in respect of KPL 80 percent Punjab and 60 percent Sindh.

## CT Interior Minister chairs meeting on law & order, preparations: It's ensured to provide peaceful and conducive environment for general elections, says Dr. Gohar Ejaz

65,522 personnel of law enforcement agencies to be deployed for security during elections in Balochistan, CS briefs Federal Interior Minister

Independent Report

QUETTA: The caretaker Federal Minister Interior, Dr. Gohar Ejaz has stated that it is being ensured by the government with all stakeholders to provide peaceful and conducive environment for the upcoming general elections to be held on February 8 in the country.

He said that the caretaker government is determined to ensure, free, fair and peaceful elections in the country including Balochistan.

The caretaker Interior Minister was chairing a high level meeting on the law

and order here on Thursday.

The Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan briefed the visiting Interior Minister about the law and order situation and preparations of the elections in Balochistan.

Also present in the meeting were caretaker Provincial Minister for Home, Captain (Retd) Mir Muhammad Zubair Jamali, Additional Chief Secretary Home, Zahid Saleem, Inspector General of Police, Abdul Khaliq Sheikh and other concerned high ups from civil bureaucracy and military.

It may be mentioned

here caretaker Minister Interior arrived in the provincial metropolis to review the preparations for elections besides the law and order situation in the province on special directives of the caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar.

Speaking on the occasion, the Interior Minister said that he is visiting the provinces for review of the preparations of elections on special directives of the caretaker Prime Minister.

Dr. Gohar Ejaz directed to the concerned authorities to provide peaceful and conducive environment for the elections.

## Security and other necessary arrangements reviewed for general elections in Quetta

Independent Report

QUETTA: The security as well as other related matters about preparations of the general elections were reviewed in Quetta Division here on Thursday.

The Commissioner Quetta Muhammad Hamza Shafiq chaired the meeting that discussed and finalized the arrangements made for security and provision of other necessary facilities including transport at the polling stations.

Those who were in attendance were included the Additional Commissioner Quetta Division and District Monitoring Officer Soban Dashti, Assistant Commissioner Revenue, Hanif Kibzai as well as deputy Commissioners Quetta, Kila Abdullah,

Chaman and Pishin besides the Returning Officers and other concerned officials.

The meeting decided to set up control rooms in all districts of the Quetta Division and depute the employees there for monitoring of elections.

It was also decided to finalize the contingency and security plan, besides other arrangements, and submit the report thereon.

All the concerned officials were directed to complete installation of the CCTV cameras at the sensitive polling stations.

## Iran hands over bodies of nine Pakistani labourers

ISLAMABAD (INP): Iran on Thursday handed over bodies of nine Pakistani labourers killed in Sistan Balochistan.

The bodies were handed over to Pakistani authorities at the Pak-Iran border by Iranian Border Security Guards.

The mortal remains of Pakistani nationals were received by Assistant Commissioner Taftan, Waqar Kakar.

The incident was condemned by the Iranian authorities and an inquiry was ordered.

Iranian envoy to Pakistan in his statement condemned the killings of Pakistani labourers in Iran and said Tehran and Islamabad will not tolerate a violation of damage to the countries' relations.



QUETTA: Caretaker Interior Minister Dr. Gohar Ejaz addressing a Press conference regarding holding of peaceful elections

## One killed, four injured as multiple blasts rock Balochistan

Police confirmed multiple blasts in Quetta, Turbat, and Dera Allah Yar; Wave of terror poses challenge to political activities ahead of elections

Independent Report

QUETTA: Four separate blasts occurred in Balochistan's provincial capital Quetta, Turbat, and Dera Allah Yar city of Jaffarabad district, injuring four people who have been shifted to hospitals for medical treatment.

One person was killed while four people sustained injuries in the wake of the blasts. The deceased was identified as 79-year-old Abdul Khaliq.

In Quetta, an explosive material blasted near a police checkpoint while one person was injured in the Turbat blast that occurred at Ghulam Nabi Chowk wherein the police team identified the nature of the blast.

Quetta SSP (Operations) Tariq Jawad told the media at the scene of the incident that one person had been killed in a roadside explosion on CPEC Road. He further said that eight to 10 kilograms of explosives were used in the blast and investigations were underway to determine the identity of the deceased.

During preliminary investigation, the deceased appeared to be a passer-by, the official claimed, claiming that there was no election campaign in the area where the blast took place.

Jawad said security was on high alert regarding the electoral activities.

In a third blast, a cracker blast occurred in the Bhatti hotel located on national highway Dera Allah Yar in district Jaffarabad.

In Hub, the deputy commissioner ordered political parties to restrict their political activities, rallies, and corner meetings amid the deteriorating security situation in the district.



QUETTA: Caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai meeting with Caretaker Health Minister Dr. Amir Muhammad Khan Jogezeai

## Nawaz vows to remove KP people's sense of deprivation

Independent Report

SWAT (APP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Quaid Muhammad Nawaz Sharif on Thursday said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been deceived in the name of change during last 10 years rule of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and vowed to remove sense of the deprivation of its people.

Reiterating to bring positive socioeconomic changes, Nawaz Sharif said that the people of KP were in fact deprived of development under the guise of so-called change.

Addressing a public gathering in Mingora, he said that all sectors in KP were badly affected by poor governance of the PTI government.

Neither the promise of construction of 350 dams was fulfilled nor five million houses were constructed or 10 million jobs

created, he added.

Where were 10 billion trees, he asked.

Nawaz Sharif said during his last government, there was no loadshedding while price hike was controlled and peace was restored in Swat.

His party if voted to power, would again expedite the pace of economic development, besides taking steps to reduce price hike and inflation, he vowed. The PML-N leader asked the people to exercise their right of vote wisely and elect the honest and committed leadership on February 8. PML-N KP President Engr Amir Muqam, in his address, said that the Nawaz Sharif Kidney Hospital at Swat was a great gift of the thrice elected prime minister that reflected his love and affection for the local people.

Daily Voice of Masses  
**Independent**

**Double down**

Two verdicts in two days. A 14-year sentence for 'corruption' to accompany a 10-year sentence for 'divulging state secrets'. First, his top lieutenant, and now his spouse also convicted and jailed.

And still, former prime minister Imran Khan's troubles are far from over. What new depths will the state plumb as it makes clear its antipathy towards him?

The days leading up to the Feb 8 elections may hold more 'surprises'. For now, we may only sit and spectate as facts, procedures, laws and institutions bend to the will of those who think that no elected leader deserves a free pass — until they decide they do.

Mr Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi, have been convicted for under-declaring the value of a jewellery set they received as a gift while the former was still in office. The verdict has been delivered via an accountability court judge who, just days before the last general election, had also convicted this year's front-runners in the Avenfield reference.

That judgement was overturned in November last year. Most commentators believe this one will not last too long, either. Incidentally — or perhaps by design — the same judge is also supposed to hear a similar case involving items retained from the state's gift repository. The matter involves several cars allegedly retained by Messrs Nawaz Sharif, Yousuf Raza Gilani and Asif Ali Zardari in violation of Toshakhana rules.

However, given how completely the judge's attention and energies have been devoted over the past month to delivering the 'accountability' brand of justice to Mr Khan and his spouse, he seems to have had very little time to spare for any other of the matters pending before him. He retires soon, in March, after 11 years in NAB's accountability courts. Most accountability judges are appointed for three. During that extended tenure, he has judged four former prime ministers, all brought before him when their free passes ran out.

A word, too, on NAB, an institution that seems to exist only to cycle through political targets based on the whims of the powers that be.

The bureau has gained notoriety over the years for swooping in, guns blazing, when a politician's free pass has been revoked. It digs up all manner of 'corruption' cases against the targeted politician, effectively drowning them under a wave of litigation.

Sometimes, a conviction or two is secured through legal proceedings based on weak evidence and conducted without regard for due process. Unsurprisingly, most cases and convictions collapse within a few years, and those once accused of serious malfeasance eventually return as political martyrs.

It is a rinse-and-repeat cycle that has gradually deprived the idea of accountability of any legitimacy whatsoever. As this latest conviction shows, nothing seems about to change.

**Years of un wisdom**

F.S. Aijazuddin

Memoirs of retired Indian and Pakistani diplomats contain accounts of their postings to Islamabad and New Delhi, spent in professional pugilism and recollections in tranquillity.

Former Indian high commissioner Ajay Bisaria's book *Anger Management: The Troubled Diplomatic Relationship between India and Pakistan* belongs to that genre. Its adversarial counterpart is former Pakistan HC Abdul Basit's *Hostility: A Diplomat's Diary on Pakistan-India Relations*.

Bisaria served in Islamabad for 20 months before being summarily 'expelled' in 2019—the first among his 24 predecessors to suffer this indignity. His book is the most comprehensive survey to date of the first seven years in a conflict that could well score a century. It is structured to cover seven decades and some years, from 1947 into 2023. It could carry the subtitle 'Seven Pillars of Unwisdom'.

According to him, three ideas "of identity, territory, and security have populated scholarship on the subcontinent". They recur in his narrative. He tells us that "a lesson all Indian envoys to Pakistan learn at some point or the other: Pakistan policy in India is driven personally by India's prime minister".

Since independence, India has drawn its elected PMs from the same democratic pool, installed by popular vote. The PM's authority is unequivocal, except in the instance of the paloo-tied control exercised by Sonia Gandhi during PM Manmohan Singh's tenure. In contrast, leadership in Pakistan has passed from governors general, to nominated or self-appointed presidencies, to selected PMs.

Many of them have articulated their views on foreign policy. None has done so as poetically as the late PM A.B. Vajpayee: "The tools of diplomacy are words, eyes, and signs; plus forks and knives; First you shake hands; Then wring them in repentance."

Bisaria notes that personal chemistry between subcontinental leaders has often raised their people's hopes: "Duos of leaders had held great promise of breakthroughs [...]: Zia and Rajiv, Benazir and Rajiv, Sharif and Gujral, Sharif and Vajpayee, even Sharif and Modi, seemed to signal new phases of constructive engagement."

He recalls: "In the 1960s, Rajeshwar Dayal managed to persuade Nehru to give Ayub Khan a chance, despite Nehru's instinctive suspicion of the dictator. Natwar Singh became an advocate for Zia in the 1980s despite Mrs Gandhi's aversion to him. Pakistan's envoy Jehangir Qazi, through his quiet diplomacy with Advani, managed to get the Agra Summit of 2001 in place giving Musharraf a chance to make his case."

He singles out Vajpayee for his "sincerity and balanced approach" towards Pakistan. Amongst Pakistani leaders, he thinks "Zia was perhaps the most consummate diplomat for Pakistan who tried to sweet-talk India while running a nuclear programme and a jihad" in India's Punjab.

Bisaria remembers PM Singh's remarks in 2006 that "borders cannot be redrawn, but we can work towards making them irrelevant [...] just lines on a map". Singh's sponsorship of the Satish Lambah/ Tariq Aziz plan came as close to a working formula for Indo-Pak ties as the two nations will ever reach. On taking over, PM Modi shelved it. In former HC Shivshankar Menon's words, "the two countries fell into a repetitive pattern or dance of en-

agement and disruption".

It is to Bisaria's credit that, despite being "more of a Europe and Russia hand", he accepted the Islamabad assignment with courage. He describes his life there as "never lo-nely": "Followed everywhere, wat-ched clo-sely, photographed on cell phones by swa-rms of men in shalwar kameez, Indian diplomats become either peaceniks or hawks [...] seldom left in the middle."

Bisaria offers his successor nine unequal pillars of wisdom: cross-border security, coincidence of leadership, safe diplomacy, the role of global forces and multilateral institutions, aspirations of the people, quarantining territorial disagreements, accepting Pakistan's volatile structure of governance, minority is--sues and economic aspects of the relationship.

Peering into August 2047, when India and Pakistan will celebrate a centenary of independence from each other, Bisaria sees three scenarios: "Business as usual; conditional optimism; and conditional pessimism."

Those who recall the struggles over Nor-thern Ireland may remember the response of the then British PM John Major when he was asked what his solution for the Irish qu-estion was: "We can do one of three things. We can go backwards, or stay where we are. Neither is a policy. Or we can go forward."

By the end of February, there should be a new government (conceivably led by Nawaz Sharif) in Islamabad. By June 2024, predictably, Narendra Modi will have returned to serve a third term. In which direction will they take us: backwards, mired in history, or forward? -- Courtesy Dawn

**Rich man's polls?**

Syed Sheheryar Raza Zaidi

The general elections to determine Pakistan's fortunes are just around the corner. On Feb 8, 2024, the people of Pakistan will come out to vote for a party or candidate who they believe is competent enough to rule for the next five years. Much has been said about the level playing field being prepared for a particular party or the lack thereof for another. Yet, Elections 2024 are no different to general elections of yesterday. Yes, the 'favourites' of the powers that be may have changed, but the underlying idea of the general elections being the rich man's playground continues to be true.

An election in the truest sense of the word is the people's choice of an individual who will represent them in a particular body. As is customary, elections involve canvassing, ie, reaching out to the masses to market oneself as one whose merits outweigh those of his or her opponents and result in such a person being 'elected'.

That said, in Pakistan elections have always been about a particular economic class from which emerge individuals of a particular gender to fight it out amongst themselves and to use their financial muscle that can help them get the votes.

A look at the majority of the members who have been elected over the past 50 years to parliament makes this idea clear. A big chunk of the people (read: men) voted into power are either large landowners, sugar barons and construction tycoons or business magnates, whose foray into national and provincial politics is backed by enormous financial

clout. This is where the title of the piece comes from.

Meanwhile, the gender difference is appalling. Of the total number of candidates (5,121) contesting for the general seats in the National Assembly, 4,807 are male and only 312 are females (two candidates from the transgender community). For all their claimed progressiveness, even the three leading political parties have allotted only a handful of seats to women nominees. While there are reserved seats for women in parliament, there is little to show that parties are taking a significant stride towards plugging the gap between men and women candidates for the general seats. At the other end, female voters make up around 46 per cent of the total eligible voters — an improvement from the past but one can still see how women are being shortchanged in elections as they are in every other facet of life.

Having established that Pakistan's general elections have an unhealthy obsession with men at the helm of affairs, we can dissect the financial clout which has become the very foundation of Pakistan's electoral activity. The Election Act, 2017, hailed as a complete code of polls in Pakistan, actually facilitates the triumph of rich men over those with fewer resources in the electoral arena.

Section 132 of the Act specifies the amount a candidate is allowed to spend. As per the said law, a candidate for the National Assembly on their own and through his supporters and political party cannot spend more than Rs10 million and for a candidate of a provincial assembly

that cap is Rs4m. Now contrast that with the average household income in Pakistan which stands at around Rs75,000.

This means that for an average person in Pakistan to be able to spend even close to the spending limit for election to the National Assembly, they will need to save all their income for over a decade. That's not even the irony. The irony is that the spending limit only applies where a candidate permits such expenditure. If expenses are in-curred for a candidate which he or she does not permit, in light of Section 132 of the Election Act, those expenses are not considered part of the candidate's official expenses to which the limit applies.

To add fuel to the fire, no spending limit exists for political parties, just as long as their expenditures are duly accounted for, legally sourced and not directed towards a particular candidate. This is why when you open your browsers to surf the internet, watch videos or scour your television, you see various political parties advertising themselves having bought valuable ad space and airtime worth millions of rupees. It is only natural then for such political parties to gravitate towards candidates who can finance these splurges.

The purpose here is not to relegate a rich man to the comforts of their expensive homes but to lay bare how the 'level playing field' being sought by one and all should actually be realised for aspirational women and socially challenged individuals rather than for the same pensioners who continue to rule the roost in Pakistan. -- Courtesy Dawn

**Commerce News**

**Trade deficit narrows to \$1.879 billion in Jan 2024**

Dr. Gohar Ejaz announces positive trend in Pakistan's exports

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Interior Commerce and Industries, Dr. Gohar Ejaz on Thursday said that trade deficit narrowed to \$1.879 billion in January 2024 from \$2.689 billion in January 2023.

This is a substantial improvement from last year, said a press release issued by the Ministry of Commerce. Caretaker Federal Minister for Interior, Commerce and Industries, Dr. Gohar Ejaz, is announcing a positive trend in Pakistan's exports. He said: "Pakistan's

Exports in Jan 2024 have increased by 26.9% to \$2.786 billion from \$2.195 billion in Jan 2023." Dr Gohar said that imports during the same period decreased by 4.5% to \$4.665 billion from \$4.884 billion.

The caretaker minister said that Pakistan's global trade figures for the period of July 2023 - January 2024, show that Pakistan is steadily expanding its international trade footprint. Exports totaled

\$17.766 billion, up 12% from \$15.831 billion during the same period in the previous Financial Year (FY), he said. He further said that imports contracted by 16% to \$30.010 billion as compared to \$35.836 billion in the same period in the last FY.

The overall trade deficit has decreased by 39% to \$12.244 billion as compared to \$20.005 in the previous year, he added. In absolute terms, during Jul-Jan 2024, exports increased by almost \$2 billion, and Imports

decreased by \$6 billion, and the trade deficit contracted by \$7.8 billion. He said: "These positive trends reflect our government's unwavering commitment to promoting trade and economic growth."

We will continue to implement policies that support our exporters, diversify our export base, and enhance trade facilitation. I am confident that Pakistan is on the right track to achieving its trade goals and becoming a leading player in the global economy."



ETHIOPIA: Finance Minister Dr. Shamsad Akhtar, exchanging views with Ethiopian State Minister of Finance Eyob Tekalign Tolina during the meeting. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Thursday explored different avenues for economic cooperation during a bilateral meeting took place here in Islamabad at the Ministry of Finance.



A meeting with District Administration regarding 7th Agriculture Census was held at Provincial Census Coordination Centre (P3C), PBS, Regional office Karachi under the chair of Chief Statistician, Dr. Naemuz Zafer in Islamabad.

**Senate body discusses implementation status on various commodities**

**Independent Report** ISLAMABAD: The Senate Standing Committee on Commerce on Thursday discussed the implementation status of recommendations on various commodities made by the committee over the last three years.

A meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Commerce was held here in Parliament House, presided over by Senator Zeeshan Khanzada.

The Chairman of the Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) briefed the committee members on the progress of different commodities.

He mentioned that TCP was in the reconciliation process, and while the Sindh government had already responded, the other provincial governments were still in the process of responding.

**Gold rates up by Rs.800 per tola**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The per tola price of 24 karat gold increased by Rs 800 and was sold at Rs 216,300 on Thursday compared to its sale at Rs. 215,500 on the last trading day.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs. 686 to Rs. 185,442 from Rs 184,756 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold went up to Rs 169,989 from Rs. 169,360, the All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

**Dr Saif says: Startups can apply for funds from March 2024**

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication, Dr Umar Saif has said that startups in Pakistan can apply for funds from March 2024.

The government has allocated Rs 2 billion for the Pakistan Startup Fund to enhance venture capital investment in the country. The fund is designed to offer financial assistance to startups, with each receiving 30% support,

while venture capitalists will contribute the remaining 70% of the capital.

Dr. Umar Saif highlighted on social media that Pakistan has over 85 startup incubators and more than 4,000 startups.

He said that startups face challenges after the incubation stage, struggling to secure external venture capital (VC) for building scalable products and achieving product-market fit.

**Chicken, eggs prices reach at Rs 460 per kg, Rs 415 per dozen**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of poultry chicken reached Rs 460 per kg and the price of poultry eggs reached Rs 415 per dozen in the open market in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The meat of the poultry chicken has reached Rs 800 to 810 per kg in the open market,

according to the survey conducted by APP here on Thursday.

The price of poultry chickens and eggs has been going above Rs 415 to 420 per kg and dozen for the past few months, which is getting away from the purchasing power of consumers day by day.

**CPI inflation recorded at 28.3% in January**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation increased to 28.3 percent during January 2024 as compared to the corresponding month of last year.

The inflation had increased to 29.7 percent during last month (December) whereas it was recorded at 27.6 percent during January 2023, according to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) on

Thursday.

On a month-on-month basis, the CPI increased to 1.8 percent in January 2024 as compared to an increase of 0.7 percent in the previous month and an increase of 2.9 percent in January 2023. The urban CPI inflation increased to 30.2 percent on a year-on-year (YoY) basis in January 2024 as compared to an increase of 30.9 percent in the previous month and 24.4 percent in January

2023. On a month-on-month basis, it increased to 1.8 percent in January 2024 as compared to an increase of 0.7 percent in the previous month and an increase of 2.4 percent in January 2023.

On the other hand, the rural CPI increased to 25.7 percent on a year-on-year basis in January 2024 as compared to an increase of 27.9 percent in the previous month and 32.3 percent in January 2023.

**VCUVAScallson Chairman IPO**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Vice Chancellor of the University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (UVAS) Lahore, Professor Emeritus Dr Nasim Ahmad on Thursday called on Chairman IPO-Pakistan and discussed matters related to scientific research for promoting the agriculture and livestock sector of the country.

Continuing the robust engagement between IPO-Pakistan and the leading research and product development universities.

**Ethiopia, Pakistan discuss Economic Cooperation**

ISLAMABAD (Online): The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Pakistan on Thursday explored different avenues for economic cooperation during a bilateral meeting took place here in Islamabad at the Ministry of Finance.

Dr. Eyob Tekalign Tolina, State Minister of Finance, led the Ethiopian delegation while the

Pakistan side was led by H.E. Dr. Shamsad Akhtar, Finance Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan H.E. Jameel Ahmad and senior officers of the Ministry of Finance of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan were also present during the highly level engagement between the two countries.

## Punjab Governor says: Education, health sectors very important and for the development of any country

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: A delegation of an international non-governmental welfare organization, led by Alan Glasgow, Regional Director of Mercy Corps, met Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman at the Governor's House Lahore. The delegation briefed the Punjab Governor about the work on TB control, clean water supply, agriculture, climate change, humanitarian response and poverty alleviation in the province.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman said that education and health sectors are very important and for the development of any country. He further stated that it is very important to develop these sectors.

He appreciated the services of the international non-governmental organization in the field of health, especially TB eradication Program and education. The Punjab Governor said that provision of clean drinking water is very important

because many health problems are caused by consuming contaminated water.

He said that public private partnership is a successful model. Governor Punjab further said that youth are the most valuable asset of the country. He said that along with formal education, the aspect of moral education is also important. Governor Punjab said that as Chancellor, he has given instructions to the Vice Chancellors to give special attention to the character building of the youth.



MULTAN: Caretaker CM Punjab Mohsin Naqvi talking to media persons during his visit to Nishtar Hospital 02.

## Naqvi lays foundation of Multan Cadet College project

**Independent Report**  
MULTAN: Caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi broke the ground by operating a crane and laid the foundation of Multan Cadet College to kick off work on a mega project meeting a longstanding demand of the people of Multan here Thursday.

Secretary of Housing and works gave a detailed briefing to the chief minister on the project stating that the cadet college would have two hostels, a faculty hostel, officers mess, multi-purpose hall, and a Masjid besides residences for officers.

On the occasion the CM said that the Punjab government has already released Rs 124 million to begin construction work.

Meanwhile, Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab, Syed Mohsin Naqvi, inaugurated the new building of Model Police Station (PS) Seetal Mari.

The cadet college will be completed in Dec 2025 under a Rs 1678 million project. The cadet college would be built on the 919 Kanal area in Multan and would have the capacity to accommodate 450

students.

On the occasion the CM said that the Punjab government has already released Rs 124 million to begin construction work.

He also held a virtual inauguration of 36 more model police stations in the province.

## KP Finance Minister inaugurates Kohat Sewage Treatment Plant

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Finance, Excise and Taxation and Anti-Narcotics, Ahmed Rasool Bangash on Thursday formally inaugurated the Kohat Sewerage Treatment costing Rs.6 billion and Mallam Women Businesses and Community Center costing Rs.589 million started under the auspices of WSSC Kohat.

On this occasion, the Chief Executive WSSC Kohat Arif Rauf gave a detailed briefing about the importance and usefulness of the projects and the quality of work.

While inspecting the under-construction parts of both the projects, he expressed satisfaction over the pace and quality of the work and directed the authorities concerned to complete these important projects of public interest in the stipulated time.

Meanwhile, the Minister also inaugurated the Kohat Industrial Estate Security Development Project.

On this occasion, MD Small Industries Development Board Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and President Kohat Chamber of Commerce and Industries gave useful suggestions to the Minister of Finance besides identifying the obstacles in the development of small industries in Kohat.



LAHORE: Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman in a group photo with delegation of an international non-governmental welfare organization, led by Alan Glasgow, Regional Director of Mercy Corps at Governor's House.



PESHAWAR: Caretaker Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Justice (R) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah witnessing signing of MoU between KP IT Board and Alkhidmat Foundation.

## LHC orders for purchase of buses by private schools for children afresh

LAHORE (Online): Lahore High Court (LHC) has issued written order on the petitions seeking court's order for eradication of smog.

The court has ordered that the private schools should purchase buses for children and the private schools be registered afresh.

Justice Shahid Karim of LHC has issued written order on the petitions in connection with eradication of smog here Thursday.

The court has ordered school education

department to conduct registration of private schools afresh besides directing private schools to purchase buses for children.

50 percent children in private schools will travel by these buses from home to school.

It has been said in the decision that two years back School Education department was directed to purchase buses for private schools but school education department has not got implemented this order.

## Ji to hold public meeting on Feb 3

FAISALABAD (APP): The Jamat-e-Islami (JI) would hold a public meeting at Dhoobi Ghat ground [Iqbal Park], here on February 3. JI Ameer Siraj-ul-Haq will address the public gathering.

Party spokesperson, d the media on Thursday that a meeting was held at party secretariat, Al-Markaz Islami, Chiniot Bazaar, with District Ameer Prof Mahboob-uz-Zaman Butt in the chair to discuss electioneering.

## Man killed during dacoity

FAISALABAD (APP): A man was shot dead over resistance during a dacoity in the area of Sadar police station.

A police spokesman said here on Thursday that armed bandits stormed into the house of one Umair Farooq in Yousuf Town and took the family hostage at gunpoint. The house owner, after receiving information, also reached the house and offered resistance. The dacoits opened fire at him and fled. The victim succumbed to his bullet injuries in the chest on the way to hospital.

## Political parties relying upon social media to shape public opinions

ABBOTTABAD (APP): Through social networking websites and increasing penetration of internet access, political parties and candidates from across the board are using social media platforms to get engaged with voters for shaping their opinions during the general election 2024 campaign.

Prior to this general election, political campaigns were primarily conducted through traditional media channels such as television, radio, and newspapers. The increasing use of social media platforms, which proved their efficiency during the local bodies' elections 2020, is now

providing a level playing field for all participants enabling even the smaller parties and independent candidates to reach a wide range of audience.

Social media serves as a platform for alternate narratives and diverse voices that may be marginalized in mainstream media outlets.

It enables citizens to access a wide range of perspectives and information sources, facilitating informed decision-making during the election process.

In Hazara Division, social media has become a game-changer during the local bodies' elections 2020 when the present

Tehsil Mayor of Haripur, Sami Ullah Khan, launched a comprehensive campaign on social media. This brought a dramatic transformation in the first phase of the Local Body elections campaign in district Haripur where the young independent candidate has won the race of Tehsil Mayor against the two seasoned PML-N and PTI ticket holders with a huge margin.

This trend continued in the second phase of LG elections in the remaining six districts of the region, where candidates utilized this tool very effectively and reached their target audience, achieving their goals. During the current

general elections campaign for both national and provincial assembly constituencies, candidates are using social media.

Former Tehsil Nazim Abbottabad and independent candidate for NA-17 Abbottabad-II, Muhammad Ishaq Zakaria, told APP that with meager resources, he launched his election drive by hiring an expert social media team, and up till now, the results are satisfactory.

He said that most of the areas in his constituency consist of difficult hilly terrain where physical reach is time-taking task and costly. But thanks to social media platforms, every rally,

corner meeting, and public gathering is duly shared with supporters and voters.

Both independent and political party candidates have launched their election campaigns on social media and successfully delivered their message to the voters and supporters. On one hand, social media is helping politicians, and on the other, it also gives an opportunity to the masses to analyze candidates.

Renowned journalist and social media expert Syed Kamal Hussain Shah said that besides youth, people from other age groups are also using social media applications to get updates.

# International News

## Putin vows to make military gains in Ukraine as he meets with his campaign staff

**Monitoring Desk**  
MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin vowed Wednesday to push back Ukrainian forces to reduce the threat of attacks on Russian territory as he met with activists running his campaign ahead of the March presidential election that he's all but certain to win.

Asked about plans for the military campaign in Ukraine, Putin said the line of contact needs to be pushed back to "such a distance from our territory that will make it safe from Western-supplied long-range artillery that Ukrainian authorities use

for shelling peaceful cities."

He added the Russian military has been doing just that, "pushing the enemy back from vital populated centers."

"This is the main motive for our guys who are fighting and risking their lives there—to protect the Motherland, to protect our people," he added.

Ukraine has struck inside Russia recently, including a Dec. 30 attack on the border city of Belgorod that killed 25 people, injured over 100.

Putin also said Russian investigators concluded that Ukraine used U.S.-sup-

plied Patriot air defense systems to shoot down a Russian military transport plane in the Belgorod region on Jan. 24.

Russian authorities said the crash killed all 74 people onboard, including 65 Ukrainian POWs heading for a swap.

Ukrainian officials didn't deny the plane's downing but didn't take responsibility and called for an international investigation.

Putin said Russia wouldn't just welcome but would "insist" on an international inquiry on what he described as a "crime" by Ukraine.



Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban attends a European Union summit in Brussels, Belgium.

## Israel and Lebanon are prepping for a war neither wants, but many fear it's becoming inevitable

**Monitoring Desk**  
BEIRUT: The prospect of a full-scale war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militia terrifies people on both sides of the border, but some see it as an inevitable fallout from Israel's ongoing war against Hamas in Gaza.

Such a war could be the most destructive either side has ever experienced.

Israel and Hezbollah each have lessons from their last war, in 2006, a monthlong conflict that

ended in a draw. They've also had four months to prepare for another war, even as the United States tries to prevent a widening of the conflict.

Here's a look at each side's preparedness, how war might unfold and what's being done to prevent it. The 2006 war, six years after Israeli forces withdrew from south Lebanon, erupted after Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers and killed several others in a cross-border raid.

## Dissident Russian rockers held in Thailand fly to Israel

**Monitoring Desk**  
BANGKOK: A dissident Russian-Belarusian rock band held in Thailand on immigration charges have left the kingdom to fly to Israel, according to a post Thursday on the group's official Facebook page.

Bi-2 have criticised Russian President Vladimir Putin and the war in Ukraine, and their arrest sparked fears they would be deported to Russia where they would face persecution.

## Ukraine and Russia swap 400 POWs

**Monitoring Desk**  
KYIV: Russia and Ukraine traded hundreds of prisoners of war on Wednesday, just a week after Moscow said Kyiv had shot down a plane carrying captured Ukrainian soldiers to an exchange.

The crash of a Russian military cargo plane near the border with Ukraine — which Russia said killed 65 Ukrainian POWs — had thrown doubt on future prisoner swaps between the two sides.

But in a series of coordinated announcements, both sides hailed the latest agreement to free more than 400 people captured dur-

ing the course of the two-year war. Russia's defence ministry said 195 of its soldiers were freed, while Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said 207 people — both soldiers and civilians — had returned to Ukraine.

"Our people are back. 207 of them. We return them home no matter what," Zelensky said in a social media post. Russia's defence ministry said "195 Russian servicemen... were returned home". The exchange was brokered by the United Arab Emirates — which has played a role in several previous swaps.

## Humanitarian 'collapse' facing Gaza, warns UN

**Monitoring Desk**  
GAZA CITY: Artillery fire pounded southern Gaza early on Wednesday as Israel said it had begun "flooding Hamas tunnels" and mediators sought a halt to the nearly four-month hostilities.

The focus of the fighting in recent weeks has been Khan Yunis, the southern Gaza Strip's main city, where a constant barrage of air strikes and shelling rent the air all night.

The health ministry recorded 125 deaths across southern Gaza in the latest Israel strikes.

United Nations agencies' chiefs said a bitter row over the main aid organisation for Palestinians could "have catastrophic consequences for the people of Gaza".

Major donors, including the United States and

Germany, have suspended funding to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, over accusations that several staff members were involved in the Oct 7 raids in Israel.

Withholding the funds was "perilous and would result in the collapse of the humanitarian system in Gaza", the heads of the UN agencies said in a joint statement.

Meanwhile, mediation efforts gathered pace following a Sunday meeting of top US, Israeli, Egyptian and Qatari officials that produced a proposed framework for a new truce and prisoner release.

The Israeli army said on Wednesday its troops had killed 15 "terrorists" in northern Gaza, and captured 10 "militants" during an attack on a school where they were allegedly hiding.

## Pentagon calls out Chinese companies it says are helping Beijing's military

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday added more than a dozen Chinese companies to a list created by the Defense Department to highlight firms it says are allegedly working with Beijing's military, as part of a broader effort to keep American technology from aiding China.

New additions to the list, first reported by Reuters, were posted on the Department of Defense website and include memory chip maker YMTC, artificial intelligence company Megvii, lidar maker Hesai Technology and tech company NetPosa.

Amid strained ties between the world's two biggest economies, the updated list is one of numerous actions Washington has taken in recent years to highlight and restrict Chinese companies that it says may

strengthen Beijing's military.

A spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington said China opposed the move and called it an abuse of state power, adding that it ran counter to the US's "alleged commitment to market competition and international fair trade."

Hesai Group said it does not sell products to any military in any country and it does not have ties with any military. The company said it was disappointed to be added to the list.

YMTC, and Megvii did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

While being placed on the list doesn't involve immediate bans, it can be a blow to designated companies' reputations and represents a stark warning to US entities and companies about the risks of conducting business with them.



A Palestinian man carries bags of flour distributed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

## China quietly expanding influence in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan

**Monitoring Desk**  
KABUL: While most of the world treats Afghanistan's Taliban government as a pariah, China is growing diplomatic and economic links — and Kabul is happy for the attention.

Top-level meetings between officials, new mineral deals, and the upgrading of transport routes between the two countries are regularly championed by Taliban government officials.

While Beijing has

played down the formality of these growing links, it is steadily increasing investment and exposure — a relationship that could benefit both parties, analysts and diplomats say.

"The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is a challenging terrain, but the characteristic of the Chinese is to go where no one else goes, trying to gain advantages," said Valerie Niquet, an analyst with the Foundation for Strategic Research in Paris.

## Bulldozers knock down 600 years old mosque in New Delhi

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW DELHI: Bulldozers have knocked down a centuries-old mosque in India's capital, a member of the building's managing committee said on Thursday, during a demolition drive to remove "illegal" structures from a forest reserve.

The demolition comes at a sensitive time in India with nationalist activists emboldened in their long campaign for the replacement of several prominent mosques with Hindu temples.

The Masjid Akhoni in New Delhi, which its caretakers say is around 600 years old, was home to 22 students enrolled in an Islamic boarding school.

It was torn down on Tuesday in a forest of Mehrauli, an affluent neighbourhood dotted with centuries-old ruins from settlements predating modern Delhi.

Mohammad Zaffar, a member of the mosque's managing committee, told AFP that it had not received any prior notice before a demolition carried out "in the dark of the night."

# Pak calls for full implementation of ICJ judgment on Gaza; urges UNSC to play mandated role

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan on Thursday called for the full implementation of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)'s provisional judgment on Gaza requiring an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, urging the UN Security Council to play its mandated role for the purpose.

"Pakistan also calls for the full implementation

of ICJ's provisional judgment to uphold human rights, dignity, and identity of the Palestinian people as per the UN Charter, relevant resolutions, and international law. The implementation of these provisional measures requires an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to bring about an end to the suffering faced by the people of

Gaza," Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in her weekly press briefing.

Expressing deep concerns about the ongoing oppression of Palestinian people, she strongly condemned the Israeli attack inside the Ibn Sina Hospital in Jenin which she said fell in the category of war crimes being perpetrated

against the Palestinian people. "These ongoing atrocities go against the spirit of the provisional measures decided by the International Court of Justice to protect the people of Gaza," she remarked. Besides, she said the suspension of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) also went



ISLAMABAD: The Ambassadors-Designates of Russia, Italy and Mongolia presenting their diplomatic credentials to President Dr. Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.



QUETTA: Caretaker Home Minister Captain (retd) Mir Muhammad Zubair Jamali enquiring about health of policemen injured in Mach terror incident

## Aneeq says Ministry to reveal hajj training, biometric schedule next week

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed Thursday said that the ministry plans to release the comprehensive training and biometric schedule for Hajj pilgrims next week, aiming to provide enhanced facilitation for the pilgrimage.

Talking to the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al Maliki, regarding the finalization of preparations for the impending Hajj pilgrimage, the minister said Pakistani pilgrims now have the conven-

ience of completing their Saudi Visa biometrics from the comfort of their homes.

The minister said that the implementation of distinctive initiatives aimed at improving the facilitation of Pakistani Hajj pilgrims this year. Furthermore, the completion of Hajj arrangements is progressing well in advance of the established schedule.

Speaking on the occasion, Al Maliki extended congratulations to the Pakistan Hajj Mission for being recognized among the top three award-winning countries.

## Govt. pursues extradition of fugitive journalist

ISLAMABAD: Interpol has declined the Federal Ministry of Interior's plea for the re-arrest of journalist Syed Fawad Ali Shah, who fled Pakistan after facing multiple charges.

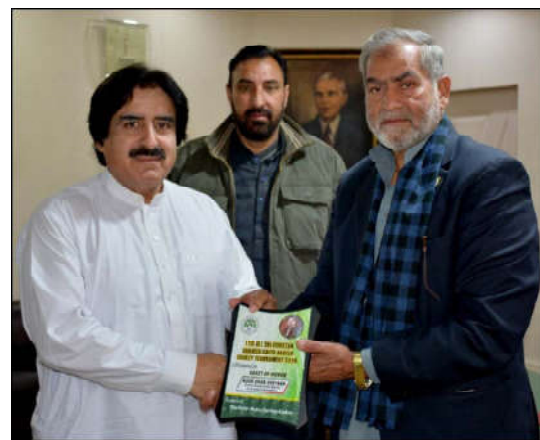
The journalist, accused under conspiracy, secret, and cybercrime acts, managed to slip away despite bail from the Islamabad High Court, prompting international pursuit.

Speaking anonymously, a senior government official disclosed that Fawad Ali Shah's evasion led to a renewed effort by Pakistani authorities to bring him to justice. How-

ever, Interpol's refusal highlighted discrepancies in the case's eligibility for international intervention.

Following Fawad's escape abroad, a fresh case was lodged against him by the Federal Investigation Agency's counter-terrorism wing. The file, now sealed, underscores the gravity of Fawad's alleged offenses and the government's determination to secure his return.

Undeterred by Interpol's rebuff, the government is mobilizing diplomatic channels with Thailand and Malaysia to facilitate Fawad's apprehension and extradition to Pakistan.



QUETTA: Deputy Director Sports Syed Naeem Akhtar presenting a shield to Director General Public Relations Balochistan Muhammad Noor Khetran in connection with 11<sup>th</sup> All Balochistan Shaheed Saeed Akhtar Hockey Tournament.

## Secretary Health says Step afoot to control maternal, child disease for reducing mortality rate

QUETTA (APP): Balochistan Health Secretary Abdullah Khan on Thursday said that Balochistan government was making every possible effort to control maternal and child diseases for reducing the mortality rate.

He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting to review the performance of Sibi and Zhab divisions.

The meeting was attended by Special Secretary Health Mujib-ur Rahman Qamrani, DG Health Dr. Farooq Hoth, Additional Secretary Atiqullah Khan, DG, PPHI Zakir Nasir, Deputy Secretary Liaquat Kakar, Provincial Coordinator MNCH Gul Sabin Azam, Ghorizai, EO. C. Dr. Aftab, Divisional Directors Zhab Dr. Nasreen and Section Officer Tahoor Khan, all DHOs and MSs and

DSMs were attended it through online.

Addressing the meeting, Abdullah Khan said that attendance of all staff including doctors, nurses, paramedical staff, lady health workers should be ensured, no shortage would be tolerated in the provision of facilities related to mother and child in the province.

He said that the Department of Health, government was making every possible effort to control maternal and child diseases for reducing the mortality rate.

MNCH program has deployed doctors, nurses, lady health visitors, community midwives in the maternity and child departments of district and other hospitals, as well as providing ambulances, essential equipment and medicines, he said.

## Higher costs of living hit election drives

KARACHI (INP): Higher living costs and political uncertainty have muted Pakistan's once boisterous election campaigns, with both candidates and those who supply them with materials bemoaning the need to do more with much less.

The Feb 8 general election, the first since 2018, will take place as Pakistan battles an economic crisis, inflation running at almost 30 per cent and a weak recovery path under a \$3 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout.

The vote also follows a widespread state-sanctioned crackdown on the PTI whose founder has been in jail since August over a raft of charges, including corruption. "There was a lot of activity in previous elections and our business boomed, but in this election our business has been reduced to half compared to the last one," said Jawad Jiwani.

## KP political figures receive threats ahead of elections

PESHAWAR (INP): The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) on Thursday released a list of political figures who received threats ahead of the general election 2024.

According to the Counter Terrorism Department, 15 politicians from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have received threats from terrorists.

According to CTD Political leaders who received threats are, MNA Mohsin Dawar, Ex-provincial minister Imtiaz Qureshi, Senator Hidayatullah, former PML-N MNA Amir Maqam, former PTI MNA Pir Mansoor Shah and Shah Muhammad, JUI-F's Malik Adnan Wazir and Ehsanullah, Senator Bakhti Afsar and Senator Maulana Abdur Rasheed.

## Pakistan's envoy meets Italian police chief

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Pakistan Ali Javed recently called on Italian Police Chief Vittorio Pisani, at the Police Headquarters in Rome and discussed matter of mutual concerns. Central Director for Immigration and Border Police assisted the Police Chief along with other delegates while the Ambassador was assisted by Deputy Head of Mission and Third Secretary, said a press release issued here on Thursday. During the hour-long interaction, both sides noted with satisfaction the trajectory of bilateral ties and acknowledged the well-established services and contributions of 300,000 Pakistanis residing in Italy.

## President for expanding trade, cultural ties with Russia, Italy, Mongolia

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday urged the need to further expand trade, economic, cultural and people-to-people relations with Russia, Italy and Mongolia.

He said that Pakistan offered immense investment opportunities for foreign investors, who should benefit from its business-friendly environment by investing in various economic sectors. The president expressed these views while talking to the ambassadors-designates of Russia, Italy and Mongolia, who separately called on him at the Aiwan-e-Sadr and presented their diplomatic credentials. Speaking to the Ambassador-designate of the Russian Federation to Pakistan, Albert P. Khorev, President Alvi expressed Pakistan's desire to further

strengthen bilateral relations with Russia in the fields of trade, economy, tourism and culture.

He expressed the hope that the new ambassador would further promote bilateral ties between the two countries.

Talking to the Ambassador-designate of Italy to Pakistan, Marilina Armellini, the president highlighted the need to further enhance bilateral trade between the two countries.

He said that Italian investors should benefit from the investment opportunities under the Special Investment Facilitation Council in various sectors.

He stated that the Pakistani diaspora was playing an important role in the development of Italy and was acting as a bridge between the two countries.

## Caretaker Minister Home visits CMH, inquires about health of Mach injured personnel

QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial Minister for Home, Mir Muhammad Zubair Jamali visited the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) on Thursday.

During the visit, the caretaker Minister inquired about the health of those injured in the terrorism incidents in Mach earlier this week.

Mir Zubair Jamali praised the spirit of injured personnel.

Speaking to them, the

Minister said that the soil of Balochistan always needs the jawans like them.

He said that the whole nation is proud of you people.

The injured cops said that we didn't let the nefarious designs of terrorists succeed.

They pledged to serve the country and nation with the same spirit.

The caretaker Minister on the occasion prayed for early recovery of all injured.



QUETTA: Chief Executive Officer QESCO Engr. Shafqat Ali inaugurating newly constructed 132 KV Industrial Estate Bostan Grid Station

## Pervaiz, other accused could not be indicted in illegal appointments in PA case

LAHORE (Online): PTI leader and former Chief Minister (CM) Punjab Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi and other accused could not be indicted in illegal appointments in Punjab Assembly (PA) case Thursday.

The Anti Corruption Court Lahore while adjourning the proceedings due to absence of the accused has summoned them on next hearing for their indictment.

Judge Arshid Hussain Bhutta of anti corruption

court heard the case.

Pervaiz Elahi and other accused could not be presented in the court despite being summoned for indictment. Upon it the court while expressing annoyance announced interval in the hearing.

The court remarked during hearing when the accused are appearing in accountability court then why they are not appearing here.

Judge remarked the accused be presented here too.

## Annual Tableeghi Ijtima to be held in Sibi from February 10-13

QUETTA: The annual Tableeghi Ijtima (congregation) is scheduled to be held in Sibi from February 10-13.

The collective prayer would be offered at morning of February 13.

This was informed in a meeting held under presidency of Deputy Commissioner Sibi, Khudae-Rahim on Thursday.

The meeting reviewed the arrangements for the annual Sibi Tableeghi including security.

The meeting was attended by the senior superintendent of police, Sibi, Inayatullah Bangulzai, Assistant Commissioner Jarullah kakar, Assistant Commissioner Lehri, Owais Ahmed and other concerned officials.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner said that effective and foolproof security arrangements would be made for the annual Tableeghi Ijtima in Sibi.

## CDWP okays Rs2 bln project, recommends 3 projects worth Rs136.6 bln 3 to ECNEC

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Central Development Working Party (CDWP) here on Thursday approved a development project worth Rs.2 billion and recommended three projects worth Rs. 136.660 billion to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) for further consideration.

The CDWP meeting was chaired by Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan while among others, it was attended by Secretary Planning, Awais Manzoor Sumra, senior officials from Planning Commission and Federal Ministries and Divisions and Chairman ACS (Dev) from provincial governments.

CDWP considered projects related to energy,

physical planning housing and transport and communications sectors were considered in the meeting.

The forum approved a project related to the physical planning and housing sector, specifically focusing on the "Construction of Litigants Facilitation Center for Litigants of District Courts in Sector G-10/1 Islamabad," with a cost of Rs. 1,989.990 million.

The primary objective of the project is to establish a facility catering to the needs of litigants and lawyers. It will include various amenities such as the Litigants Facilitation Center, Cafeteria, Multipurpose Hall, Banks, Dispensary, Shop, Bar Room (Male and Female), Prayer Hall, Library and Day Care, Office of IBA and IBC, along with Soft & Hard Landscaping and Internal Road.

A project related to Energy sector under the title "Expansion of 48MW Jagran Hydropower Station (Phase-II) in District Neelum, AJ&K (Revised), with a cost of Rs. 14,744 million, has been considered and recommended to ECNEC for further consideration.

The Power Development Organization of the Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is designated for the operations and maintenance of the project.

The financing structure involves Rs. 12,717.764 million to be sourced from AFD, while the remaining Rs. 1,277.753 million is proposed to be funded through the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP).

## Pakistan, Maldives agree to strengthen bilateral ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan and Maldives on Thursday agreed to strengthen bilateral relations and explore avenues for enhanced cooperation, particularly focusing on trade and environmental initiatives.

The bilateral relations were discussed during a telephone conversation between Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and President of Maldives Dr Mohamed Muizzu.

"The purpose of the telephone call was to follow up on the discussions during their meeting held on December 02, 2023, on the sidelines of the 28th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) in Abu Dhabi," a Prime Minister Office news release said.



CHAGAI: Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani meeting with tribal elites in connection with election campaign at Sanjrani House

## Dr Jogezi says Health dept witnesses improvement in healthcare services

QUETTA (APP): Jogezi has appreciated the tireless efforts of the Health Department to elevate service delivery and provide the best healthcare to the citizens. Caretaker Minister for Health Dr. Ameer Muhammad Khan Jogezi has also lauded the efforts of Secretary Health Abdullah Khan and positively noted that the medical practitioners have been provided more facilities now.

He said that during his tenure, the stocks and availability of safe delivery equipment had been improved and medicines were more readily available.

He acknowledged that access to immunization services has also been steadily improving. Looking to the future, Dr Jogezi expressed hope that in the future health minister would continue to push the reform agenda for the betterment of the people.

Under the program, independent monitors have collected data to evaluate the available facilities in hospitals across the province. The department has conducted review meetings with DHOs and PPHIs while using this data and issued directives to immediately address these deficiencies and improve service delivery.

Dr Amir Muhammad

The functionality of 'Labor Room' in hospitals, enhancement of health education and improvement in immunization services were concentrated in the reform agenda.

Under the program, independent monitors have collected data to evaluate the available facilities in hospitals across the province. The department has conducted review meetings with DHOs and PPHIs while using this data and issued directives to immediately address these deficiencies and improve service delivery.

Dr Amir Muhammad



LAHORE: Former Chief Minister Punjab and Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) President, Chaudhry Parvez Elahi arriving for case hearing, at District Court.

## Samina Zehri says Determination of nation will not decrease until end of last terrorist

QUETTA: Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri has strongly condemned the terrorist attacks in Mach Bolan, Kolpur and Sibi. In her condemnation statement, she expressed grief and sorrow over the loss of precious lives and loss of government property in the incidents of terrorism in Mach, Kolpur and Sibi yesterday.

She said that the enemy wants to sabotage the peace and order situation in the country which will not be allowed to succeed under any circumstances. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri expressed deep sorrow and grief over the martyrdom of those martyred

in the attacks and said that the security forces personnel who prevented the terrorists from carrying out major operations in the aforementioned incidents are the heroes of the nation.

Expressing pain and sadness to the families of SHO Mach and other martyrs, she said that the martyrs demonstrated professional bravery and crushed the nefarious intentions of the terrorists and martyred themselves while performing their duty. The nation will always remember his sacrifice. She paid tribute to the security forces for thwarting the terrorist attacks in Mach, Kolpur that their timely action saved the country.



QUETTA: Commissioner Quetta Division Hamza Shafqat presiding over a meeting regarding security and other arrangements for general elections through video link