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Caretaker setup leaves behind useful strategy safeguarding national interests: PM

Expresses gratitude to cabinet members, officers, staff for successful operations of caretaker setup

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday said the caretaker setup in a short span of time had left behind a useful strategy for the upcoming elected government that would ensure public welfare and protect national interests.

"The caretaker government always gave priority to national interests while taking policy decisions as

it believed to work together for national stability and development," the prime minister said while chairing a meeting of the federal cabinet at Prime Minister office.

He said the government had improved the national economy, adding "we are leaving country's economy in a better condition than before".

He appreciated and

thanked his cabinet members and the civil servants for their tireless efforts during short tenure of the government.

The federal cabinet expressed satisfaction over the steps taken by the caretaker government regarding restructuring of various institutions, promotion of foreign investment and providing facilities to businesses.

Appreciating the prudent leadership of Prime Minister Kakar on behalf of the federal bureaucracy, the cabinet secretary said that he had taken important difficult decisions in interest of the country, which would have far-reaching results.

Among other agenda items, the cabinet, on the recommendation of the

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



QUETTA: Secretary Higher Education Zafar Ali Buledi, Director General Levies Naseebullah Kakar and Vice Chancellor Bolan University of Medical & Health Sciences Prof. Dr. Shabbir Ahmed Lehri meeting with Caretaker Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Ali Mardan Khan Domki

Pakistan won't allow spread of false propoganda on social media platforms: Solangi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Thursday that some elements were using social media platforms to incite violence, which was an illegal activity.

Addressing a press conference along with Prime Minister's Special Representative on Interfaith Harmony Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, he said the government would take strict action against such illegal activities under the law.

He said that freedom of expression under Article 19 of the Constitution was not unlimited, rather it was subject to law of the land.

Under Article 19, derogatory remarks against ju-

diary, armed forces and brotherly countries were not allowed, Solangi remarked.

He said that the companies earning billions of dollars from the social media platforms could not abdicate themselves from the responsibility if their platforms were used to disturb law and order in any country and incite people to violence and hatred, he maintained.

The minister said that social media platforms X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, Facebook and Instagram had been continuously used for propaganda, lies, defamation of government officials and harassment, and the companies owning these platforms would have to control this illegal activity.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Information Murtaza Solangi and Caretaker Federal Minister of National Heritage & Culture Syed Jamal Shah along with Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan H.E. Mitsuhiro Wada cutting cake to celebrate the 64th Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor.

Jan Achakzai criticizes PTI founder for decision about writing letter to IMF

Independent Report QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial Minister for Information, Jan Achakzai has criticized the founder of PTI, Imran Khan for his decision about writing letter to International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In an official statement issued here on Thursday, Jan Achakzai said that the founder of PTI has decided to send a letter to IMF, other investors and friendly countries for not extending financial assistance to Pakistan.

He said that it is very sorrowful that the PTI founder has become ready for playing with the economic future of Pakistan.

The PTI founder only wants chaos and instabil-

ity in the country. It had also been his policy in the past, Jan Achakzai added.

He further said that the announcement made by PTI about writing letter to IMF is irresponsible and unjustified.

The PTI has already made similar mistake in the past.

No political party had not done like that on allegations of rigging in year 2018.

He said that it is an unfortunate PTI founder wants to destabilize the country which had made him Prime Minister.

Jan Achakzai said that writing letter to IMF means playing with interests of Pakistan and it's people and suffer it from economic disorder.

Pakistan's total liquid foreign reserves reach \$ 13.097 billion

KARACHI (APP): The total liquid foreign reserves of Pakistan stood at US\$ 13,097.8 million while foreign reserves held by State Bank reached \$ 8,012.8 million in the week ended on February 16, 2024.

The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here on Thursday, informed that foreign exchange reserves held by the central bank decreased by \$ 44 million to \$ 8,012.8 million due to debt repayments during the week under review.

Meanwhile net foreign reserves held by commercial banks stood at \$ 5,085 million.

Total liquid foreign reserves held by the country, in the previous week ended on February 9, 2024, were \$ 13,149.1 million. Among them foreign reserves held by the central bank were \$ 8,056.5 million while net foreign reserves held by commercial banks were \$ 5,092.6 million.

Jamali takes notice of kidnapping of labourers from Kachhi district

Independent Report QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial Minister for Home, Mir Zubair Jamali has taken notice of abduction of two labourers from Kachhi district and directed the district administration to ensure their safe recovery.

According to an official hand out issued here on Thursday, the caretaker Minister called the Additional Deputy Commissioner Kachhi, Abdul Sattar Mengal and inquired about the incident.

The ADC Kachhi told the Minister Home the levies force is taking action for hunt and recovery of the kidnapped labourers.

In this regard, help of the local tribal elders is also being sought, the ADC Kachhi maintained.

However, the Minister directed him to mobilize all available resources for safe recovery of the labourers.

QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan presiding over a meeting of Task Force for Anti-Polio campaign

Matters about formation of Govt discussed: PML-N and PPP Balochistan's parliamentary parties vow to resolve issues of province

Independent Report

QUETTA: The parliamentary groups of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) Balochistan have expressed resolve to resolve the issues of province together. The parliamentary groups of the two major political parties of the province expressed the resolve about resolving issues of the province in a joint meeting held in Islamabad on Thursday. Those who were in attendance at the meeting were included former Chief Ministers of the province, Nawab Sanaullah Zehri, Jam Kamal Khan and Mir Sarfraz Bugti.

Also present in the meeting were the provincial President of PPP, Mir Changezi Jamali, provincial President of PML-N, Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail, other senior leaders and members of national and provincial assemblies- elect including Jamal Shah Kakar, Ali Madad Jatak, Mir Ubaid Gorgej, Sardar Sarfraz Domki, Asfandyar Kakar, Abdul Khaliq Achakzai, Toor Utmankhail, Muhammad Khan Lehri, Maulvi Noorullah, Sardar Abdul Rehman Khetran, Wali Muhammad Noorzai, Asim Kurd, Sardar Faisal Jamali, Barkat Ali Rind, besides others.



QUETTA: Nawab Sanaullah Zehri, Jaffar Khan Mandokhail, Jam Kamal Khan and others are participating in the important meeting of Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) regarding government formation in Balochistan, in Quetta.

Ex-Rawalpindi commissioner retracts 'rigging' accusations against CEC, CJP

"I apologise to entire bureaucratic circles of country whose reputation has been seriously dented by my actions"

RAWALPINDI (INP): In a surprising turn of events, the Ex-Commissioner Rawalpindi, Liaquat Chatha, on Thursday withdrew all his allegations related to rigging in the general elections 2024 and apologized to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

In a recorded statement before the ECP's investigative committee, Chatha revealed that he was under huge pressure due to retirement and surrendered before the authorities.

The former commissioner clarified that he did not direct any Returning Officer (RO) or interfere in anyone's support during the general election of 2024.

The ex-commissioner clarified that he never instructed any Returning Officer to show favoritism or intervene in the election process.

"With a 32-year service record, I was scheduled to retire on March 13, 2024, and held concerns about potential loss of benefits in the future. I deeply regret

my statement and offer a sincere apology to the nation," Chatha stated.

The former commissioner revealed that during his role as Punjab's secretary, he forged close ties with a political party official, aiming for future advantages.

"The party official went into hiding due to involvement in the May 9 incidents, I was in touch with him and also used to assist him secretly," he said.

Liaquat Chatha disclosed a covert meeting with the leader of a political party in Lahore on February 11 and was tasked with devising a plan to 'confirm' allegations of election rigging, however, concerned about the potential ineffectiveness of the accusations, he opted to conduct an emotionally charged press conference. The former Rawalpindi commissioner revealed that, according to the political leader, the plan had the backing of a particular party's top leadership. The press conference was strategically tied to a party's protest plan.

Apex Court Misreporting of judgment in proscribed literature case created misunderstanding

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Thursday said that many misunderstandings have been created owing to the misreporting of a judgment on the release of a person accused of distributing the proscribed literature.

A press release issued by the SC in the matter said that an impression was being given as the apex court violated the Second Constitutional Amendment (interpretation of Muslim) and has directed to abolish the sections of offenses against religion. This impression is completely wrong, it said.

It stated that the SC has ruled that even the accusations of the FIR in this case are believed they didn't merit the applications of sections charged but rather section V of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1932 related to the dissemination of proscribed literature under which the maximum punishment of publishing proscribed books is six-month imprisonment.

The press release said that the SC accepted the bail of the accused and ordered for his release keeping in view the rulings of Islam, constitutional sections and principles of law and justice, as the concerned person has already spent more than one year in prison.

It further said that it is

said that in such cases sentences are inflamed and Islamic rulings are used to be forgotten. The written judgment has quoted the relevant verses of the Holy Quran in this context, he added.

It said that Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa tried to ensure that the interpretation of the law by the court be aligned with Islamic sources of law as well as the country's constitution.

It further stated that if anyone felt there was a mistake by the court then avenues of legal recourse were always present, which the apex court or the chief justice would never stop anyone from approaching.

Imran Khan wants IMF aid halted over 'rigged' election

ISLAMABAD (INP): The founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) will send a letter to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), asking the money lender to cease its monetary support for Pakistan due to alleged "electoral rigging," party leader Ali Zafar announced on Thursday following a meeting with the cricketer-turned-politician at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail.

"Today, the PTI founder will dispatch a letter to the IMF," Senator Zafar informed a group of journalists, emphasising that according to the charters of the IMF, European Union and similar institu-

tions, their assistance or loans to a nation were contingent upon the presence of "good governance".

According to Barrister Zafar, a fundamental tenet of these charters was the requirement for democratic governance. "These institutions are not meant to operate within nations without a democratic system in place. And the basic pillar of democracy is free and fair elections."

Unfortunately, the recent election was marred by allegations of manipulation, the PTI senator stated, adding, "The entire world saw how the public mandate was stolen."



QUETTA: Caretaker Home Minister Mir Muhammad Zubair Jamali meeting with Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar

Over 2.65 million children to be vaccinated: Seven-day polio immunization campaign to be kicked off in Balochistan from Feb. 26

Chief Secretary pledges to mobilize all available resources for eradication of polio; emphasizes upon convincing parents who refuse to get their children vaccinated

Independent Report

QUETTA: The seven-day polio immunization campaign is due to start all over Balochistan from February 26 (Monday).

Over 2.65 million children below five years of age would be administered the anti-polio vaccine along with Vitamin "A" drops during the immunization campaign.

More than 11,000 teams would take part in the anti-polio campaign and administer the anti-polio and Vitamin "A" drops to the children.

These and similar other details were shared during a briefing conducted for

Chief Secretary, Shakeel Qadir Khan at a meeting of Provincial Task Force for polio eradication here on Thursday.

The Secretary Health, Abdullah Khan, Coordinator Emergency Operation Center (EOC), Syed Zahid Shah, representatives of UNICEF, World Health Organization and other concerned departments were present in the meeting.

The meeting reviewed the measures taken for eradication of polio in the province.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Secretary said that the anti-polio campaign

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President Alvi urges community action to combat thalassaemia

LAHORE (APP): President Dr. Arif Alvi on Thursday emphasised the necessity of community efforts in preventing thalassaemia among children, advocating for mandatory testing before marriage.

He was addressing a prize distribution ceremony of Sundas Foundation, as a chief guest, held here at Governor's House. Director Sundas Foundation Khalid Abbas Dar, President Yaseen Khan, renowned journalists Sohail Warraich, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami and Salman Ghani also attended the event.

In his address, President Alvi quoted the example of England regarding success in thalassaemia control due to proper

awareness, while Pakistan had to face shortage of blood donations for thalassaemia children, adding that even with extensive campaigns, this shortage could not be overcome.

Alvi further said that Pakistan has 26.2 million children out of schools, while our neighbouring countries India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have accomplished almost 100 per cent enrollment rate.

He said that Pakistan built 50,000 schools in Punjab since its inception, while the state needed equal number of more schools to educate such a large number of children. He said that Pakistan has more than 2.5 lakh mosques, and proposed that those could be used as

educational centres to address the issue.

He said: "Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) gave status of community centres to mosques and Islam gave us golden principles for society; we all should get inspiration from Quran and Sunnah".

China made progress and achieved prosperity by focusing on education and health of its population.

He said Pakistan has the fifth biggest population in the world, which has immense potential for growth. The president stressed the best utilisation of this workforce.

Thanking the people working for thalassaemia

elimination and serving humanity, he said that they are our heroes and they would stand honoured before Almighty Allah; they should be given respect, and recognition of their services. Dr. Arif Alvi lauded the philanthropic individuals and organisations for their generous financial support towards the treatment of these otherwise expensive medical conditions.

President Sundas Foundation Yaseen Khan said that the foundation was a leading non-profit organisation dedicated to voluntary blood transfusion services and treatment of thalassaemia, hemophilia, and other blood-related diseases for the last 26 years.



MUZAFFRABAD: Women activists of International forum for justice shouting slogans during protest ahead of Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day 23rd February, in the city.



GILGIT: Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Haji Gulbar Khan being briefed by officials about the project of Women Degree college at Jutiyal.

ECP notifies minority, reserve seats for women in Punjab, Sindh assemblies

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Election Commission on Thursday issued details of reserved seats for women and minorities in the Sindh and Punjab assemblies.

In the Sindh Assembly, the notification specifies that the PPP has been allotted 20 seats for women and 6 for minorities. Additionally, MQM-Pakistan has secured 6 seats, and GDA has secured 1 seat. MQM-Pakistan has secured 2 minority seats.

For the Punjab Assembly, notifications have been issued for reserved seats, with PML-N securing 36 seats for women, PPP getting three, PML-Q securing two, and one seat allocated to a woman affiliated with IPP.

Decisions are pending on one minority seat in the Sindh Assembly and two seats for women.

Similarly, the decision could not be reached for the reserved seats in the Sindh Assembly for independent candidates affiliated with the Sunni Itehad Council.

In the Sindh Assembly, the number of GDA members has reached 3, PPP has secured 114 seats, and MQM has secured 36 seats.

Out of the 66 seats reserved for women in the Punjab Assembly, the Election Commission did not allocate 24 seats.

Similarly, out of the eight seats reserved for minorities, no party was allocated separately. Considering numerical representation, the Sunni Itehad Council's quota for women is 24, with three seats for minorities.

The Election Commission will finalise the allocations by Friday.

NAB Balochistan organizes seminar

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QUETTA: In connection with anti-corruption awareness campaign, delegation of NAB (Balochistan) comprising of Director NAB Mr. Jawaid Ahmed Khan, Director Investigation Mr. Haroon Rashed and Deputy Director Mr. Khuram Shehzad visited National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) Baluchistan Campus, Quetta on 22nd February, 2024. The main objective of the visit was to create awareness in youth on hazardous repercussions of corruption through collective efforts with aim to build a corruption-free society according to the vision of NAB leadership. During the visit, both directors interacted with the participants and apprised on vision, mission, functioning of NAB (Balochistan) and role of students in eradication of corruption.

They emphasized students to adopt their lives wherein abhorrence against corruption will be integral part of their personalities. It is also argued that the teachings of Islam also assert on self-accountability and do not allow an iota of dishonesty and

corruption. Nepotism, influence peddling, bribery, extortion and favouritism were underlined as forms of corruption, but unfortunately, these have been taken by the society as norm/right. It was also emphasized that the collective efforts of students as crucial members of society can play a pivotal role for laying foundation of a corruption-free society. Both guest speakers effectively and patiently responded to the questions candidly raised by the students and faculty members during the session.

On this occasion, the Acting Dean Dr. Imran Usman in his address appreciated the efforts of NAB Balochistan and also assured to extend all possible help in the anti-corruption awareness drive of NAB Balochistan. Afterwards, the guests visited various departments/wings of NUST Balochistan.

Lastly, an awareness walk was also arranged wherein NAB officers, faculty members and students participated

Caretaker setup leaves behind...

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The cabinet approved the decisions taken in the meetings of the Economic Coordination Committee held on February 13, 2024 and February 14, 2024.

The cabinet also approved the decisions made in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee for State Owned Enterprises held on February 16, 2024.

The Federal Cabinet ratified the decisions taken in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Legislative Cases held on February 16, 2024.

Meanwhile Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Thursday extended gratitude to the cabinet members, officers, and staff at the PM office for their significant contributions that had played a pivotal role in the successful operations of the government setup.

He said the collective efforts and teamwork had propelled the administration towards achieving its goals and ensuring effective governance.

Under this MoU, the first Pakistan International Date Palm Festival will be held by September, 2024 to promote date production in the country.

He said the cabinet members' genuine and positive contribution had steered the cabinet in the right manner and without their help, this goal could not have been realized.

He also eulogized the services of the principle secretary and military secretary along with their staff for their efficiency and balanced approach despite administrative challenges related to the PM office and other matters.

He said he considered himself a lucky person to have served as the caretaker prime minister.

The prime minister said he had romance for Pakistan and he also loved the idea of the country.

"I have romance for Pakistan, I love the soul of the country, for me Pakistan is the first and last and for me Pakistan stands as emblem of my faith. It is home to me and let us make this home stable, prosperous and developed."

He said this country had tremendous potential of natural resources, and it was a unique territory and people with rich history.

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Man who threatened CJP on social media arrested

ISLAMABAD (INP): The law-enforcement agencies (LEAs) have arrested the man, who used derogatory and threatening language against Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Justice Qazi Faez Isa on social media, reported on Thursday.

Sources said that Abdul Wasey, a resident of Pandora, Rawalpindi, while participating in the social media campaign against the CJP on February 20, not only indulged in his character assassination on X, but also threatened him with dire consequences.

Sources informed that the LEAs were busy identifying more people who were involved in maligning Justice Isa, and that after arresting them, they would be awarded exemplary punishments.

On Wednesday, the caretaker federal cabinet has approved the formation of a joint investigation team (JIT) against social media

campaigners.

The notification for this high-level five-member JIT has also been issued.

As per the notification, the JIT will be headed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Additional Director General while the JIT will include officers from Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Intelligence Bureau (IB). Officers of grade 20 from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and NADRA are also included in the JIT.

Sources said that an attempt was made to blackmail the officers through a social media campaign. The JIT will trace the culprits and recommend registration of cases. The JIT will also suggest measures to counter such nefarious campaigns in future.

The sources said that propaganda against government officials is a violation of Article 5 of the Constitution.

Maryam Nawaz calls for early completion of Ramzan package

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's senior vice president and chief organiser, Maryam Nawaz, the party's nominee for the Punjab CM slot, has 'called' for early completion of the Ramzan package.

Maryam Nawaz, who was all set to become the first woman chief minister in Punjab, has directed the administration to ensure the timely completion of the Ramzan package to provide relief to the general public.

Sources further said that Punjab's expected next CM has ordered the administration to give the status of Ramzan Bazars to the Model Bazars as her government will start with the commencement of the Holy month of Ramadan.

According to the package, masses will get relief on the purchase of flour, ghee, pulses, sugar and other essential items.

Whoever was suggested by MQM-P would be appointed the governor of province, the PML-N assured.

There was possibility that the MQM-P would suggest to retain the governorship of Kamran Khan Tessori.

ORIC organizes lecture session on "Diverse Society Counter-subversion Drive" at UoG

QUETTA (APP): In a thought-provoking lecture session on the topic of "Diverse Society Counter-subversion Drive" organized by the ORIC department was held here on Thursday at University of Gwadar (UoG).

Vice Chancellor of the University of Gwadar, Prof. Dr. Abdul Razzaq Sabir, was the chief guest speaker.

The lecture session was attended by pro VC UoG Prof. Dr. Syed Manzoor Ahmed, Registrar UoG Dolat Khan, Dean Faculty of Social Science, Director QEC, Dr. Kambar Farooq, Director ORIC Muhammad Irshad Buledi, Director Sports, Saghir Naseem, Director Financial Aids Shayhak Ali, Chairperson Computer Science department Madam Haim Gul. In charge Public Relations Naseer Muhammad, and students.

Prof. Dr. Sabir highlighted the challenges posed by subversion in the context of a diverse society.

Prof. Dr. Sabir emphasized the importance of understanding the various di-

mensions of the diversity of Pakistan, including cultural, religious, and socio-economic aspects, as crucial components in formulating effective counter-subversion strategies.

During the lecture session, the scholar underscored the need for proactive measures, and calling for collaboration among academia, policymakers, and community leaders.

Dr. Sabir stressed the role of education in fostering tolerance and inclusivity, asserting that a well-informed society is better equipped to resist divisive influences.

Throughout the lecture, Prof. Dr. Abdul Razzaq Sabir shed light on historical and contemporary examples to illustrate the impact of subversion on diverse societies and underscored the importance of unity in facing such challenges.

Earlier, UoG pro VC Dr. Syed Manzoor Ahmed, also spoke on the occasion. Director ORIC Irshad Ahmed Buledi performed the duties of the stage secretary.

Senate Body on Foreign Affairs recognizes 3-year commitment, dedication of members

ISLAMABAD (INP): Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs in its last meeting recognized the dedication and commitment of committee members during the past three years.

The Foreign Secretary briefed the committee on India's alleged atrocities in IIOJK and the actions taken by the Foreign Ministry. He emphasized Pakistan's ongoing efforts to spotlight the Kashmiri plight internationally and reiterated support for their right to self-determination in line with UNSC resolutions.

Furthermore, the ministry continued its endeavors to raise awareness about the challenges faced by Muslims in India and denounced sacrilegious statements made against the Holy Prophet (PBUH) by BJP members. Pakistan also actively addressed Islamophobia on the global stage. A diplomatic passport, along with foolproof security, was provided to Mr. Yasin Malik's spouse as directed by the committee. The ministry is actively pursuing the matter of

travel conditions imposed on Pakistanis to the UAE.

The issue of stranded Pakistani students in Chinese universities due to COVID restrictions was successfully resolved. The committee informed that concerns regarding Afghan spectators during the Pakistan-Afghanistan cricket match in the UAE were addressed with authorities, and necessary steps were taken by the UAE government.

The Foreign Ministry issued standard operating procedures and continued to facilitate visits of Pakistani parliamentarians abroad through its missions. Efforts were ongoing to address difficulties faced by Pakistanis in Gulf countries, including Iqama renewals, lost passport issuances, and non-payment of salaries.

Pakistan maintained a delicate balance in its foreign policy and diplomatic relations with Russia and the Western Bloc amid the Ukrainian crisis. A formal application for BRICS membership has been submitted, meeting all necessary prerequisites.

Governor Sindh to be from MQM-P, accedes PML-N

KARACHI (INP): Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has agreed to give Sindh governorship to Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P).

Sources said that the PML-N has assured the MQM-P to elect the governor of Sindh from the party.

Whoever was suggested by MQM-P would be appointed the governor of province, the PML-N assured.

There was possibility that the MQM-P would suggest to retain the governorship of Kamran Khan Tessori.



QUETTA: Governor Balochistan Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar presenting a shield to outgoing Vice Chancellor University of Balochistan Dr. Shafiq Ahmed Khan at a farewell meeting

Snow clearing begins in Malam Jabba road

By Haroon Siraj

SWAT: Tehsil administration Charbagh have kicked off clearing snow from Malam Jabba road after the popular hill station received the snowfall on Thursday.

On the instructions of Assistant Commissioner Charbagh Muhammad Yaqar Khan had issued instructions to the operation staff to appoint additional number of workers as soon as the snow season begins in Swat. he operational staff worked to remove snow from the roads and paths during the snowfall and also maintained cleanliness as a good number of visitors arrived in the tourists destination.

Lauding the arrangements put in place by the tehsil administration, the visitors said that the staff is busy in removing the snow from roads despite cold and that they haven't seen garbage in the area. Talking with our correspondent Assistant Commissioner Charbagh Muhammad Yaqar Khan said that, we are fully prepared and our teams are deputed in the spots of the tourists destination to ensure that motorists easily moved in and around Malam Jabba and traffic flow remained normal.

Meanwhile, the district administration has advised the tourists to get weather updates and traffic-related information prior to traveling to Swat's tourists destination.

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Seven-day polio immunization...

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going to be started next week is very important.

He said that it is very necessary to administer anti-polio vaccine to the children below five years of age during the immunization campaign in order to eradicate the virus fully.

He reiterated the government's resolve of mobilizing all available resources for eradication of polio from the province. In this regard, he also emphasized upon convincing the parents who otherwise refuse to get their children vaccinated against polio.

He mentioned that special attention is being to the children left from vaccination and that at the transit points.

He said that it is very necessary to convince the patients for vaccination of their children so as to protect them from crippling disease.

He said that it is our firm resolve to eradicate the polio virus from Balochistan. For the purpose, the role of religious leaders and tribal elders is crucial, adding he stressed further.

The Chief Secretary directed the concerned high ups to provide security to all the teams taking part in the immunization campaign.

He also urged the parents to ensure complete immunization of their children besides administering anti-polio drops to them.

Earlier, it was informed that no fresh case of polio has been reported since 2021. However, the polio virus has been detected in the environment and sewerage samples of different districts of the province.

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ABBOTTABAD: An eye-catching view of a snow covered area during the heavy snowfall of winter season, which more decreases the temperature below in minus degree Celsius, at Galyat in Abbottabad.

Senators laud commitment of MoCC&EC, members at Climate body's farewell meeting

ISLAMABAD (APP): The members of the Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change on Thursday at the body's farewell meeting here appreciated the dedication and commitment of the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (MoCC&EC) and its participants for striving towards resolution of environmental conservation challenges.

The Chairperson, Senator Seemee Ezdi while opening the forum with the recitation of the verses of Holy Quran extended her warm gratitude to the member Senators for successfully completing their tenure at the Committee with landmark interventions intended to address challenges pertaining to environment and nature conservation.

The Committee was convened on a one-point agenda moved by Senator Fawzia Arshad on implementation of the guidelines of the National Climate Change Policy 2021.

Senator Ezdi thanked the committee members for

supporting the body and making all its field visits a success.

The Committee organized eight field visits in total starting from its maiden visit to Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency (Pak-EPA) office and its smog control center, then to the Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB)'s Trail-6 Leopard Preserve Zone, fire control room at erstwhile Marghar Zoo (Margalla Wildlife Rescue Centre), Pakistan Meteorological Department office, Trail-5 visit followed by visits to Shahdarah, Farash Town, and Mangroves Forest, Karachi.

She mentioned the Committee members gave a tough time to the Met Office officials during their briefing through very pertinent questions.

Senator Ezdi appreciated the capability of MoCC&EC officials and their successful representation of the country at COP-28 (28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, Dubai) and lauded Secretary,

Ministry Asif Hyder Shah for his efforts in this regard.

Senior Joint Secretary MoCC&EC, Muhammad Farooq while briefing on the agenda item apprised the Committee and the mover that all provincial climate action plans were aligned with the National Climate Change Policy 2021 which was submitted at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and published at the MoCC&EC website.

He added that all multinationals' investment was being done after consulting this policy which was formulated by all stakeholders' consultation and the Ministry strictly abides by this policy guidelines. Senator Fawzia Arshad said on the occasion that her concerns were related to the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) that was an autonomous entity neglected in the policy endeavours.

She added that this policy should be clarified either it was enacted while considering Punjab or the federal capital as well.



Senator Seemee Ezdi, Chairperson Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change presiding over a meeting of the Committee at Parliament House Islamabad.

ISSI's students' art competition tribute courage, resilience of Palestinians in Gaza

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) Thursday organized an art competition for children aged 8-12 years, titled, "Expressing Solidarity with the Children of Gaza," aimed to pay homage to the courage and resilience of the people of Gaza, particularly its children, who have borne the brunt of the conflict. The Chief Guest on the occasion was Ambassador of the State of Palestine, Ahmed Rabaei, Coun-

Adiala jail admin refuses to shift Bushra to jail on security reasons

ISLAMABAD (Online): Jail administration has refused to shift Bushra Bibi wife of PTI founder to jail on security reasons.

The petition filed by Bushra Bibi seeking her shifting from Bani Gala to Adiala Jail came up for hearing in Islamabad High Court (IHC).

Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb took up the petition for hearing Thursday.

Superintendent Adiala jail filed his report in the court wherein the jail administration refused to shift Bushra Bibi to jail.

The administration was of the view that he was less space in jail. 250 women are already imprisoned therein. There are security concerns as well.

The court adjourned the hearing of the case for two weeks.

Police launches crackdown against unauthorized number plates

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP) Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, on Thursday directed to the Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) to utilize all available resources to ensure the peace and tranquility within the federal capital.

A public relations officer said that, the police were ensuring data registration, identification documents and effective search of citizens entering the high security zone on a regular basis.

Moreover, action has been taken against motorcyclists over traffic rule violations on various checkpoints of high security zone, he added.

During the week, the police removed tinted glasses and improper number plates from bikes and issued challan tickets to motorcyclists for violations.

Strict directions have been issued to police officers and officials performing their duties at high security zone checkpoints to exercise their duty with full responsibility.

The ICT Doorstep Service initiative offers a variety of documents and permits, including Domicile Certificates, Birth Certificates, Power of Attorney, International Driving Permits, Fuel Permits (Domestic/Commercial), and Motor Vehicle Registrations.

This endeavor reflects a commitment to citizen-centric governance, prioritizing accessibility and ease of use for essential administrative tasks. Residents are encouraged to take advantage of these services conveniently located at Trail 3's parking area during the specified hours



ISLAMABAD: Air Vice Marshal Abid Latif, Ambassador of Russia to Pakistan Federation Albert P. Khorev, Defence Attaché Colonel Vadim N. Fenchenko and others cutting the cake during Defender of the Fatherland Day of the Russian Federation ceremony, at a local hotel in the Federal Capital.

Japan Envoy hosts reception to celebrate the 64th Birthday Anniversary of Emperor of Japan

ISLAMABAD (Online): To celebrate the 64th Birthday of the Emperor Naruhito, the Ambassador of Japan WADA Mitsuhiro hosted a reception at a local hotel in Islamabad.

Caretaker Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture, Jamal Shah was the chief guest on the occasion. The reception was attended by Ministers, Parliamentarians, senior government officials, members of the diplomatic community and other dignitaries from the public and private sector.

Ambassador WADA together with the distinguished guests cut a cake to mark the His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday, which is on February 23rd.

Since his accession to the throne on 1st May 2019 as the 126th Emperor of Japan, His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito stands as the symbol of Japan and the unity of the people. His Majesty and the Imperial Family also facilitate the good relations with foreign countries including Pakistan.

While welcoming the

guests on the occasion, Ambassador WADA conveyed his gratitude to the Government and the people of Pakistan for sending their best wishes on the 64th birthday celebration of His Majesty the Emperor. Expressing his appreciation for the long-standing friendly relations between Japan and Pakistan, the Ambassador lauded the contributions of all the people who have helped to further strengthen our mutual ties in individual, business or official capacity.

Dr. Sidra says; Awareness, early diagnosis is key in breast Cancer fight

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dr. Sidra Shabbir, a General and Laparoscopic Surgeon on Thursday underscores the critical importance of timely diagnosis in combating breast cancer, urging awareness towards potential symptoms.

Talking to PTV, she highlighted that while breast cancer symptoms may manifest as a lump in the breast or armpit, they are often painless and may go unnoticed.

Additionally, redness of the skin, blood-colored or white fluid drip from the nipple should be taken seriously and promptly investigated.

Dispelling myths surrounding breast cancer, Dr. Sidra emphasizes that factors like garment use, deodorants, or Antiperspirants do not increase the risk of the disease.

She laments the prevalence of social taboos that deter individuals from seeking help despite experiencing symptoms like itching or lumps due to the fear associated with the word 'cancer' and apprehensions regarding male doctors.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Palestine to Pakistan Ahmed Jawad A.A. Rabaei, and others looking at art work during Art work exhibition by Young Pakistani Students ceremony titled "Expressing Solidarity with the Children of Gaza" at Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) in the Federal Capital.

Senate body on Interior convenes

ISLAMABAD: Senate Standing Committee on Interior met today under the chairmanship of Senator Mohsin Aziz here at the Parliament House.

At the commencement of the committee's concluding meeting, Chairman Senator Mohsin Aziz expressed gratitude to the committee members and Ministry officials for their unwavering support and active engagement throughout the committee's tenure. In return, committee members and ministry officials lauded Senator Mohsin Aziz for his effective leadership and the seamless conduct of committee proceedings. The Chairman Committee also appreciated the services of Secretary Committee and his staff and acknowledged the support extended by the Secretary Committee especially on legislative business.

The committee while taking up the agenda items passed the Bill further to amend the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 [The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024] introduced by Senator Shahadat Awan on 1 January, 2024. (Insertion of new section 297A in PPC and subsequent amendment in Cr.P.C. The committee passed the bill unanimously emphasizing the preservation of the right of dignity of the human corpse. The bill was passed with the increase of fine to 5 hundred thousand rupees.

However, the Bill further to amend the Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance, 2002 [The Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking (Amendment) Bill, 2024] introduced by Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri on 1 January, 2024. (Amendments in Sections 3, 4 & 5 of the Ordinance) was withdrawn by the mover as the Ordinance in which the amendment is being proposed has already been repealed by an Act of Parliament in the year 2018.

The Bill further to amend the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 and the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 [The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024]

Delay in issuance of Passport: Mohtasib takes strict notice

ISLAMABAD: Expressing his deep concern over the persistent complaints of irregularities, malpractices, inordinate delays, and unsatisfactory facilities at the Passport Offices for the general public, the Wafaqi Mohtasib, Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has directed immediate inspection by the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Inspection Teams at Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar and other major cities. He directed to look into these complaints and suggested urgent remedial measures. It may be recalled that taking suo moto notice of a large number of complaints against the delay in the issuance of passports, an Inspection Team from the WMS had earlier visited the Passport Office Islamabad on the directions of the Wafaqi Mohtasib to ascertain the causes of the



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Chief Minister of the Punjab Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi calls on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

IHC orders for fixing petition regarding medical check up of Bushra Bibi

ISLAMABAD (Online): Islamabad High Court (IHC) has ordered to fix for hearing application of Uzma Khan sister of PTI founder for medical check up of Bushra Bibi following the removal of registrar office objections on the application.

Justice Saman Rafat Intiaz will hear the petition filed by Uzma Khan today (Friday). Diary branch has allotted writ number to the petition of Uzma Khan.

The court had directed to remove objections

of registrar office. Advocate Sheeraz Ahmad Ranjha counsel for Uzma Khan has removed the objections.

The petition said Bushra Bibi is imprisoned in Bani Gala residence after having been convicted in Toshakhana case. Family doctor Dr Asim Yousof be allowed to conduct medical check up of Bushra Bibi.

Senior doctors of PIMS be also issued orders to conduct medical check up of Bushra BIBI in the presence of Dr Asim Yousof.

PSF invites applications from young Pakistani students to participate in IJSO-2024

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) has invited applications from young Pakistani science students to participate in the 21st International Junior Science Olympiad (IJSO-2024).

According to an official of PSF, the International Junior Science Olympiad (IJSO) is going to be held from December 02-11 this year in Bucharest, Romania tentatively.

IJSO is a science competition for students under 16 years of age on December 31st of the competition year. IJSO was established to promote interest in science among school students, exposing them to problem-solving, critical thinking and experimentation. Over the years, IJSO aims to positively impact science and mathematics education at school level. IJSO is held in the first week of December every year, in any one of member countries.

About the eligibility, the official informed that interested students (boys and girls) under 16 years of age on December 31, 2024 may send their applications on prescribed proforma available through the web link <https://psf.gov.pk/ijso2024.aspx>.



A delegation of Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) headed by Naem Muhammad Mirza met with Principal Information Officer (PIO), Dr. Tariq Mehmoor Khan at PID Headquarters, Islamabad.

Netherlands Embassy hosts reception to celebrate a visit of a Dutch Hockey Team

ISLAMABAD (Online): The Ambassador of Netherlands in Islamabad, hosted a reception to honor the Dutch hockey team, highlighting the vital role of sports diplomacy in fostering international relations and building bridges between nations.

This historic visit has significant cultural and sporting importance as the team hailing from Oldenzaal in the Netherlands becomes the first hockey team to visit and compete against a Pakistani team in over 22 years.

Commenting on the occasion, Ambassador Henny de Vries said "Hockey holds a special place in the hearts of both the Dutch and Pakistani people, and it this week is a testament to the power of sports in bridging cul-

tures and fostering understanding. The matches played in Lahore, and the upcoming match in Islamabad, have not only showcased the skill and ability of our athletes but have also provided an opportunity for cultural exchange and mutual appreciation."

The Ambassador expressed her gratitude to Khawaja Junaid Hockey Academy for extending the invitation to the club and to the Higher Education Commission (HEC) for their invaluable support. The presence of such influential voices from the media, sports, and diplomatic community underscored the collective commitment to leveraging sports as a vehicle for strengthening international relations.

Autocratic Hindutva rule, undeclared martial law imposed in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD (APP): All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has condemned the surge in cordon and search operations and house raids as well as the snatching of properties and sacking of employees under undeclared martial law imposed by the Modi-led Hindutva government of India in occupied Jammu and Kashmir and said that these repressive measures are designed to suppress the Kashmiris' righteous demand of right to self-determination.

According to Kashmir Media Service, the APHC spokesman in a statement

issued in Srinagar said, the Indian military and police establishment along with Hindutva-aligned bureaucrats and administration were undemocratically ruling IIOJK and suppressing the Kashmiri people for raising their voice for justice and UN-recognized right to self-determination.

Despite the use of brute military and dreaded SOG (Special Operations Group) force against the people, so far, their morale and valour regarding their sacred cause of freedom from Indian illegal occupation remains invincible.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers busy in construction work of Park Road during development work in the city.

ICT admin introduces convenient vehicle services at Trail 3

ISLAMABAD (APP): On the directions of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad Irfan Nawaz Memon, a new initiative has been launched to streamline vehicle-related services for the residents of Islamabad.

According to the spokesman of ICT, Dr Abdullah Tabasum, this initiative was aimed to provide easy access to essential services, bringing them closer to the community.

The excise staff would be stationed at the parking area of Trail 3 from 3 to 5 pm, facilitating vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax processes, he



Senator Mohsin Aziz, Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Interior presiding over a meeting of the Committee at Parliament House Islamabad.

Daily Voice of Masses
Independent

Friday February 23, 2024

Open the books

The knocking on its doors keeps growing louder. How long can the ECP ignore it? Over the weekend, Pakistan's most prominent elections monitoring body as well as its top human rights watchdog have added their voices to calls for an audit of election results.

On Saturday, the same day a senior bureaucrat had 'confessed' to his involvement in results tampering, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan expressed its reservations regarding the "integrity and credibility" of the Feb 8 exercise, noting a range of issues that it said had "cast a shadow over the democratic process".

A day later, the Free and Fair Election Network urged the ECP to take immediate action and address complaints regarding illegalities committed in the compilation of election results. It also proposed a three-phase process to comprehensively address the widespread allegations of rigging, which is based on an audit of each step in the results consolidation process.

In Pakistan, it is almost customary for election candidates to refuse to acknowledge their defeat. Except a few, most are generally quick to cast aspersions and question the integrity of any election which does not go in their favour.

This time, however, certain irregularities have been so widespread that even otherwise impartial observers are joining the chorus of voices demanding a recount and investigation into the post-poll results compilation process.

For example, there are ample witnesses to the fact that both election laws and the rules governing how vote counting and compilation is supposed to be done were not adhered to by many returning officers on election day.

Many independent observers, candidates and accredited media personnel reported being excluded or evicted from the Form 47 compilation process which was completed at ROs' offices, indicating that the most important check on the process was bypassed without any convincing explanation being given.

Compiled behind closed doors, many results later issued by ROs did not match the consolidated results from Form 45s issued to different candidates' polling agents. Fortunately, there is an extensive paper trail for each constituency, which can still be used to verify them.

Fafen has called for an audit led by the ECP that starts by closely examining this paper trail. The monitor notes that the ECP still has power to adjudicate results "before the expiration of 60 days after publication of the name of returned candidate in the official gazette". It suggests that independent observers as well as election candidates be invited to participate in this audit, so that all controversies can be resolved satisfactorily.

As such, these suggestions are not unreasonable or outside the law. They might show the ECP a way to redeem its image. Will it choose to assert itself as an independent, principled body, or continue to look the other way?

Economic cost of internet, social media shutdown

By Qamar Bashir

Former Press Secretary to the President; Former Press Minister to the Embassy of Pakistan to France; Former MD, SRBC



Pakistan, like any nation, faces challenges in balancing the interests of its people, businesses, and the state. Decisions made by authorities, including interim governments, can sometimes prioritize immediate or specific objectives over broader economic and social impacts. The act of slowing down or terminating internet services, including access to social media platforms, is a significant decision that can have far-reaching consequences. Such actions, while intended to serve particular goals, can inadvertently hinder the country's economic vitality by affecting business operations, trade, investment, and exports. They also pose risks to employment rates and GDP growth, potentially exacerbating poverty levels across the nation.

The internet and social media are modern-day lifelines for commerce, communication, and information exchange. Restricting access to these services can be likened to constricting the arteries of the nation's economy, impeding the flow of business and innovation. While security and regulatory concerns are valid, solutions should be sought that balance these needs with the preservation of open and free internet access to

support the nation's socio-economic development.

According to international internet and social media watchdogs, during the 2024 elections in Pakistan, there were widespread disruptions to internet and mobile services on the orders of the Interior Ministry on the lame and excuse of "maintain law and order". Ironically, despite the assurance of the government and the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority multiple regions experienced internet blackouts and mobile network disruptions on the very election day. Independent watchdogs like NetBlocks confirmed these outages, indicating a significant impact on connectivity. Furthermore, the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) reported that specific websites, including those of the PTI political party and investigative news platforms, were blocked prior to the elections. Cloudflare Radar observed significant drops in internet traffic for several local ISPs on the day of the elections, indicating widespread service disruptions.

The direct losses incurred to the nations can easily be calculated by inserting vital information in simple formulas. For example, Given Pakistan's GDP of \$1.24 trillion in February 2023 and forecasted merchandise trade of \$95.96 billion in 2024, the daily GDP for 2024 is approximately \$15.85 billion. With per day merchandise roughly at \$1.23 billion and as-

suming a 50% impact on merchandise trade due to closures, the daily loss from shutting down the internet is about \$615 million. For Twitter, the daily loss stands at approximately \$14.25 million. The indirect costs of internet shutdowns on businesses, trade, and investment are significant and multifaceted. Internet shutdowns disrupt economic activities, leading to losses in e-commerce, delays in time-sensitive transactions, increased unemployment, and interruptions in business-customer communications. These disruptions result in financial and reputational risks for companies, affecting both local businesses and international trade and investment.

For instance, in specific cases like Algeria, internet restrictions impacted various sectors, including the tourism industry, where businesses faced material losses due to hindered communications with customers and missed reservation deadlines. In India, the economic impact of internet shutdowns was quantified at \$1.9 billion for the first half of 2023 alone, highlighting the substantial direct economic losses incurred due to such disruptions. These shutdowns not only affect the immediate economic output but also have long-term consequences on investor confidence and the country's digital infrastructure.

Such actions not only impose direct economic losses on an already strained economy but also lead

to broader socio-economic instability. They not only infringe upon basic human rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan and international human rights standards but also erode the country's democratic fabric by undermining the freedom of information and press. The irony is stark as these actions, meant to secure political gains or regulate the political narrative, result in billions of dollars in losses to the national economy, contributing to its vulnerability. This situation leaves political parties wary of assuming power in the aftermath of the 2024 elections, given the looming economic challenges compounded by such disruptive practices.

When a country's actions to block social media platforms, slow down the internet, and disrupt internet services lead to widespread condemnation by international bodies like the United Nations, Amnesty International, and Transparency International, as well as foreign leaders and institutions, the resulting costs can be multifaceted and significant.

These costs extend beyond direct and indirect economic impacts to include the erosion of the country's soft image, which can lead to further financial, business, tourism, and soft capital losses. The erosion of a country's soft image can be even more detrimental in the long term. Condemnation by international bodies and foreign leaders can lead to a de-

cline in investor confidence, reduced foreign direct investment, and a negative impact on the country's diplomatic relations and international standing. This can further result in decreased tourism revenues, as potential visitors may choose to avoid a country perceived as politically unstable or repressive in terms of digital rights. Moreover, the disruption of internet services can hinder innovation and the digital economy's growth, essential components of modern economic development. It can also affect the country's attractiveness as a destination for international events, conferences, and cultural exchanges, further impacting its soft capital and potential revenue streams.

Overall, the indirect costs of such actions, compounded by international condemnation, can significantly hinder a country's economic growth, international reputation, and ability to engage in global commerce and diplomacy effectively. To safeguard the right to internet and social media access, ensuring economic, business, trade, and innovation opportunities remain unhampered, a comprehensive and collaborative approach is essential. Governments, alongside legislative bodies, must enact and enforce laws that protect internet access as a fundamental right, with a clear emphasis on transparency, accountability, and adherence to international human

rights standards. This legal framework should be designed to prevent unwarranted internet shutdowns, maintain neutrality, and ensure open access, with independent regulatory bodies established to oversee compliance and enforce regulations. Additionally, policies should mandate transparency in actions by both government and ISPs, especially concerning decisions that may affect internet access, ensuring any restrictions are justified, transparent, and subject to public scrutiny. Moreover, civil society, the judiciary, and political entities must play active roles in advocating for and protecting internet freedom. This involves promoting digital literacy to empower citizens to demand their digital rights, strengthening data protection to build trust in digital services, and supporting the pivotal role of independent media and civil society in holding power to account.

International cooperation is also vital, as global collaboration fosters a supportive environment for internet freedom, sharing best practices and advocating for digital rights on the world stage. Inclusive policy making, involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders, ensures diverse interests are represented and the public good is protected, fostering an environment conducive to growth, innovation, and the free exchange of ideas.

Parallel travesties

Mahir Ali

At the time of writing, almost five days after the Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny was reported to have suddenly died in an Arctic penal colony, his mother was still searching for his remains.

Yesterday, the UK high court was scheduled to begin a hearing on whether WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange could have the right to appeal the decision to extradite him to the US, where he faces 18 charges that could potentially lead to a 175-year prison term.

Navalny emerged as Vladimir Putin's most visible challenger little more than a decade ago. He was previously better known as a stalwart of the ethno-nationalist right who, in a 2007 video, compared immigrants to cockroaches. He subsequently shifted his focus to the Putin clique's extravagant corruption, which broadened his local appeal and turned him into something of a blue-eyed poster boy for Western liberals desperate for an alternative to the status quo in Moscow.

Navalny does not seem to have formally recanted his xenophobic past, and he appeared to share Putin's views that Russians and Ukrainians are essentially indistinguishable, although he opposed the war that enters its third year this week. He was also resistant to the idea of a broad anti-Putin coalition. His videos exposing the venal elite that helps to prop up the crème de la Kremlin are a useful resource, but their influence was largely restricted to Moscow and St Petersburg.

There is speculation about why Putin might have wanted Navalny dead at this juncture, but none of it so far is convincing. Only an independent forensic examination of the 47-year-old's corpse could reveal the immediate cause of death, little more than three years after he barely survived an assassination attempt by poisoning. His choice of returning to Russia for almost certain incarceration after treatment in Germany was undoubtedly brave, and possibly foolhardy.

Even if he hadn't been imprisoned, there is little Navalny could have done to thwart Putin's re-election next month. Perhaps the only possible explanation for Putin's paranoid intolerance of even the mildest resistance is some kind of psychosis. His next term could propel him past Joseph Stalin's 29-year record as dictator. Stalin had a lot more blood on his hands, but Putin keeps striving to catch up.

But why would 'Genocide Joe' — as US President Joe Biden has been dubbed after refusing to take action to halt Israeli atrocities in Gaza, and striving to expand the Middle Eastern conflict — wish to add Julian Assange to his lengthening list of victims?

The crux of the case against Assange hinges on the Iraq War Logs and Afghan War Diary that WikiLeaks helped to publicise almost 15 years ago. The massive trove of documents exposed the sordid reality and immoral grounding of the twin conflicts spearheaded by Washington under false pretences — echoing the Pentagon Papers, which had, back in 1971, laid bare the egregious lies that kept the Vietnam War going.

Barack Obama's vice president absurdly labelled Assange a "high-tech terrorist", but the administration wisely chose not to pursue charges, as that

would have entailed also charging The New York Times and other respectable media outlets that worked with WikiLeaks to highlight US excesses and hypocrisies. Donald Trump was exuberant when WikiLeaks released internal Democratic Party messages broadly highlighting the deficit of democracy in a floundering political system, and specifically the dedicated efforts to deny Bernie Sanders the presidential nomination in 2016.

It's open to question whether those revelations tipped the balance in Trump's favour, but he was briefly a WikiLeaks enthusiast until the outlet spilled the beans on some of the CIA's egregious global practices. The whistleblower in this instance, Joshua Schulte, was sentenced this month to 40 years in prison for leaking classified information. Chelsea Manning, the Iraq/Afghan whistleblower in the instance pertinent to the pending case against Assange, faced humiliation, torture, and a 35-year sentence, but Obama pardoned her after seven years. Biden has so far seemed incapable of even that modicum of decency, despite bipartisan parliamentary representations from various American allies as well as the US Congress. If the travesty continues to unfold, the effect on journalism globally of the US persecuting an Australian conduit for uncomfortable truths whose publishing venture was based in Europe will be chilling. Just as many who disagreed with some of Navalny's inclinations are appalled by his fate, almost everyone who was rubbed the wrong way by Assange agrees that his unrelenting persecution is an abomination. The British justice system can liberate him in short order after seven years of confinement and five years of brutal imprisonment. It's too late for Alexei, but Julian must walk free. — Courtesy Dawn

Better democracy

Abdullah Khalid

Pakistan's electoral history is a tale of evolving political consciousness, as evidenced by voter turnout oscillations. The dismally low 44 per cent turnout in 2008, a manifestation of public scepticism, contrasted sharply with the more than 60pc turnout in 2024, indicating perhaps improved faith in electoral politics. Despite this progress, significant challenges persist, especially in transparency, trust, and inclusivity. Let's explore the potential of proportional representation (PR) in local government (LG) elections.

Key issues in Pakistan's elections include the transparency and trust crises. Allegations of rigging and doubts cast over the impartiality of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) erode public confidence, undermining democracy's essence, limiting societal participation and putting the legitimacy of poll outcomes in question.

Pakistan faces daunting challenges, yet these are not entirely new. It is becoming increasingly urgent for us to adopt both emergency measures for immediate relief and long-term strategies for sustainable solutions. Pakistan can draw on experiences globally, tackling these difficulties with self-confidence and determination. Despite internal conflicts and power struggles, the strength of its Constitution provides hope. The document offers a comprehensive governance framework, emphasising the separation

of powers between the legislature, executive, and judiciary, which allows for amendments and adaptations to meet evolving national needs. Key to overcoming these crises is adhering to the Constitution, in letter and spirit, and seeking solutions within its framework.

To improve governance in Pakistan electoral reform is necessary, with the introduction of the PR system as a first step. While on its own it won't resolve all governance issues, it would still be a move in the right direction. Effective governance also hinges on undertaking simultaneous reforms, including judicial reforms for efficient justice, decentralisation of power, strengthening LG, and ensuring transparency and accountability in administrative processes. These reforms are vital for establishing a robust governance framework that can respond to the needs and challenges of modern Pakistan.

Parliament's role is crucial in these electoral reforms. Systemic change faces resistance from the status quo, but inclusive dialogue and consensus can pave the way. This prioritises governance improvement and fulfils democratic potential.

Globally, diverse electoral systems provide helpful lessons. The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, in countries like the UK and India, can overlook minority voices but the PR system, popular in many European countries, ensures inclusive representation of minority and smaller parties. A dependable electoral system is key to fostering public trust. Pakistan's frequent changes in electoral regulations have created confusion and distrust. Canada and Sweden, with their consistent and transparent electoral systems, exemplify public trust. Germany's mixed-member PR model is compelling, for

blending direct and PR votes to ensure local accountability and overall proportionality.

Strengthening LG elections is vital for grassroots democracy. India's LG offers a commendable model. In Pakistan, a similar structure could bridge the gap between government and local communities, fostering a more direct and participatory approach to governance. Decentralisation could spur socioeconomic development.

Pakistan's current electoral system, though efficient, often omits minority and smaller party voices. PR could ensure inclusivity and reduce unrest from underrepresentation. Critics fear fragmentation and unstable coalitions, but Pakistan's political landscape might find stability in PR. Implementing PR requires consensus and constitutional recognition. A hybrid system, blending FPTP and PR, could suit Pakistan's unique context, considering its political and demographic fabric.

Punjab, with its diverse population and intricate political dynamics, is an ideal candidate for testing PR in LG elections. A successful pilot model could lead to broader adoption nationwide, significantly contributing to democratic evolution and an effective electoral system. This initiative, drawn from successful international models will truly mirror the aspirations of the Pakistani people, fostering a more stable, inclusive, and prosperous democracy.

Fortifying Pakistan's democracy entails overcoming electoral challenges and providing innovative solutions. Starting with PR in Punjab's LG elections and strengthening the ECP can create a more participatory future—one that aligns with global practices and Pakistan's political ethos, and promotes a representative, empowered democracy. — Courtesy Dawn

Sindh CM orders further probe in BSEK results issue

Inquiry committee held board officials responsible

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh Caretaker Chief Minister Justice Maqbool Baqar, approving the inquiry committee's report on manipulation in results of SSC-II examinations on Thursday, directed the Anti-corruption Establishment to further probe the entire exam team of Board of Secondary Education Karachi.

The three-member inquiry committee, in its report submitted to the CM Sindh, held the entire examination and IT teams of BSEK responsible for glaring mistakes in results and recommended probing their malafide through the anti-corruption establishment along with departmental action against all delinquent officers, said a statement issued here.

The inquiry committee pointed out in the report the non-seriousness, non-professional attitude and inefficiency of board

employees and alleged that the board Chairman failed to introduce reforms and streamline the old and new streams while failing in maintaining the record as well as imparting training of new systems to teachers involved in the assessment of answer sheets were also observed.

The Inquiry Committee comprising Secretary School Education Dr Shereen Mustafa (Chairperson), Additional Secretary Universities and Boards Afshan Rubab, and Zuzain Katbar Section Officer of U&B dept- was constituted by the Caretaker Sindh CM and tasked to probe into allegation of manipulation in result of annual examination of SSC Part - II 2023 by the Board of Secondary Education (BSE) Karachi.

The Inquiry Committee submitted its report and recommendation to Caretaker Sindh Chief

Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Baqar on February 21 which the CM approved and sent to the chairman of the board to implement as recommended by the committee.

The committee during its proceedings, observed that none of the employees, called for a hearing and the statement, was serious which is evident from their written statements while it was also unclear what the actual exam results were before they were announced, and how many changes were made during the announcement and publication process.

The committee requested the actual result CD/USB for comparison, but it was not provided while the then Acting Controller of Exams Imran provided a written statement which only partially served its purpose, the report stated.



KARACHI: Mayor Murtaza Wahab presides over the City Council session in the Provincial Capital.

Promotion of sports vital for the establishment of a healthy society: Baligh

Independent Report
LAHORE: The Dutch Hockey Club team and the HEC Pakistan team participating in the Shuhada Punjab Police Hockey Series called on Governor Punjab, Muhammad Balighur Rehman at Governor House Lahore. During the meeting, Chief Organizer Chairman Khawaja Junaid briefed Governor Punjab about the series. Speaking on this occasion, Governor Punjab Muhammad Balighur Rehman said that the promotion of sports is very important for the establishment of a healthy society. He said that hockey is our national game and hockey players have had brought laurels to the country. He expressed hope that we will once again regain our lost

position in this field. He welcomed the teams and officials to the Governor House on this occasion. Governor Punjab said that the sports legends are the heroes of the nation who brought glory to the country through their outstanding performance in their respective sports. He further said that sports equipment of best quality is manufactured in Pakistan and the city of Sialkot is famous for manufacturing sports equipment. Governor Punjab said that it is a matter of great pride for us that the high quality footballs produced in Sialkot have been used in last year's FIFA World Cup. He said that sports are an important means of strengthening ties between people.

KPHC gives licenses to Category-I hospitals

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Healthcare Commission (KPHC) here Thursday organized a ceremony to give licenses to Category I hospitals of the province. The ceremony was held in the Postgraduate Medical Institute Hayatabad Medical Complex. The hospitals that were given licenses include Alfalah Hospital Abbottabad, Bahadur Khan Hospital Batkhela, Jinnah Teaching Hospital Peshawar, Irfan General Hospital Peshawar, Sahab Orthopedic Hospital Peshawar, PIMS Hospital Peshawar, Abaseen General Hospital Peshawar, Kuwait Teaching Hospital Peshawar and Bacha Khan Medical Complex Swabi. Addressing the ceremony, Chief Executive Officer KPHC, Dr. Nadeem Akhtar said that licenses were given after examining the health delivery infrastructure of these hospitals adding that license is mandatory under KPHC Act 2015.

Abdul Aleem Lashari posted as Chairman STBB
KARACHI (APP): Caretaker Chief Minister Sindh has accorded approval for posting of Abdul Aleem Lashari, an officer of Ex-PCS (BS-20) as Chairman Sindh Textbook Board (STBB), Janshoro with immediate effect. According to a notification, in pursuance of Section-4(2) of Sindh Textbook Board Ordinance, 1970 read with Section-2 of amended Act 2022, the Competent Authority i-e Sindh Chief Minister, accorded approval and posted

Minister stresses govt role in fostering growth of pharma sector

Independent Report
LAHORE: Caretaker Punjab Health Minister Professor Dr Javed Akram Thursday said he expected the new government would play its role in promoting the pharmaceutical industry. "Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry has a good position in the world and should be happy over its progress," the minister said during his visit to 16th Pak Pharma and Healthcare Expo at the Lahore's Expo Centre. The two-day Pak Pharma and Healthcare Exhibition was held by the Prime Event Management with the support of Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PPMA). He said a lot of progress in science also transformed the pharmaceutical businesses

across the globe. Dr Javed appreciated the holding of another mega pharma exhibition and hoped that the business deals would not only benefit the local industry and foreign companies, but also promote investment in the country. Earlier, the minister visited various stalls and interacted with the local and foreign exhibitors. Exhibition organiser Kamran Abbasi told the minister that 400 stalls were set up to display medical and laboratory equipment and chemicals. Stalls were set up by pharmaceutical equipment manufacturers, laboratory manufacturers, research and testing laboratories, raw and packaging supplier, pharma printing, pharma chemicals.



LARKANA: People visiting at the world famous archaeological site of Moenjodaro.



LAHORE: American Consul General Ms. Kirstin Hawkins presenting gift of cricket ball to Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Raza Naqvi.

1400 plots allotment: CM fulfills promise made with journalists

LAHORE (APP): Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi has fulfilled his another promise made with the journalist community by allotting over 1,400 plots in RUDA Maskane-Ravi project.

Distribution of allotment letters among journalists was inaugurated by Caretaker Punjab Information Ministers Amir Mir at a ceremony, held at Alhamra Arts Council. RUDA Chief Imran Amin and DGPR Rubina Afzal participated in the ceremony.

Amir Mir said distribution process of the allotment letters had started from those journalists who duly fulfilled the laid down criteria. He said CM Mohsin Naqvi fulfilled his last promise, made with the journalists community.

Amir Mir said that a high-level committee conducted a lengthy scrutiny to finalise the list of eligible journalists. He said RUDA was itself intimating those journalists who were declared eligible for getting plots.

District Judge ordered DC for removal of Encroachment

By Adeel Ahmed
SHIKARPUR: District and Session Judge Shikarpur Manoo Mal Khagaija ordered to Deputy Commissioner Altaf Ahmed Chachar for removal of illegal encroachment from the land of Historical Shahi Bagh within 15 days.

According to details that the huge area of 7-15 acres of ancient Shahi Bagh was illegally leased out to one late Suleman Shaikh by the then Taluka Nazim Zafar Ali Shaikh vide lease Deed dated 13.02.2010, though that lease deed dated 13.02.2010 has also been cancelled by the then Administrator/Deputy Commissioner Shikarpur Syed Hassan Raza Shah vide his order dated 08.05.2017. But still that public property is in illegal possession of legal heirs of the late Suleman Shaikh. As Authorities of Municipal Committee Shikarpur have been failed to protect the public property and this case is classic example of their negligence.

Therefore the Deputy Commissioner Shikarpur being head of District Administration is required to take over of suit land measuring 7-15 acres from Shahi Bagh from legal heirs of late Suleman Shaikh and over it to Municipal Committee Shikarpur by demolishing boundary wall over suit land, if any within a period of 15 days from today.

PPP to steer country out of economic crisis: Senator Imam

HYDERABAD (APP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Senator Malik Imam Din Shauqeen has said that his party was given the mandate by the people and it would steer the country out of economic and other challenges.

Talking to APP in Tando Adam, he said that it is evident that no single political party was in the position to form a government alone. Indeed, this is a challenging situation, and the upcoming government will address the acute economic crisis currently faced by the country.

Shauqeen said that the PPP obtained more seats than before in Sindh, and heading towards forming a government in the province. Meanwhile, the PPP is supporting the Pakistan Muslim League (N) to form a government at the federal level.

He emphasized the need for major political parties to learn from the past and play their role in improving the country's economy. If the economy improves, then inflation, unemployment and other major issues of the country will be resolved.



LAHORE: Caretaker Provincial Minister for Health Professor Dr. Javed Akram in a group photo with Faculty members of Mayo Cancer Care Hospital Manawa.

KMC Council to form committee to discuss street crimes situation with IGP

KARACHI (APP): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab on Thursday agreed to a proposal to form a committee consisting of City Council members to deal with the increasing street crimes in Karachi, which would meet the Sindh police chief and discuss the crime situation in the city.

The meeting Karachi Metropolitan Corporation - KMC's Council was chaired by the Mayor Karachi in the council hall of the KMC head office here.

On this occasion, a

proposal was also made by the members of the House to form a committee consisting of City Council members to deal with the increasing street crimes in Karachi, to which Barrister Murtaza Wahab termed it as timely and said that a committee consisting of members of the House will be formed today which will meet with IG Sindh.

He said every political party will be represented in the committee to inform the law enforcement agencies about the crime situation in Karachi.

DC Larkana chairs meeting to review Polio drive

LARKANA (APP): Deputy Commissioner Larkana Dr. Sharjeel Noor Channa has directed the officials of the health department to make proper arrangements to make the polio campaign a success so that no child misses out on the polio vaccine. He expressed these views today while presiding over a meeting in the committee room of the Commissioner's office. The meeting was attended by DHO, PPHI, WHO and other concerned authorities. On this occasion, the previous polio campaign was reviewed. However, the officials of the health department also gave a briefing to the deputy.

Railway police foil narcotics smuggling attempt

PESHAWAR (APP): Railway Police in Peshawar conducted a successful operation at Peshawar City Station, apprehending two women for smuggling narcotics via train. The suspects were caught by SHO Jamal Abdul Nasir and other officers based on suspicion at the internal passage of Peshawar City Station. Upon inspection, more than 2 kilograms of narcotics were recovered from the possession of the women.

PMSA strengthening collaboration with Royal Oman Police Coast Guard

KARACHI (APP): Under the terms of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) and the Royal Oman Police Coast Guard (ROPCG), a delegation from Pakistan, headed by Rear Admiral Imtiaz Ali SI(M) T.Bt & BAR, Director General (DG) of PMSA has visited the ROPCG Command HQs in Muscat, Oman for the 2nd high-level meeting.

This meeting followed an invitation from the Commander of ROPCG as a continuation of the 1st annual high-level meeting held between the heads of both organizations in September 2022 at PMSA HQs in Karachi, Pakistan, according to a news release issued here on Thursday.

The discussions during the visit revolved around the provisions of the MoU regarding maritime cooperation and the exchange of crucial information.

Staff Brigadier (Engineer) Ali Saif Khalfan Al Muqabli, Commander ROPCG, commended PMSA's efforts in enforcing maritime law effectively across all Maritime Zones of Pakistan.

Both organizations' commanders affirmed their commitment to continuing cooperation in areas of mutual interest, including Maritime Safety & Security, Prevention & Fight against Organized Maritime Crimes, and Maritime Environmental Protection, within the framework of the MoU.

The PMSA delegation also inspected ROPCG Fleet units/boats to assess operational readiness.

They also met with Major General Abdullah Bin Ali Al Harthy, Deputy IG of Police & Customs for operations, and the Maritime Security Center (MSC) in Oman to explore avenues for mutual cooperation.



RAWALPINDI: Chairman World Peace Jirga Program Rayatullah Khan addressing press conference at Pindi press club in the city.

CS chairs meeting of Provincial Task Force on Polio Eradication

KARACHI (APP): The Chief Secretary Sindh on Thursday chaired a meeting of the Provincial Task Force on Polio Eradication and discussed matters related to upcoming weeklong anti-polio drive to be started from February 26, 2024.

The meeting was informed that over 10 million children across the province will be immunised, for which 80,000 polio workers will perform their duties to accomplish the task.

The CS was informed that thousands of polio workers in the 30 districts will be part of this

vaccination drive. The meeting was attended by Commissioner Karachi Muhammad Saleem Rajput, Deputy Health Syed Mansoor Abbas Rizvi, Additional IG Karachi Khadim Rind, Coordinator Emergency Operations Center Sindh Irshad Ali Sodhar, and other relevant officials. All district commissioners and deputy commissioners also participated in the meeting via video link. The meeting reviewed the overall situation of the polio virus and its containment efforts. Coordinator Emergency Operations Center Sindh.

DIG directs to enhance security measures during Shab-e-Barat celebrations

HYDERABAD (APP): The Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Hyderabad Tariq Razaque Dharejo has issued directives to intensify security measures in Hyderabad Range on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat, aiming to ensure the safety of citizen's lives, property and dignity. He has also directed to prevent aerial firing and one-wheeling, including buying and selling of firecrackers, and to take strong action against the elements involved in it. According to

a spokesperson, DIG Hyderabad has instructed the establishment of temporary police pickets at mosques, Imam Bargahs, shrines and main graveyards. Additionally, he directed that police officers and personnel dressed in plain clothes will be deployed to ensure effective security for worshippers and visitors to graveyards and shrines on this sacred night. All SSPs were also directed to ensure the effective deployment of additional police.



PESHAWAR: Volunteers distributing free food among deserving people in Sadar Bazar.

3-day Intl congress of soil science concluded at PMAS-AAUR

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chairman Higher Education Commissioner (HEC) Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad here on Thursday urged the scientists and researchers to play a leading role in conservation, land and water resources and guide the policy makers in evolving research priorities. He also stressed on the management of soil through the latest technologies for maximum agricultural production to meet the country's demand for food. The Chairman speaking as chief guest at

the concluding session of the three-day 20th International Congress of Soil Science at Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi (PMAS-AAUR) stressed the need to adopt latest agri practices to address the country's food security and emphasized the importance of protecting and improving natural resources, particularly soil for increasing agriculture production in the country. The event was organized by the Institute of Soil & Environmental Sciences (ISES).

Pakistan aims lifting bilateral trade with Saudi Arabia upto \$20 billion: Gohar Ejaz

ISLAMABAD (APP): Observing that the current trade volume falls short of expectations, Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industry, Gohar Ejaz said in Riyadh Thursday that Pakistan wanted to lift bilateral trade with Saudi Arabia upto \$20 billion.

Addressing the Pakistan-Saudi Business Forum, the minister said that legislation would be

enacted to promote bilateral investment between the two brotherly countries, according to press statement issued by Commerce Ministry here.

Dr. Gohar Ejaz, who is heading a delegation of Pakistani industrialists, also met with the Saudi Minister of Commerce, Dr. Majid bin Abdullah Al-Kassabi. The meeting focused on enhancing investment in sectors such

as construction, digital economy, and infrastructure between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The Pakistani delegation included Punjab Minister S.M. Tanveer and notable businessmen; Arif Habib, Muhammad Ali Tabba, and Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) President Atif Ikram. Ejaz mentioned that a Free Trade Agreement

(FTA) between Pakistan and Gulf countries had been ratified.

Speaking at the forum, Chairman of the Saudi Business Forum Hassan Al Hazawi stated that bilateral trade between the two countries has increased by 35 percent.

The Saudi Minister of Commerce commended efforts to strengthen bilateral trade relations and praised Gohar Ejaz.



LAHORE: President Dr. Arif Alvi in a group photo with a delegation of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who called on him, at Governor House.



Caretaker Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication, Dr. Umar Saif chairing 6th Board of Directors meeting of National Information Technology Board (NITB) in Islamabad.

ICCI invites Saudi importers to import agricultural products from Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari on Thursday invited the Saudi importers to import agricultural products from Pakistan to meet their consumption.

He said that Pakistan produces quality food products and Saudi Arabia is an import-based market receiving supplies from foreign markets.

He urged Saudi Arabia to import agricultural products from Pakistan at competitive prices to meet the needs of its consumers.

He said this while talking to Fadel Abdallah, General Manager, Al-Shaqqa Trading Est of Saudi Arabia during his visit to ICCI.

Ahsan Bakhtawari said that Pakistani wheat, rice, fruits, and vegetable has great potential in the Saudi market and assured that ICCI would fully cooperate in enhancing exports of these products from Pakistan to Saudi

Arabia. He said that Pakistani meat, poultry products, textiles, IT products, surgical instruments, sports goods, leather products, and construction materials can also find good a market in Saudi Arabia.

He urged the Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to focus on further improving bilateral trade and investment relations that would create new jobs and bring prosperity to both countries.

He assured that ICCI would extend all possible cooperation in developing strong business linkages between the private sectors of both countries to explore all untapped areas of cooperation.

Speaking on the occasion, Fadel Abdallah, General Manager, Al-Shaqqa Trading Est of Saudi Arabia discussed the possibilities of direct import of food products, fruits, vegetables, seafood, and livestock from Pakistan.

Pak inks agreement to export skilled workers to S. Arabia in construction sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Jawad Sohrab Malik has signed an agreement recently with NESMA & Partners for the export of skilled Pakistani labor to Saudi Arabia. The agreement was signed at the Embassy of Pakistan in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, said a press release received here on Thursday.

The agreement marks a pivotal collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, paving the way for the export of a substantial Pakistani workforce to contribute to Saudi Arabia's ambitious infrastructure and development goals.

NESMA & Partners, as the leading construction company in Saudi Arabia, holds responsibility for numerous mega-projects within the kingdom.

The agreement would provide Pakistani workers with the opportunity to showcase their expertise and contribute to the success of these critical infrastructure projects.

Jawad Sohrab Malik highlighted the exceptional reputation of Pakistani workers for their dedication and hard work.

The agreement was signed between the Pakistan Overseas Employment Corporation (POEC) and NESMA & Partners. The POEC is a government agency responsible for the recruitment and deployment of Pakistani workers abroad.

NESMA & Partners is a leading Saudi Arabian construction company with a portfolio of mega-projects in the kingdom.

The agreement is expected to create significant job opportunities for Pakistani workers in Saudi Arabia. It will also help to strengthen the economic ties between the two countries.

The meeting was also attended by the Ambassador of Pakistan to Saudi Arabia, Ahmad Farooq, Director-General of the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOE).

PSX stays bullish, gains 355 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 355.19 points, a positive change of 0.58 percent, closing at 61,914.34 points against 61,559.16 points the previous trading day.

A total of 324,830,445 shares valuing Rs 13,966 billion were traded during the day as compared to 362,771,035 shares valuing Rs12.492 billion the last day.

Some 352 companies transacted their shares in the stock market; 185 of them recorded gains and 143 sustained losses, whereas the share prices of 24 remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Pak Elektron with 23,114,152 shares at Rs 22.74 per share, Cnergycio PK with 21,245,331 shares at Rs 3.95 per share, and Pak Intl Bulk with 16,257,000 shares at Rs 6.22 per share.

Services Industries Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 29.56 per share price, closing at Rs 657.00, whereas the runner-up was Systems Limited with a Rs 23.03 rise in its per share price to Rs410.40.

Rupee gains 17 paise against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Rupee on Thursday gained 17 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 279.32 against the previous day's closing of Rs 279.49.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 279.5 and Rs 282.3, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs 1.3 to close at Rs 303.36 against the last day's closing of Rs.302.06, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen remained constant at Rs 1.86, whereas an increase of Rs 1.7 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 354.38 compared to the last closing of Rs 352.68.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased by 5 paise each to close at Rs 76.04 and Rs 74.47.

President highlights social issues in meeting with LCCI delegation

LAHORE (APP): President Dr. Arif Alvi has stressed the importance of empowering women economically for their active participation in financial activities.

In a meeting with a delegation from the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), held at the Governor's House here on Thursday, he highlighted challenges facing the country currently including stunting, food insecurity, and 26.2 million out-of-

school children, and urged the business community to help prioritise solution to these problems. He advocated for addressing mental health issues by ensuring timely support at the household level. Discussions encompassed the nation's economic landscape, mental health, breast cancer, and women's empowerment. The LCCI members commended President Alvi and the First Lady's efforts in raising awareness on these critical social and health issues.

Mobilink Bank witnesses 72% revenue growth

Independent Report
ISLAMABAD: Mobilink Bank achieved multiple financial milestones in 2023, solidifying its position in the banking industry. With a revenue of PKR 41,053 million, representing 72% growth from the previous year, the Bank's performance underscores its commitment to excellence and innovation, particularly in its support for women and Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Mobilink Bank's commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is exemplified through its flagship initiative, the Women Inspirational Network (WIN) program and MobilinkHER Women Returnship Program, which

have emerged as a catalyst for change. Through WIN, the Bank has empowered over 5,000 female entrepreneurs with essential digital and business skills, while MobilinkHER Women Returnship Program has successfully onboarded eight (8) women who took career breaks, demonstrating its commitment to uplifting women in the workforce.

The Bank's DEI efforts received recognition from key organizations, including the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), ranking Mobilink Bank at the top on its Banking on Equality (BOE) scorecard. The VEON group also titled the Bank as a DEI Champion, highlighting

Trade Conference 2024: Ambassador Tirmizi highlights opportunities for Pakistani companies in Middle East

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, has highlighted opportunities for Pakistani companies in the Middle East (ME), particularly in the UAE, focusing on sectors such as dairy, meat, fruits, vegetables, and non-food products.

The event aimed to explore trade relations between Pakistan and the Middle East, providing networking opportunities for Pakistani traders, particularly with UAE buyers. Ambassador Faisal Niaz Tirmizi explained that the UAE market is continuously growing,

offering ideal opportunities for dedicated Pakistani companies with sound business plans to maximize their potential. Panel discussions during the conference focused on developing strategies to enhance market penetration and overcome challenges effectively.

Senior Vice Chairman of the Pakistan Dairy Association, Usman Zaheer, underscored the importance of dairy exports to the UAE market from Pakistan, emphasizing the need for value-added dairy products.

FCCI demands completion of IP gasline

FAISALABAD (APP): Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI) Acting President Dr Sajjad Arshad has stressed the need to complete pending Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline on priority basis to avoid penalty of \$18bn and to ensure gas supply to the industrial sector at the earliest.

He expressed satisfaction over Iran-Pakistan engagement on the issue as the energy crisis had gripped Pakistan with a trickle-down impact on overall economy.



QUETTA: A man selling use items in local market.

TBM, Ericsson extend partnership to expand services

ISLAMABAD (APP): Telenor Microfinance Bank (TMB) and Ericsson Wallet Platform have extended their partnership to propel Easypaisa's financial services and expand their service portfolio within the financial technology (fintech) sector.

According to a press release on Thursday, Ericsson will support TMB by providing its leading fintech solutions whereas Ericsson Wallet Platform will help with innovative new digital financial services.

Commenting on the recent development, Acting Chief Executive Officer and President, TMB & Easypaisa Kashif Ahmed said that TMB and Easypaisa are committed to enabling a financially inclusive and empowered Pakistan.

"With our state-of-the-art in-house

technology, powered by the Ericsson Wallet Platform, we aim to position ourselves as a leading Digital Bank providing a spectrum of new and innovative digital financial services for millions of Pakistanis", he added.

With this strategic collaboration, he said that the unified goal is to reshape the financial landscape across the country and develop an inclusive ecosystem that benefits the entire country.

Head of Mobile Financial Services of Ericsson, Michael Wallis-Brown said that Ericsson Wallet Platform supports over 400 million registered mobile wallets and processes more than 2.8 billion transactions worth over USD 40 billion monthly through communication service providers and financial institutions globally.



DUBAI: Participants of Pakistan Middle East Trade Development Conference 2024 standing in honor of the National Anthems of UAE and Pakistan played during the event held at Pakistan Association Dubai (PAD).

KPTMA refutes any link with tax fraud case

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textile Mills Association (KPTMA) has vehemently refuted a claim circulating in certain sections of the press alleging tax fraud amounting to Rs. 1.4 billion through the misuse of the Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS) by a so-called textile unit in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In a statement issued here on Thursday, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textile Mills Association (KPTMA) clarified that

the so-called textile unit has no affiliation with their organization, saying the association condemns the actions of this unit and urged the authorities to take strict action against those involved in tax evasion.

In a recent development, it has been revealed that a so-called textile unit, which exists only on paper with no physical presence, operating in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), has been involved in tax fraud.

SFA distributes food licenses

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Food Authority (SFA), distributed food licenses to the business community engaged in food businesses in a ceremony held at Deputy Commissioner's office Khandkot - Kashmore.

Director SFA Masood Bhutto along with Deputy Commissioner Ameer Fazal Awasi distributed food licenses, said a statement issued here on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion Director SFA Masood Bhutto said that on directives of DG SFA Agha Fakhar Hussain, SFA has been made more effective at the district level across the province and now SFA teams will conduct regular inspections in district Kashmore.

Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): The movements of ships was recorded at the port where eight ships namely, Xpress Salween, Maersk Cabo Verde, MSC Ellen, Wide Alpha, Chemroad Haya, Corona, Ullswater and Agia Erini Force carrying Containers, Chemicals, Palm oil, LPG and Coal, berthed at Container Terminal, Engro Terminal, Liquid Terminal.



KARACHI: Visitors looking animals during Dalfa cattle show at expo center in Provincial Capital.

Pakistan exports to South China increases by 16% in 2023

BEIJING (APP): Pakistan's exports to South China have witnessed a significant surge of 16% during the year 2023. This remarkable achievement comes as a result of the strengthened trade ties between the two countries

and Pakistan's ongoing efforts to diversify its export market, said Muhammad Irfan, Trade and Investment Counsellor Pakistan's Consulate in Guangzhou, China.

According to the latest data released by the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC), the total value of exports from Pakistan to South China reached a

record high of \$973.21 million from January-December of 2023, compared to \$836.645 million in the previous year. This upward trajectory is a testament to the resilience and competitiveness of Pakistan's export sector.

"Guangdong Province imported \$379.011 million worth of goods from Pakistan in 2023, while Fujian Province imported \$367.30 million." On the other hand, imports in the previous year were 248.532 million, up by 48%, followed by the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region's 86.790 million.



ISLAMABAD: Labourers busy unloading banana from a truck at Islamabad Fruit and Vegetable market.

Kremlin says Biden calling Putin a 'crazy SOB' debases the U.S.

MOSCOW (Internews): The Kremlin said on Thursday that Joe Biden had debased the United States by calling Russian President Vladimir Putin a "crazy SOB", casting the U.S. president's remark as part of a failed "Hollywood cowboy" act.

The U.S. president made the "crazy SOB" remark as part of a sentence about threats to the world - including "that guy Putin and others", the risk of nuclear conflict and the existential threat to humanity from climate change.

"The use of such language against the head of another state by the president of the United States is unlikely to infringe on our president, President Putin," Kremlin spokesman

Dmitry Peskov said. "But it debases those who use such vocabulary." Peskov said the remark was "probably some kind of attempt to look like a Hollywood cowboy. But honestly I don't think it's possible."

"Has Mr Putin ever used one crude word to address you? This has never happened. Therefore, I think that such vocabulary debases America itself," Peskov said, adding that such language was a disgrace for the United States. Putin ally Dmitry Medvedev, who served as president from 2008-2012, said the existential threat to the world came from "useless old geezers, like Biden himself". Medvedev said Biden was "senile" and "ready to start a war with Russia". The war

in Ukraine, the death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and U.S. assertions that Russia plans to put a nuclear weapon in space have led to the biggest crisis in relations between Russia and the West since the Cold War.

Some Russian and U.S. diplomats say they do not remember a time when relations between the world's two biggest nuclear powers were worse, including during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Biden said last week after prison officers announced Navalny's death in a Russian penal colony that it was "a consequence of something that Putin and his thugs did." Navalny had previously accused Putin of trying to kill him, an allegation the Kremlin denied



Farmers riding tractors arrive in front of Madrid's Puerta de Alcalá square during a protest against the European Union's agricultural policy.

UK Parliament in turmoil after a debate over a Gaza cease-fire raised fears for lawmakers' safety

Monitoring Desk
LONDON: The chaotic debate over a cease-fire in Gaza reverberated through Britain's Parliament on Thursday as the speaker of the House of Commons faced calls to resign, and lawmakers said they feared for their safety amid pressure from all sides of the issue.

After more than six hours of sometimes heated debate on Wednesday, both the governing Conservative Party and the Scottish National Party, or SNP, refused to participate in voting on the question.

That left Labour, the largest opposition party, with the largely hollow victory of passing its version of a nonbinding motion calling for an "immediate humanitarian" cease-fire unopposed.

Anger over the way the debate unfolded led to more than 50 lawmakers

submitting letters of no confidence in Speaker Lindsay Hoyle on Thursday. Hoyle was meeting with the leaders of all three main parties to plot a way forward.

Underlying the parliamentary tug-of-war are rising tensions over the Israel-Hamas war, with hundreds of thousands of people marching through London last Saturday in support of the Palestinian cause and figures showing that the number of antisemitic incidents in the United Kingdom jumped almost 150% last year.

That is spilling over into Parliament, where the Gaza issue has been "weaponized" and some lawmakers believe they have to vote a particular way to ensure their own safety and the safety of their families, Conservative Charles Walker said during Wednesday's debate.

EU is watching Albania's deal to hold asylum seekers for Italy

Monitoring Desk
MILAN: Albania has agreed to host two migrant processing centers on its territory that will be fully run by Italy, under a deal that worries many human rights activists. The European Union, however, sees the agreement as a possible future template.

Italy has long complained about not getting enough help from its EU partners in dealing with migrants arriving on its shores from northern Africa. Italy's right-wing Premier Giorgia Meloni is keen to show she is taking action as arrivals spiked 55% this year, to nearly 160,000 — though still well below the levels reached during the 2015 crisis. In January Italy's lower chamber of parliament approved the novel deal with non-EU member Albania, followed a month later by the Senate.

Also in January, Albania's Constitutional Court rejected a legal challenge that could have

blocked the deal. Albania's parliament approved the deal with 77 votes to zero on Thursday, while 63 lawmakers were marked not present as the opposition refused to participate. The president also will issue a decree as the final step of approval.

Under a five-year agreement announced in November, Albania will shelter up to 36,000 migrants a year as Rome fast-tracks their asylum requests. Those picked up within Italy's territorial waters, or by rescue ships operated by non-governmental organizations, would retain their right under international and EU law to apply for asylum in Italy and have their claims processed there.

Italy has agreed to take back any migrants whose requests have been rejected, and they will likely be repatriated. Children and pregnant women will not be covered by the plan.

Fresh aggression: US, UK launch five strikes on Yemen's Hudaydah

Monitoring Desk
SANA'A (Online): The United States and Britain have conducted fresh aerial assaults on Yemen's strategic western province of Hudaydah.

The al-Masirah television network reported three airstrikes on Ras Issa area in Hudaydah's a-Salif district late on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, it added, four similar air raids also targeted al-Jabana and al-Arj areas in Hudaydah.

Meanwhile, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement that its forces had carried out four strikes on areas in Yemen, targeting "seven mobile anti-ship cruise missiles and one anti-ship ballistic missile launcher" in the act of aggression.

It claimed that the targets "presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and to the US Navy ships in the region."

CENTCOM also said that its forces had shot down a "one-way attack unmanned aircraft system."

Nikkei parties like it's 1989; hits record high

Monitoring Desk
SINGAPORE (Internews): Japanese stocks raced to a record peak on Thursday, breaking levels last seen in 1989 during the halcyon days of the bubble economy, as cheap valuations and corporate reforms lure foreign money looking for alternatives to battered Chinese markets.

The Nikkei share average (N225), opens new tab rose as high as 39,156.97 points, above the previous intraday all-time peak of 38,957.44 points touched on the final trading day of 1989. On that day, the benchmark index closed at 38,915.87 while on Thursday the Nikkei finished 2.19% higher at 39,098.68. The 34 years it has taken to regain its footing is a record, too, for a major market and is a decade longer than Wall Street took to recoup losses from the 1929 crash and Great Depression.



BEIJING: A man removes snow from a rental bicycle.



GAZASTRIP: A man records the names of the deceased during the funeral of Palestinians killed in overnight Israeli strikes at a cemetery in Rafah.

As war with Russia enters third year, US aid to Ukraine hangs in the balance

Monitoring Desk
WASHINGTON (Internews): Top Biden administration officials spent last weekend in Europe trying to soothe the jitters over the prospect of U.S. military aid to Ukraine ending, assuring counterparts from Paris, Berlin and Kyiv as the war enters its third year that Washington will somehow come through.

Just two days later, the Republican Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Mike Johnson, who has so far blocked passage of a bill that includes \$60 billion in new funding for Ukraine, posted a picture of himself smiling with former Republican President Donald Trump, who has opposed aid for Kyiv.

The contrast underscored the challenges facing the Biden administration if Congress fails to approve more military assistance, which Ukraine desperately needs to hold off Russian invaders.

So far, President Joe Biden's administration has ruled out discussing a plan B. Trump, frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination and a longstanding critic of the NATO alliance,

Ship abandoned in Red Sea faces unknown fate, sources say
LONDON (INP): A cargo ship abandoned four days ago in the Gulf of Aden after it was hit by missiles fired by Yemen's Houthi is still floating despite taking in water, and could be towed to nearby Djibouti, industry sources said.

Shipping risks have escalated due to repeated drone and missile strikes in the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab Strait by the Iran-aligned Houthis since November. U.S. and British forces have responded with several strikes on Houthi facilities but have so far failed to halt the attacks.

Iran says Israel continues to violate Palestinians' right to self-determination

Monitoring Desk
UNITED NATION (Internews): The International Court of Justice, the UN's top court, on Thursday continued its hearing from dozens of states and three international organizations who question the legality of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Representatives from countries including China, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Libya were expected to deliver their positions during the third day of the hearing at the ICJ, also known as the World Court.

Speakers from the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have already demanded Israel end its occupation of the Palestinian territories, with the Kingdom's envoy to the Netherlands Ziad Al-Atiyah stating Israel's continued actions were legally indefensible. Safadi closed his remarks, saying "Palestinians are being killed in the hundreds every day in Gaza and in the West Bank because Israel is not being held accountable for its war crimes and violation of international law... Rule that the Israel occupation, the source of all evil, must end," Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan, said that "Israel is violating the rights of Muslims and Christians to the freedom of worship by banning Muslims from entering Al-Aqsa.

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South Africa's parliament impeaches top judge

Monitoring Desk
WESTERN CAPE: In a historic move, South Africa's parliament has impeached one of the country's top judges for misconduct.

An investigation found that John Hlophe, the leading judge in Western Cape province, tried to influence justices at the country's top court in a case relating to former President Jacob Zuma.

He approached two justices in 2008 to see if they would support Mr Zuma in a decision relating to a corruption case.

Mr Hlophe always denied the accusation.



Medical workers walk at Severance Hospital in Seoul, South Korea.

Thousands ordered to flee as bushfire burns in Australia's south

Monitoring Desk
SYDNEY (INP): More than two thousand people have been ordered to flee from towns in the west of Australia's Victoria state due to a bushfire burning out of control on Thursday.

The state emergency service urged residents in the towns of Raglan and Beaufort, home to around two thousand people, and those in surrounding areas to leave.

while it was still safe and head east to the nearby regional hub of Ballarat, 95 kms (59 miles) west of Melbourne.

Roughly 50 square kms (12,355 acres) is ablaze northwest of

Bengal folk artist's event attacked by Hindutva activists in Rajasthan

Monitoring Desk
JAIPUR (INP): Activists affiliated with a Hindutva group stormed the venue of a Bengali folk artist in BJP-ruled Rajasthan state, causing chaos and fear among the attendees.

The serene atmosphere of Bengal's folk artist Deen Krishna Thakur's event was shattered when the Hindutva group stormed the venue in the heart of Jaipur city.

Eyewitnesses recount the harrowing moments when the peaceful gathering turned into a scene of confrontation.

"They barged in, shouting slogans and vandalising the stage. It was terrifying."

US farmers face harsh economics with record corn supplies in silos

Monitoring Desk
CHICAGO (Internews): Illinois farmer Dan Henebery regrets not selling more of his corn crop last summer, when the Midwest needed rain and prices were high. He is not alone. Farmers across the United States are kicking themselves for putting off corn sales after fields dried up in May and June, fueling expectations for higher prices and smaller harvests. Instead, prices tanked as rains saved the crop. The size and speed of the price collapse stung farmers and left their storage bins stuffed with record

Hindutva outfit sets eyes on Bhojshala mosque in Madhya Pradesh

Monitoring Desk
BHOPAL (INP): After Ayodhya's Babri Masjid and Gyanvapi Masjid in Varanasi, a Hindutva outfit has set its sights on Bhojshala mosque complex in Madhya Pradesh state in India. The Hindu Front for Justice Trust has filed a petition in Madhya Pradesh high court claiming the Bhojshala mosque in Dhar city was a temple. The petitioner urged the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to conduct an extensive survey.

Israeli continues air strikes in Gaza, China urged UNSC for ceasefire

Monitoring Desk
GAZA (Online): Nineteen Palestinians were martyred and several injured in unabated Israeli air strikes on refugee camps in Gaza during the last twenty four hours. According to Wafa news agency, Israeli army continued bombardments on Nuseirat refugee camp and the Zeitoun neighborhood.

In the Nuseirat camp in central Gaza, Israeli air strikes on the home of the al-Daalis family martyred 17 people and wounded dozens of others. In Zeitoun, local journalist Ihab Nasrallah and his wife were martyred. Their three children were also badly burned in the attack.

Britain and Jordan have air-dropped four tons of aid including medicines, fuel and food at a hospital in northern Gaza.

Britain's Foreign Office said the UK-funded aid was delivered by the Jordanian Air Force.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said in a statement that thousands of patients will benefit and the fuel will enable this vital hospital to continue its life-saving work.

China has urged the UN Security Council to push for ceasefire in Gaza.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said during a regular briefing in Beijing that protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict has resulted in a devastating humanitarian situation in besieged enclave. She said that China will continue to work with the rest of the international community to push the Council to take further actions that are meaningful for de-escalation.

Turkey calls for Gaza ceasefire, two-state solution at G20 meeting

Monitoring Desk
ANKARA (Internews): Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan called on the international community to take a more active role towards an urgent ceasefire in Gaza and a two-state solution to the conflict during talks at the G20 meeting in Brazil, a Turkish diplomatic source said. Turkey, which has harshly criticised Israel for its attacks on Gaza and backed measures to have it tried for genocide at the World Court, has repeatedly called for a ceasefire.

Unlike its Western allies and some Gulf nations, NATO member Turkey does not view Hamas, the Palestinian militant group which runs Gaza and on Oct. 7 carried out an attack inside Israel that prompted the Israeli campaign, as a terrorist organisation.

Fidan told a G20 foreign ministers meeting in Rio de Janeiro on Wednesday that the "savagery" in Gaza must be stopped, and discussed steps to achieve an urgent ceasefire and get more aid into the enclave during talks with counterparts from the United States, Germany, and Egypt, the source said.

"Steps that can be taken to achieve a full ceasefire as soon as possible were discussed," during talks between Fidan and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the source said, adding Fidan also discussed "concrete steps" to stop the fighting with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock.

"The fact that a decision on a ceasefire did not come out of the U.N. Security Council once again, has shown that reform is a must," Fidan told a session at the G20 meeting, according to one of his aides, referring to a third U.N. veto on a ceasefire call at the 15-member body. Ankara says the U.N. Security Council must be reformed to be more inclusive and representative of the world.

Brazil calls for reform of United Nations as it starts its G20 presidency

Monitoring Desk
RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's foreign minister called for reforms of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions Wednesday while criticizing their inability to prevent global conflicts, as his country kicked off its presidency of the Group of 20 nations.

Mauro Vieira told fellow foreign ministers during opening remarks for a G20 meeting in Rio de Janeiro that the U.N. Security Council has been unable to prevent or halt conflicts such as those playing out in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip.

"Multilateral institutions are not adequately equipped to deal with current challenges, as demonstrated by the unacceptable paralysis of the Security Council in relation to ongoing conflicts," Vieira said.

Foreign ministers of the 20 leading rich and developing nations are gathering this week to discuss poverty, climate change and heightened global tensions, setting a roadmap for work to accomplish ahead of a Nov. 18-19 summit in Rio.

One of Brazil's key proposals, set by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, is a reform of global governance institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and multilateral banks, where he wants to push for stronger representation of developing nations.

The leftist leader reiterated on Feb. 18 his interest in expanding the U.N.'s Security Council, contemplating the entry of more countries from Africa, Latin America, as well as India, Germany or Japan.

"We need to add more people and end the right of veto in the U.N., because it is not possible for a country alone to be able to veto the approval of something approved by all members," Lula said while on a state visit to Ethiopia.

Over 70% of trainee doctors submit resignations in SK Amid Protests

Monitoring Desk
SOUTH KOREA: Anxiety is mounting in South Korea's largest hospitals, now starting to buckle under the gaping absence of thousands of trainee doctors who are on strike against a government plan to increase the intake of medical students.

Despite a slew of emergency measures announced by the government this week, the strike has reportedly affected the operations of major hospitals. A brain cancer patient told AFP that his chemotherapy has been postponed, even though the cancer has spread to his lungs and liver, while pregnant women say they have had their C-sections canceled. The health ministry said it has received around 150 public complaints about the strike.

The number of participants is continuing to snowball, with 74%—or over 9,200—of trainee doctors having tendered their resignations. Over 8,000 have walked off the job, Vice

Health Minister Park Min-soo said at a news briefing on Thursday.

With junior doctors leaving their posts en masse, nurses are left to hold down the fort, carrying out tasks usually reserved for doctors, such as signing consent forms and dressing wounds, local media reported.

The Korean Young Nurses Association has publicly urged doctors to refrain from joining the strike. "If more trainee doctors stage walkouts, nurses not only have to take on doctoral duties but they also have to deal with the patients' complaints," the group wrote in a post on social media. "If something goes wrong with the patient in the process, nurses are required by law to take all the responsibility."

Meanwhile, Park Min-soo said on Thursday that authorities will not be accepting the resignation letters from the trainee doctors and urged them to consider the consequences of the strike.



LAHORE: President Dr. Arif Alvi addressing the recognition ceremony of officers of the Federal Insurance Ombudsman and representatives of insurance companies, at Governor House.

Ashrafi denounces misuse of apex court ruling ambiguities

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Special Representative for Religious Affairs, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, and Pakistani Diaspora in the Middle East and Islamic Countries, Thursday denounced attempts by certain individuals to exploit ambiguities arising from the Supreme Court verdict in the Mubarak Ahmed Sani case for political purposes.

Addressing to the media persons with the Caretaker Minister for Information, Broadcasting, and Parliamentary Affairs, he asked the detractors of verdict to use legal avenues to address issues, rather than opting for street protests or violence. This is particularly crucial, considering the im-

possibility of allowing the use of banned material in Pakistan. Urging the Punjab government to submit a review petition to the Supreme Court of Pakistan, he emphasized the fundamental belief in the finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last Prophet of Allah, which was an integral part of the Muslim faith. According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, this matter is settled. Every Muslim is entrusted with safeguarding the sanctity of the finality of the holy Prophet (PBUH). He appealed to everyone to foster an environment that ensures the stability and peace of the country remains undisturbed.

Solangi calls for promoting trend of research among people

ISLAMABAD (APP): Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Thursday called to promote the trend of research among people. Delivering his speech at the launching ceremony of the Display Center of the Directorate of Electronic Media and Publication at Pak-China Friendship Center, he said the tendency of reading books and writing was decreasing in the digital era. He said that the Directorate of Electronic Media and Publications (DEMP) had worked hard to promote the trend of reading and writing among the people. "This organization has done a great job in a short time with hard work", Murtaza Solangi said while appreciating the perfor-

mance of the DEMP. The minister said that the quality of books and periodicals at the display center was high from both the content and printing point of view. He congratulated the officers and staff of the DEMP on the inauguration of its first Display Center at Pak-China Center and hoped that as planned it will open more display centers at the mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Lok Virsa and Islamabad Monument at Shakar Parian. Earlier Executive Director General DEMP Imrana Wazir briefed the minister about the vision behind the creation of DEMP and its mission. Executive Director General Information Service Academy Arshad Munir was also present on the occasion.

Fast decision-making essential for national development: Alvi

Independent Report LAHORE: President Dr Arif Alvi has underscored the need for taking fast decisions to put the country on the path of progress and prosperity. He said that slow decision-making has hindered the process of national development. He expressed these views while addressing the recognition ceremony of officers of the Federal Insurance Ombudsman (FIO) Secretariat, CEOs and MDs of Insurance Companies, organized by the Federal Insurance Ombudsman, at Governor House, Lahore, today.

He congratulated FIO on its outstanding performance by providing monetary relief to the tune of over Rs. 5 billion to the aggrieved policyholders. The President also remarked that Pakistan had tremendous potential to grow but it required honesty and fast decision making to put it on the right track. He stressed that honesty must be the foundation stone with a key focus on integrity and fair play. He stated that institutions of the country were required to do justice. The President added that he firmly believed in merit, saying that he had never asked for any favour for anyone during his tenure as the President. He expressed the hope that Pakistan would turn around as it was blessed with enormous potential and talented youth.

Federal Insurance Ombudsman, Dr Muhammad Khawar Jameel, highlighted the role of FIO in providing justice to the policyholders against the maladministration of insurance companies. He said that under the guidance of President Dr Arif Alvi, FIO had significantly improved its performance and processed 6000 complaints last year. The President also distributed recognition shields among the representatives of insurance companies and officials of FIO for their valuable services in the provision of timely relief to insurance policyholders against the maladministration of insurance companies. Later, a delegation of Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry also called on the President and discussed the economic situation.



ISLAMABAD: Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori meeting with Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, MQM leaders Dr. Farooq Sattar and Mustafa Kamal were also present in the meeting.



Pakistan Ambassador to the US, Masood Khan meeting with delegation of USAID led by Zeinah Salahi, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator. Other members of the delegation included Peter Young, Asia Bureau Director for South & Central Asia, Adeline Joshua and Brittany Brown.

Governor appreciates services of Dr. Shafiq for higher education

Independent Report QUETTA: The Governor Balochistan, Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar has highly appreciated the invaluable services of outgoing Vice Chancellor of Balochistan University, Professor Dr. Shafiqur Rehman who paid farewell call-on to him here at the Governor's House on Thursday. The Governor expressed best wishes for more success of Professor Dr. Shafiqur Rehman.

portfolio of Vice Chancellor is an honour too. He was speaking to the Vice Chancellor Balochistan University, Professor Dr. Shafiqur Rehman who paid farewell call-on to him here at the Governor's House on Thursday. The Governor expressed best wishes for more success of Professor Dr. Shafiqur Rehman.

Jan Achakzai, Zubair Jamali grieved over death of Naji

Independent Report QUETTA: The caretaker Provincial Minister for Information, Jan Achakzai and Minister for Home, Mir Zubair Jamali have expressed deep grief and sorrow over death of the senior journalist, Nazir Naji. In their separate condolence statements issued here on Thursday, the caretaker Ministers expressed sympathy and condolence with the bereaved family over his death.

They also paid rich tributes to late Nazir Naji saying that his services in the field of journalism would be remembered for long. He prayed that may Allah Almighty rest the departed soul into His eternal peace and give enough patience and strength to the bereaved family to bear the loss of his death.

Secretary health for stern action against illegal labs in Balochistan

QUETTA (APP): Secretary Health Balochistan Abdullah Khan on Thursday directed the Healthcare Commission and Balochistan Clinical Laboratory Regulatory Authority to take stern against the unregistered and illegal laboratories working across the province. Declaring the registration of laboratories

with Balochistan Clinical Laboratory Regulatory Authority as mandatory, the secretary said laboratories and diagnostic centres must follow the procedure laid down by the BCRLA for sanitation and waste management. The secretary of health further directed the owners of the laboratories to get their facilities.



QUETTA: Secretary Forest Abdul Rauf Baloch inaugurating tree plantation campaign by planting a sapling.

FAO holds stakeholders consultation workshop on fisheries policy

Independent Report QUETTA: Two-day stakeholders consultation workshop was held under the auspices of Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) on the fisheries policy and laws in Karachi. The workshop was organized on the theme of one part of technical assistance to the provincial government Gwadar Lasbela Economic Support Project-II in collaboration with International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The workshop was aimed at promoting cooperation and getting wisdom for preparations of the fisheries policy framework and

formation of legal appliances. The federal and provincial government high ups as well as governmental organizations, experts, representatives of fishermen community and Aquaculture value chain actively participated in the workshop. Prominent among them were the Naib Admiral (R) Iftikhar Ahmed, Imran Gichki, Lal Jan Jaffar, Dr Muhammad Ali Mastoi, Director General Sindh Maritime Fisheries besides others. The participants stressed the need to promote policy of fisheries sector.

AIMS to hold Congenital Heart Disease Health Camp in Quetta

QUETTA (APP): Aria Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS) Quetta will hold a Congenital Heart Disease Health Camp and CME in its office located on Spini Road on Saturday, February 24.

A press statement issued here on Thursday said experienced pediatric cardiologists from various reputable centres in the country will be conducting a CHD screening camp followed by CM-a public health approach to CHD. The Congenital Heart Disease Health Camp will start at 9:00 am and will continue till 2:00 pm. The heart patients mainly the parents of kids patients have been asked to visit the camp to be established at Aria Institute of Medical Sciences Spini Road Quetta.

PHC orders to remove name of Asad Qaisar from ECL forthwith

PESHAWAR (Online): Peshawar High Court (PHC) has ordered to remove name of Asad Qaisar former speaker National Assembly (NA) from ECL (Exit Control List).

The petition filed against putting name of Asad Qaisar in ECL came up for hearing before two members bench of PHC comprising Justice Shakil Ahmad and Justice Sahibzada Asad Ullah Thursday. The court declared June 23, 2023 order of putting name of Asad Qaisar in ECL unconstitutional. Muazzam But advo-

cate counsel for Asad Qaisar said Asad Qaisar is former speaker NA and he was going to Saudi Arabia for performance of Umrah but he was stopped. Justice Sahibzada Asad Ullah questioned his name was included in ECL when. The counsel told the court his name was put in ECL on June 23. Justice Shakil Ahmad questioned has he been elected member of national assembly now. The counsel for petitioner said yes he is member of assembly and senior politician.



LAHORE: Federal Ombudsman for Insurance Dr. Jameel Khawar addressing 4th Annual Conference.

Telecom work completes, navigational work in offing at new Gwadar Int'l Airport

GWADAR (INP): In a significant development, high-tech telecommunication work has completed in connection with ongoing gradual development of New Gwadar International Airport (NGIA).

NGIA's state of art telecommunication paraphernalia involves telecom networks and systems that use various technologies and protocols to facilitate the transmission of voice, data, and audio-video signals between devices, including smartphones, computers, and other communication devices. Talking to Gwadar Pro GWA official said that NGIA's telecommunication work deals with telecom networks which are made up of various components, including transmission systems, switching systems, and network management systems. These components work together to ensure that communication signals are transmitted and delivered efficiently and securely, he added. Meanwhile Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of-

PTA strengthens measures against illegal SIM issuance

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Zonal Office in Lahore, in close collaboration with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Circle, conducted a successful raid against the franchise of a mobile phone company located in Raiwind. The franchisee was found to be involved in the illegal issuance of SIMs, said a news release on Thursday. During the raid, 256 active SIMs were discovered. The FIA team confiscated these active SIMs along with 16 BVS devices as evidence.

15th Pediatric Neurology Conference due to be inaugurated today

Independent Report QUETTA: The 15th Pediatric Neurology Conference is scheduled to be inaugurated today (Friday) here at a local hotel. According to an official handout issued here on Thursday, the Governor Balochistan, Malik Abdul Wali Khan Kakar would formally the Pediatric Neurology Conference while the caretaker Provincial Minister for Health, Dr. Amir Muhammad Khan Jogezi would be the chief guest. The Secretary Health Balochistan would participate as the guest of honour at the Conference which would continue for three days. The renowned pediatricians from Pakistan and abroad would be participating in the Conference being organized by the Pakistan

Pediatric Association Balochistan chapter. The Chairman organizing committee and Chief Executive Officer Children Hospital, Professor Dr. Habibullah Babar and Co-Chairperson and President Pakistan Pediatric Association, Dr Attaullah Bizenjo termed the Pediatric Conference as an important development for mental health of the people especially of children. This is first conference of its kind in the history of province from which the pediatricians and post-graduate doctors would benefit from it. The participants would present their thesis in the conference, which would go a long way in creating innovation and technology in treatment of children in the province.

PPP ready to cooperate in federal govt with no power sharing: Kaira

ISLAMABAD (APP): Leader of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Qamar Zaman Kaira on Thursday affirmed PPP's willingness to be part of the federal government without seeking a share in power. Talking to a private news channel, he highlighted PPP's commitment to national interests and willingness to offer cooperation to the treasury benches, even without holding ministerial positions. Although coalition governments are typically perceived as weak, he said adding that they can also be strength if managed effectively with unity. Answering a query, he said that even in these difficult situations, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) attitude towards reconciliation and progress has been undemocratic. Furthermore, responding to the news about his candidacy for the Governorship of Punjab, Kaira stated that the decision rests with the party leadership.

ECP asks multi-seat winners to vacate extra seats ahead of oath

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Thursday urged winning candidates who secured more than one seat in the February 8 polls to vacate one seat before taking the oath. The commission urged the candidates to submit applications for relinquishing seats to either the office of the Chief Election Commissioner or the Election Commission of Pakistan Secretariat in

Islamabad or the Provincial Election Commissioner in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. Alternatively, in accordance with Article 223(2), if no action is taken within 30 days, all seats, except the one for which the candidate is ultimately declared successful, will be deemed vacant. The candidates will have to retain only one seat they want before they are sworn in as legislators.



ISLAMABAD: Mr. Murtaza Solangi, Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting inaugurating a 'Display Centre' at Directorate of Electronic media and Publications (DEMP).

Gohar, Umar Ayub uphold independent status rather to join SIC

ISLAMABAD (INP): Two independent members of the National Assembly elected on a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) ticket, Barrister Gohar and Umar Ayub, have opted to remain unaffiliated with any political party despite the deadline for such decisions having passed. According to PTI sources, 86 independent candidates have joined the Sunni Ittehad Council and 8 have aligned with the Muslim League-N. Gohar and Ayub have chosen to maintain their independent status. This decision is re-

portedly linked to their intentions to contest for Chairman and General Secretary positions in the upcoming PTI intra-party elections. PTI has officially announced its intra-party election schedule, with polling set for March 3rd. The nomination process will commence on February 23rd and 24th, with submissions accepted both physically and digitally through email. Scrutiny of nominations will occur on February 25th, followed by decisions on the same by February 27th.



QUETTA: A group photo of participants of two-day Stakeholder Consultation Workshop on Balochistan Fisheries Policy and Legislation organized by FAO.