

Independent

dailyindkhi@gmail.com

Chief Editor: Syed Farooq Shah

Karachi

Ph: 0300-3898091 Vol: 06. No. 18 Rajab 21, 1445 AH Friday February 02, 2024 Pages 04 Price Rs. 12.00

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, Federal Secretary 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.



KHUZDAR: Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addresses during public gathering meeting as a part of Election Campaign in connection of General Election 2024 coming ahead, in Khuzdar.

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.



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

India involved in terrorist incidents inside Pakistan: FO

ISLAMABAD (INP): Foreign Office has said that India is involved in terrorist incidents inside Pakistan.

At her weekly news briefing in Islamabad on Thursday, Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said the Indian external affairs ministry denied the veracity of our credible evidence regarding New Delhi's involvement in extra territorial and extra judicial killings in Pakistan.

She said Pakistan has also shared the evidence of India's involvement in terrorist acts with friendly countries and other relevant countries especially the ones with which we need further cooperation in holding to account the individuals behind the terror acts.

The spokesperson India's charges of terrorism against Pakistan are neither new nor credible, describing them as ridiculous. She pointed out that India has been involved in terror incidents and extra territorial and extra judicial killings in countries around the world.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch also voiced serious concerns over the attacks on Muslim places of worship in India. She said there is a concerted campaign to demolish mosques in India and replace them with temples.

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.

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.

Public holiday announced on Feb 08

ISLAMABAD (Online): Public holiday has been announced on February 8 in connection with general election.

Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has approved public holiday on February 8. Notification in this regard has been issued.

All the public and private offices, educational institutions and business centers will remain closed.

The EC while announcing the holiday has said this decision has been taken to facilitate voters so that they could not face any difficulty in exercising their right to vote.

The announcement for holding general election on February 8 has been made.



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

'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 empathises 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.

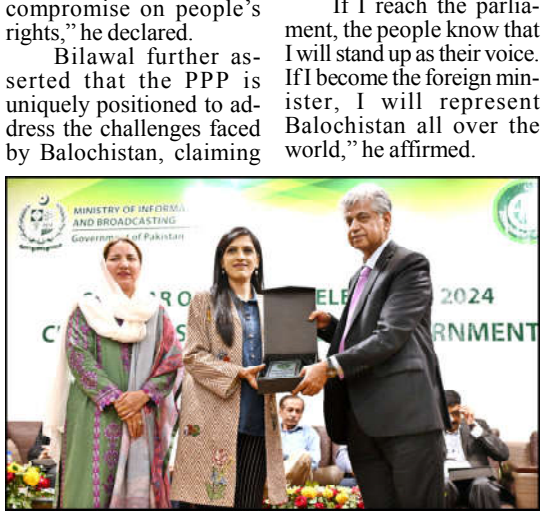
Bilawal further asserted that the PPP is uniquely positioned to address the challenges faced by Balochistan, claiming

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."

In a symbolic reference to the PPP's electoral symbol, the 'arrow,' Bilawal promised a strong representation for Balochistan if elected. "On February 8, there will be a rain of arrows across Balochistan."

If I reach the parliament, the people know that I will stand up as their voice. If I become the foreign minister, I will represent Balochistan all over the world," he affirmed.



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information & Broadcasting, Murtaza Solangi presenting shield to the guest speakers during the seminar on General Elections 2024 Challenges for the New Government and the Road Map organized by Press Information Department of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting at Auditorium National Museum of Pakistan.

DG Rangers leads strategic meeting to fortify general election security

KARACHI (APP): In a significant development aimed at fortifying security measures for the upcoming general elections in the city, a high-level meeting was convened at the headquarters of Pakistan Rangers Sindh under the chairmanship of DG Rangers Sindh Major General Azhar Waqas.

The meeting, attended by a constellation of key stakeholders including IG Police, Provincial Election Commissioner Sindh, Additional IGP Karachi, and senior officials from various sensitive institutions, delved into a comprehensive review of security arrangements for the impending electoral process across the province.

Central to the discussions was the approval of a meticulously crafted plan of action designed to bolster security protocols during the general elections.

It was unanimously decided that the joint flag march and snap-checking operations conducted by Rangers and Police would be substantially intensified to ensure security at entry and exit routes.

Additionally, Sindh Rangers troops were earmarked to serve as a swift response force, ready to address any emergent security concerns.

The meeting also underscored the imperative of strict adherence to directives issued by the provincial government and the Election Commission.



HYDERABAD: Former Minister for Information Sindh Sharjeel Inaam Memon addressing press conference along with President JUP Sahibzada Abulhair Muhammad Zubair at Rajput farm house.

SHC orders for removing obscene material from social media platforms

KARACHI (Online): Sindh High Court (SHC) has ordered to remove obscene material from social media platforms.

Case pertaining to presence of obscene material on social media in the name of family Vlogging in Karachi came up for hearing before Chief Justice (CJ) SHC Thursday.

The court issued written order on the petition filed by Hassan Beg.

The CJ SHC ordered to take immediate action for removing immoral material from face book, tik tok, Youtube, snap chat and other apps.

'Gender Desk' established at ECP Sindh

KARACHI (APP): A 'Gender Desk' has been established in the office of the provincial election commissioner of Sindh to resolve the grievances of deprived segment of the society in view of upcoming general elections 2024.

According to details, the Gender Desk will be functional from February 01-10, to address genuine complaints of deprived members of the society.

The desk will work round-the-clock, to redressal complaints of women, senior citizens, transgender, persons with disabilities and minority communities. The desk will work under the supervision of Deputy Director Gender and Social section.

Iran hands over bodies of nine Pakistani labourers

ISLAMABAD (INP): Iran on Thursday handed over bodies of 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 affliction of damage to the countries' relations.

Terrorist ring leader Ashraf Sheikh with accomplice killed in D.I Khan: ISPR

RAWALPINDI (APP): The security forces on Thursday gunned down terrorists ring leader Ashraf Sheikh, the high value target, along with his accomplice Burhan Ullah after an intense exchange of fire during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Dera Ismail Khan District. According to an Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release, weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the killed terrorists who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities, including targeting of innocent civilians.

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 Drrap 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 deregulation 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. The meeting was informed by the Ministry of National Health Services and DRAP that through the online portal of the Authority, citizens could file complaints regarding the non-availability of medicines in the market.



KARACHI: Caretaker Interior Minister Dr. Gohar Ejaz meeting with Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori at governor house.

Nawaz vows to remove KP people's sense of deprivation

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 Tahreek-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.

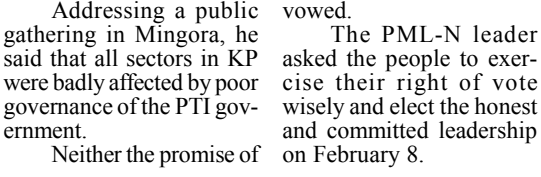
Neither the promise of construction of 350 dams was fulfilled nor five million houses were constructed or 10 million jobs created, he added.

Where there 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.



KARACHI: Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P) Senior Deputy Convener, Dr. Farooq Sattar convincing to Independent Candidates during meeting regarding seats adjustment of General Election 2024, held Defence Clifton Town Office in Karachi.

Over 2.14m voters to elect 4 MNAs, 9 MPAs in Karachi's Central district

KARACHI (APP): Over 2.14 million registered voters in Karachi's Central district will elect four National Assembly members and nine legislators of provincial Assembly of Sindh on February 08 general elections. According to data released by the Election Commission of Pakistan, after current digital census, the Central district is one of the largest district of Karachi division where one more NA and PA seats have been increased due to the rising population.

National Assembly constituencies NA 247, NA 248, NA 249 and NA 250 fall in the district Central Karachi having total number of voter 2144926.

The hundreds of candidates belonging to (MQM-P), Jammata-e-Islami (JI), Pakistan People's party (PPP), Tahreek e Labaik Pakistan (TLP) and the independent candidates were vying for NA and PA seats.

Out of 2144926 eligible voters almost 50 percent each male and female voters will exercise right of franchise in the general polls. The Election Commission of Pakistan with the help of Caretaker provincial government, Sindh Police, Rangers and law enforcing agencies have adopted administrative and security arrangements for smooth conduct of General elections. The District Returning Officer/Deputy Commissioner Fuad Ghaffar Soomro has said all required arrangements were made for holding of the general polls and strict action will be taken against violation of ECP's code of conduct.

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, Yusuf 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; 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 Lamba/ 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-t-hern 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 yesteryear. 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 progressive-ness, 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 incurred 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

Commercer 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.

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. Shamshad 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 Zafar 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.

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 (MoM) 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. Shamshad 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.



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.

Jl to hold public meeting on Feb 3

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

Party spokesperson told 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.



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.

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.

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.

During his visit to the city of Saints here on Thursday, the caretaker, CM Punjab, visited different sections of the police station, including the community room, VSO room, front desk, and SHO room. He lauded Inspector General Dr Usman Anwar for his initiatives to provide relief to the masses.

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

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

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 Plant costing Rs.6 billion and Mallam Women Business and Community Center costing Rs.589 million started under the auspices of WSSC Kohat.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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."



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 month-long 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.

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-

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.

US to press for humanitarian action on Myanmar

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON: Members of the House of Representatives on Thursday will launch the first bipartisan caucus on Myanmar to pressure US administrations to act on the crisis in the Southeast Asian country since the military staged a coup three years ago, according to a statement Republican Bill Huizenga of Michigan and Democrat Betty McCollum of Minnesota will chair the Congressional Burma Caucus, which the statement from the two lawmakers said was intended to bolster congressional support.

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 Israeli 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.

Aneeq says

Ministry to reveal hajj training, biometric schedule next week

Independent Report
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 convenience 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.

UN Secretary-General urged to stop profiling campaign in Indian-held Kashmir

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Kashmir Institute of International Relations Altaf Hussain Wani has urged UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to assist in putting an end to the illicit profiling campaign carried out by the police in the Indian illegally occupied territory of Jammu and Kashmir, camouflaged as a census.

Wani APP that in a collective letter to the UN Secretary-General and various UN special rapporteurs, he emphasized the illicit, unconstitutional, and human rights dimensions of the initiative. "The absence of transparency in initiating this campaign, launched without an official announcement from the authorities, has caused distress among the residents of the region. These individuals were already grappling with heightened fear and insecurity following the Modi government's audacious move to revoke the region's special status, a clear violation of UNSC resolutions."



KARACHI: Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori addressing a press conference at governor house.

SHC rejects JI plea against polling station transfer in Karachi's NA-232

KARACHI (INP): The Sindh High Court (SHC) on Thursday rejected a plea of Jamaat Islami's candidate against shifting of polling station in Karachi's NA-232.

Chief Justice Aqeel Ahmed Abbasi said that the Supreme Court has set guidelines for election. "We have to pray for elections being held peacefully".

AAG Saifuddin told the court that the petitioner had to submit his objection over polling station 30 days before the polling day. "The petitioner exercised his right and the polling station was changed".

Additional Advocate General said that the returning officer notified the polling station with his consent.

JI candidate Tofeequddin's counsel said that the polling station was changed and a distanced PS was notified.

DC chairs meeting on security arrangements for upcoming

SUKKUR (APP): Initiating a series of district level meetings, the Divisional Commissioner Sukkur, Fayyaz Hussain Abbasi on Thursday chaired a crucial session at the Commissioner's Office here, focusing on fair and free elections within a peaceful environment. The meeting extensively reviewed the arrangements for the upcoming general elections and the security plan.

The Divisional Commissioner emphasizing the need for fool-proof security arrangements across the Sukkur division, affirmed the citizens' right to vote in a tranquil environment. He called for meticulous planning to ensure the secure delivery of election materials, directing Deputy Inspector General of Police Abdul Hameed Khoso to promptly finalize comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).



HYDERABAD: Terminated employees of Municipal Corporation Hyderabad are holding protest demonstration for restoration of their jobs, at Hyderabad press club.

Omar Associates clinched RCA Karachi Inter-Departmental Cricket League trophy

KARACHI (APP): Omar Associates on Wednesday won the RCA Karachi Inter-Departmental Cricket League Tournament after beating Barrington Crescent Associates by six wickets at the KCCA Stadium. The final match was reduced to 30 overs due to heavy rain last night.

Barring first Barrington Crescent Associates managed to score 107 runs all out in 29.5 overs. Muhammad Asghar was their top scorer with 21 runs.

Omar Associates' Saqib Khan grabbed four wickets for 15 runs while Muhammad Asad bowled out two batters for 21 runs and M. Tariq Khan also got two wickets for 26 runs.

Omar Associates achieved the target (109) in 19.5 overs for fall of four wickets. Ram Ravi made 49 runs with the help of one six and three fours, while Yasir Mushtaq scored 26.

Faraz Ahmed Khan and Muhammad Asghar of Barrington Crescent Associates got two wickets each for 19 and 31 runs respectively. Chief guest Nadeem Omar, President of Regional Cricket Association Karachi, distributed prizes. Nadeem Omar congratulated the tournament committee specially its chairman Khalid Nafees, secretary M Touseef Siddiqui and Azam Khan for organizing the tournament.



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

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 provisions 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 against the spirit of the ICJ's provisional measures. We urge reconsideration of the decision to suspend funding of UNRWA which has a crucial role in protecting and supporting the Palestinian people, she remarked.

She told the newsmen that on February 5, the government and people of Pakistan would observe the Kashmir Solidarity Day to reaffirm their solidarity with the Kashmiri people in their just struggle for realization of their inalienable right to self-determination.

"Pakistan will continue to extend political, diplomatic and moral support to our Kashmiri brothers and sisters for the just and peaceful settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolutions," the spokesperson reiterated.

Addressing the seminar on "General elections 2024, Challenges for the new government and the road map", organized by the Press Information Department.

Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi said the caretaker government was fully prepared and committed to conducting general elections on February 8.

The minister, in his speech, said that as the government's spokesperson, he had been reiterating the caretaker government's commitment to 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.

Senior journalist Mehmood Sham said that there were several challenges ahead that must be dealt with collective wisdom. Such seminars should have been organized much before the elections, he added.

Addressing the seminar, the Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said the caretaker government was fully prepared and committed to conducting general elections on February 8.

The minister, in his speech, said that as the government's spokesperson, he had been reiterating the caretaker government's commitment to 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.

Senior journalist Mehmood Sham said that there were several challenges ahead that must be dealt with collective wisdom. Such seminars should have been organized much before the elections, he added.

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 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.

He also asked the ambassador to help in expediting the issuance of visas to Pakistani students.

Speaking to the non-resident Ambassador of Mongolia to Pakistan, Tuvshin Badra, the president said that both countries needed to further promote trade, economic, and cultural relations for the mutual benefit of the two sides.

He congratulated the newly appointed envoys and expressed the hope that they would play their role in further improving bilateral ties of their countries with Pakistan.



SANGHAR: Bibi Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, the daughter of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto addressing to party women workers gathering during Election Campaign at Khipro.

Makkah Halal Forum 2024 Saudi Minister witnesses FPCCI-MANAFEA agreement

Independent Report
KARACHI: Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh, President FPCCI, has represented Pakistan's private sector in Makkah Halal Forum 2024; and, has apprised that the global Halal foods market size has reached a Partnership is a coalition of Makkah Chamber, Madina Chamber, Jeddah Chamber, Taif Chamber and Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture. The agreement is aimed at enhancement of Pakistan's export to OIC



whopping \$2.5 trillion. It doesn't stop there as it will continue to grow at 13.5 percent per year for the next 10 years - resulting in an expected more than two-fold increase in the global market size to \$5.8 trillion by the year 2033.

The highlight of FPCCI delegation's visit was signing of FPCCI-MANAFEA Agreement; which was witnessed by H.E. Mr. Majid bin Abdullah Al Qasabi, Commerce Minister of Saudi Arabia. MANAFEA

Mr. Atif Ikram Sheikh explained that Pakistan has got all what it takes to swiftly claim its share in the global Halal foods market as all food products produced in Pakistan are Halal; and, no extra labor or costs will incur if we target more of that produce to exports. Interestingly, Halal foods market is growing in most of the countries - irrespective of whether Muslim or not.



HYDERABAD: Jamat-e-Islami (JI) Vice Chief, Dr. Mairaj-ul-Huda Siddiqui addresses to media persons during press conference, in Hyderabad.

General Elections: Media houses gear up for comprehensive coverage

KARACHI (APP): As the country gears up for its upcoming general election on February 8th, media houses across the nation are preparing to provide extensive coverage while adhering to the strict code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

Leading news channels and newspapers have outlined their plans to ensure fair and unbiased reporting during this crucial electoral process.

Speaking on behalf of PTV News, senior journalist Noman Shabbir emphasized the importance of upholding journalistic integrity. "Our team is committed to providing viewers with accurate and timely information, while also respecting the guidelines set forth by the ECP," he stated.

Noman Shabbir emphasized the crucial nature of reporting elections, urging fellow journalists to exercise caution, especially when delivering election results.

Similarly, "Daily Pak Karachi," a Sindh newspaper, expressed its dedication to upholding the highest standards of journalism. Editor-in-chief, Ghulam Nabi Chandio, assured readers that the publication would cover the election with impartiality and professionalism. "The public relies on us to deliver unbiased news, and we take that responsibility very seriously," Chandio affirmed.

Reflecting on their past experiences covering elections, seasoned journalists shared insights into the challenges and rewards of such endeavors. "Elections are a test of our journalistic ethics and commitment to the truth," remarked senior reporter of the APP, Syed Karam Ali Shah. "Media outlets must maintain credibility and avoid sensationalism, especially during this critical time," he added.

As the nation awaits the outcome of the general election, citizens can expect comprehensive coverage from media outlets dedicated to upholding the principles of democracy and journalistic integrity.

Political & economic stability to be main challenge for new elected govt: Speakers

KARACHI (APP): The speakers at a seminar on Thursday stressed the need for political and economic stability in the country which would be the main challenge for the newly elected government.

They were addressing the seminar on "General elections 2024, Challenges for the new government and the road map", organized by the Press Information Department.

Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi said the caretaker government was fully prepared and committed to conducting general elections on February 8.

The minister, in his speech, said that as the government's spokesperson, he had been reiterating the caretaker government's commitment to 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.

Senior journalist Mehmood Sham said that there were several challenges ahead that must be dealt with collective wisdom. Such seminars should have been organized much before the elections, he added.

Addressing the seminar, the Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said the caretaker government was fully prepared and committed to conducting general elections on February 8.

The minister, in his speech, said that as the government's spokesperson, he had been reiterating the caretaker government's commitment to 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.

Senior journalist Mehmood Sham said that there were several challenges ahead that must be dealt with collective wisdom. Such seminars should have been organized much before the elections, he added.



KARACHI: Karachi Development Authority (KDA) Director General, Naveed Anwar being briefed by officials about construction works of new development projects under the supervision of local government department, located on Karimabad area in Karachi.

Higher costs of living hit Pakistan election campaigns too

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 currency while navigating a 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, who sells party flags in the commercial hub Karachi.

Candidate are hosting fewer outdoor gatherings for supporters and the trucks that usually drive up and down the streets, festooned with campaign posters and blaring music and slogans, are also noticeably quieter. Syed Arsalan Haider, a Karachi printer, said the cost of a square foot of banner was up by 130pc since the last election. Lahore printer Abdul Aziz said the cost of printing stickers had risen almost 70pc and posters by nearly 90pc.

TV adverts are also limited, with Senator Taj Haider from the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of prime ministerial candidate Bilawal Bhutto Zardari viewed his party chose TV over public rallies and printed materials in a bid to save costs.



HYDERABAD: Director General Colleges Sindh Professor Saleh Abbas Rizvi and other officials leave balloons during opening ceremony of 6th Sindh College Games, organized by Director General Colleges Sindh at Government Degree College Ground.