

Islamabad POST

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Putin blames West for tensions, demands security guarantees

Detailed News On Page-07

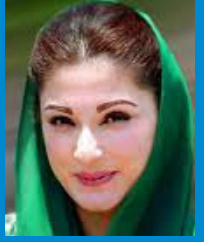
SCO chief for curbing foreign meddling

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Maryam asks PM to leave after KP defeat

Detailed News On Page-01



Briefs

WHO Chief for quitting gatherings

APP

UNITED NATIONS: The spread of Covid-19, particularly the Omicron variant, might mean Christmas holiday gatherings need to be cancelled, World Health Organization Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has said. "There can be no doubt that increased social mixing over the holiday period in many countries will lead to increased cases, overwhelm health systems and more deaths," Tedros said in a media briefing. "All of us are sick of this pandemic. All of us want to spend time with friends and family."

PTI lost despite rigging

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on Tuesday said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has lost the local bodies elections in KP despite massive rigging. Talking to media persons, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi once again said that only solution to country's problems is to send the government packing and announce new general elections. PML-N leader also criticized government and said that corruption by PTI is at its peak but Chairman of NAB is turning a blind eye. One day they all will be held accountable, he added.

Abid Ali's condition stable

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Tuesday said Test cricketer Abid Ali was diagnosed with acute coronary syndrome after he complained of chest pain during a match of the Quaid-e-Azam Trophy. The match between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Abid's team Central Punjab was being played at the UBL Sports Complex, Karachi, when the player felt pain in his chest and was taken to a "cardiac hospital" for treatment, PCB said.

Fawad regrets extremist parties' rise

Terms JUI-F's win 'unfortunate'; Says Imran is crucial for Pakistani politics



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry on Tuesday said that the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam scoring big in the first phase of local body elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is "unfortunate". This will spell the country's "downfall" as a party "that is against women's rights and is a supporter of extremist policies when it comes to religion" has won the local body polls, Chaudhry said, while addressing a post-cabinet meeting press conference.

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Shehbaz felicitates Fazl on JUI-F's win

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif Tuesday telephoned Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) president and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, and congratulated him on his party's outstanding performance in the Local Bodies' (LBs) elections held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Both leaders also had an exchange of views over the prevailing political situation in the country. "By voting for the opposition parties, the people of KP have refused to repose their trust in the claim of 'tabdeeli' (change) made by the 'selected' prime minister time and again," Shehbaz said.

Continued on Page 06

Int'l community lauds Pakistan's stance: PM

The prime minister congratulated the Foreign Office for successfully conducting the session

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan said Tuesday the international community and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have now acknowledged Pakistan's narrative on Afghanistan. The prime minister, addressing officers of the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad during his visit to the Foreign Office, said the international community should focus on

Continued on Page 06

OIC moot productive: FM

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said Tuesday that the Extraordinary Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers held in Islamabad on Sunday proved productive in respect of taking steps to address the serious humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Talking to Deputy Leader of

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Commander Royal Bahrain Naval Force (RBNF) Rear Admiral Muhammad Yousif Al Asam calls on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi at Naval Headquarters. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi cutting ribbon on inauguration of (I.T.I) Islamabad Tehran Istanbul Freight train. Federal Railways Minister, Turkish ambassador and Irani ambassador are also present on the occasion. - APP

Pak-Iran-Turkey cargo train restarts

The train departed from Islamabad for Istanbul

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Following a 10-year hiatus, a freight train service between Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan was relaunched on Tuesday in a major boost for trade among the three countries and within the region. The Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) cargo train was started in 2009 but suspended in 2011 due to several delays in Pakistan. It can complete the journey between the three countries in about 14 days, much faster and less costly than the alternate sea route. The train departed from Pakistan's capital for Europe's largest city with dozens of containers. It will cover 1,990 kilometers (1,235 miles) inside Pakistan, before crossing through the Taftan border for a 2,603-kilometer (1,620 miles) stretch in Iran. The train will travel some 1,850 kilometers (1,150 miles) in Turkey, passing through the capital Ankara before reaching its final stop in Istanbul. Turkey, Pa-

kistan, and Iran are founders of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), a 10-member regional cooperation bloc that was established in 1964 as the Regional Cooperation for Development and renamed ECO in 1985. The decision to resume the ITI cargo train service was taken at a ministerial meeting of ECO member

states in 2020. At Tuesday's ceremony in Islamabad, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi hailed the "historic" development as a step that will open new avenues for trade and business in the region and beyond. He said an ITI passenger train could also be launched in the future to further enhance regional connectivity and economic integration. Mustafa Yurdakul, Turkey's ambassador to Pakistan, said the resumption of the cargo train service is an important move part of the ECO framework and vision. "This project has been on the agenda for a long time. It is a step that will improve bilateral cooperation and bolster economic and commercial exchanges between our countries," he said, emphasizing that the rail link should be extended further to other parts of Europe.

Bahraini Naval Commander meets CNS

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Commander Royal Bahrain Naval Force (RBNF) Rear Admiral Muhammad Yousif Al Asam called on Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi at Naval Headquarters, Islamabad. Upon arrival at Naval Headquarters, Commander Royal Bahrain Naval Force was received by the Naval Chief. A smartly turned out contingent of Pakistan Navy presented him Guard of Honour and the visiting dignitary was then introduced to Principal Staff Officers at Naval Headquarters. During the meeting matters of mutual interest including bilateral collaborations and regional security mileu was discussed.

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Maryam asks PM to leave after KP defeat

'Maryam should be ashamed of party defeat'

RANA FARRUKH



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Vice-President Maryam Nawaz Sharif has asked Prime Minister Imran Khan to quit over his party's shameful defeat in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa local government elections mockingly telling him there will be no

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Information and broadcasting, Farrukh Habib on Tuesday said Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) vice president Maryam Nawaz should be ashamed of her party's humiliating defeat in the local government elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The minister in a news release said she [Maryam] should admit her defeat with open heart as her party remained on the last number in

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OIC session in Islamabad a feather in govt's cap

Interestingly when it comes to pledges, Muslim countries response is quite forthcoming but when it comes to actually deliver these pledges, they start beating about the bush. Western countries unlike make modest pledges yet ensure their timely fulfillment. The evolving Afghan situation requires an urgent response. Any complacency can only add to their woes

COMMENT

ANSAR M BHATTI

THE extraordinary session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in Islamabad on December 19, 2021 can surely be regarded as a feather in the present government's cap because over 20 foreign ministers and 10 deputy foreign ministers attended this event. In the eyes of the outer world, Pakistan is often regarded as an unsafe country for such mega events therefore holding of this particular session helped dilute that impression. The foreign ministers of the member states met in Islamabad after almost 40 years to discuss once again the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The joint declaration issued after the conference duly recalled the efforts ex-

erted by the Republic of Indonesia to highlight the grave humanitarian situation in Afghanistan on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly and the shared attention and concern by the Muslim countries to make headway in addressing the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. The declaration also made it incumbent upon the Taliban government to make sure that concrete steps are taken against all terrorist organizations in particular Al-Qaeda, Deash and its affiliates, ETIM, and TTP. According to sources privy to the closed session, the Taliban delegation assured the gathering that all the genuine concerns of the world should be taken care of. While there is no denying the fact that the conference could have not seen the light of the day without the active support and patronage of the Saudi government, Pakistan had gladly accepted to be the host of the event and post-conference feedback suggests, the Pakistan government and especially the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs successfully conducted the event albeit there were few hiccups as well but the same can be overlooked given the fact that Pakistan had no experience of hosting such a gigantic event, at least in the recent past. As we saw many countries made solemn pledges both in cash and kind to help suffering Afghans. Saudi Arabia announced 1 billion Riyals while many European countries too committed reasonable sums. Interestingly when it comes to pledges, Muslim countries response is quite forthcoming but when it comes to actually deliver these pledges, they start beating about the bush. Western countries unlike make modest pledges yet ensure their timely fulfillment. The evolving Afghan situation requires an urgent response. Any complacency can only add to their woes. All said and done, the Afghan government spearheaded by Taliban needs to address concerns shared with them during the OIC session and on other occasions as well. And more than that,

concerns of the neighboring countries also need to be heeded to because these countries happen to be the direct target whenever instability rules supreme in Afghanistan. Stability in Afghanistan ostensibly holds key to regional peace and stability. Also it is important for Afghanistan to thrive and prosper, particularly in the field of economy, with a view to minimizing its dependence on foreign aid. Without economic independence, political independence will remain elusive. Historically the spoilers have also played key role in causing instability in Afghanistan. And irony of the matter is that the spoilers are still there. They exist within and without Afghanistan. They would wish to keep Afghanistan always on its toes so that their (spoilers) relevance remains intact. One must not forget that in the United States, withdrawal was construed as an ignominious defeat. And as we know it is always difficult to accept or digest defeat, especially when it is inflicted by the minnows.

Coming back to the OIC extraordinary session, it was indeed a big opportunity for Pakistan to showcase to the outer world that it is a peaceful country. The delegates would have been taken to various touristic sites, many of such sites located in Islamabad, to reveal true beauty of Islamabad. But regrettably, no such effort was made. Guests were not allowed to even enjoy grandeur of the Margalla Hills under the so-called excuse of security threat. What a pity. Last but not the least, the foreign ministers of the Central Asian states were conspicuous with their absence, though their assistants attended the event. According to reports they chose to attend a similar conference in India. Being the key stakeholders their presence in Islamabad moot could have made a difference. The Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs need to look into it and try to figure out why foreign ministers of these countries did not deem it necessary to grace the Islamabad moot with their presence.

Inside...

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GoC attends Parents' Day celebrations at Cadet College Larkana

NAZIR SIYAL

LARKANA: The 30th Parents' Day Ceremony was held here at Cadet College Larkana. The Chief Guest was Pano Aqil GOC Noor Wali Khan. Addressing the Parents' Day, General Officer Commanding Pano Aqil Cantonment Noor Wali Khan said that it was a pleasure to inspect the Shaheed Benazir Girls Cadet College. The participation of Shaheed Benazir Girls Cadet in the parade proves that the intelligence of the students is admirable. The administration of Girls Cadet College should strive for the quality education of the students and provide facilities like modern language and computer lab to the local people.

Principal Cadet College Larkana Retired Brigadier Ghulam Raza said that on the occasion of the 30th Parents' Day, due to Karuna, the entire education system was restored and the parade presented by the cadets including all the attendees on the establishment of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Cadet College Larkana and Congratulations on the best (PT) show presented by Girls Cadet College. He said that out of all the cadet colleges, Cadet College Larkana has the honor of vaccinating all the staff and cadets of Corona. He said that Cadet College Larkana provides scholarships to (114) students and Cadet College Larkana has the status of the largest residential cadet college in Pakistan. In which more than one thousand stu-

dents are studying. Apart from this, in Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Girls' College Larkana also (31) girl cadets are given scholarships by Sindh Education Foundation on the basis of merit. At the end of the ceremony, (GOC) Panu Aqil Noor Wali Khan visited various departments of Cadet Colleges and inaugurated Science, Art and Craft Club. While praising the efforts of the students and expressing their happiness, Later, the Principal Cadet College presented the special guest as a gift from College Memento and College Publications. According to details, more than 5,000 parents and guests attended the event, where students performed tricks such as march past, karate and gymnastics shows and young commando march past.



COMSTECH organizes webinar on turbulent flows

Prof. Niemela said that science is a universal language. Basic sciences are very important

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: COMSTECH organized a webinar on "A Perspective of Turbulent Flows in Classical and Quantum Fluids" delivered by Prof. Dr. Joseph Niemela, Research Scientist Emeritus and Consultant, at The Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), Trieste, Italy on Tuesday online. Prof. Niemela said that science is a universal language. Basic sciences are very important. There is an international year announced for basic sciences for sustainable development. He said we really need basic sciences these are really global for all nations and people. Prof. Dr. Joseph Niemela outlined some of the challenges associated with the study of turbulent flows, an enduring unsolved problem in classical physics. He said, turbulence exists from microscopic to astrophysical scales, and also in quantum fluids albeit subject to severe restrictions imposed by the quantization of circulation, as first postulated by Onsager and Feynman. The talk was intended to be accessible to a non-specialized audience as well. Coordinator General COMSTECH said in his introductory remarks that we are in search of ways to how promote basic sciences in OIC states. He said one impediment to develop real science is that students have



very weak foundation to do so. Prof. Choudhary mentioned that International Centre for Theoretical Physics is a one example which have played a very important role in the development of physics in the world. He said we want to make science and technology part of the culture. The webinar was attended by students, researchers, young scientists, and academicians from the OIC member states online as well as in-person at COMSTECH secretariat. Prof. Niemela is a Research Scientist Emeritus and Consultant at the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics, a UNESCO Category 1 Institute, where he headed its Office of External Activities, Training and Research in Italian Laboratories (TRIL) program, and Applied Physics group. He is presently Chair-elect of the Forum on International Physics of the American Physical Society (APS), Secretary of Commission 13 (Physics for Development), of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics (IUPAP), and Chair of the Physics for Development Group of the European Physical Society (EPS). He is a Fellow of the American Physical Society (APS) and is a Foreign Fellow of the Pakistan Academy of Sciences (PAS). He is a recipient of the Dwight Nicholson Medal from the APS, the Galileo Galilei medal of the Italian Physical Society, and the SPIE Educator of the Year award.

Use of tech mandatory for rooting out crimes

LAHORE: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Rao Sardar Ali Khan Tuesday directed the police officers to make the use of "Hotel Eye" application mandatory in all hotels, inns, residences and private rest houses of the province. He said that modern technology should be used across the province for the arrest of proclaimed offenders, dacoits and professional criminals. He directed all RPOs and DPOs to make it mandatory for the people involved in hotel business in their districts to enter the data of every citizen staying in hotel in the "Hotel Eye App". The IGP issued the instructions while presiding over a meeting on the arrest of proclaimed offenders at the Central Police Office here. Rao Sardar Ali Khan said that legal action would be taken against those who did not enter data in Hotel Eye software, adding that if the data would not be entered in Hotel Eye software, a reply would be sought from the competent officer concerned. He directed to integrate hotel eye software with network of big transporters and prison department. He also directed the officers to prepare a feasibility report in the next meeting. During the meeting, DIG IT briefed on the performance of software developed for providing modern policing and easy service delivery. - APP



ISLAMABAD: King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KS Relief) has launched a relief package for Afghanistan. Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani was the chief guest along with Saudi ambassador Nawaf Bin Saeed al Maliki at the launching ceremony of the project. - DNA

Measures taken to ensure peaceful Christmas: DC

ISHFAQ MUGHAL

FAISALABAD: On the directions of CM Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar, as many as 8 Christmas Bazaars would be functional in Faisalabad district from today 22 December in order to provide essential commodities to the Christian community on subsidized prices for the celebrations of Christmas. The Saste bazaars would remain active till 24 December from 9 am to 5 pm. This was informed by Deputy Commissioner Ali Shahzad during a meeting held here DC Office to review the arrangements of Christmas celebrations in district. Deputy Commissioner told that these special Christmas bazaars to be set up Saint Anthony School Model Town, Pinto Ground Warispu, Esa Nagri Ghulam Muhammad Abad, Khurrianwala Chowk Jaranwala road, Old Tanga Stand near Fire brigade Jaranwala, Water Works Chiniot road Chak Jhumra, Sahulat Bazar Gojra road Samundri and Christian Colony Mohallah Shamaspora Tandlianwala. Deputy Commissioner informed that flour, sugar, ghee, pulses, meat, poultry items, vegetables & fruits and other essential commodities would be available in Christmas bazaars on control and subsidized prices to ease the Christian community for Christmas celebrations. Deputy Commissioner has said that district administration would make necessary security and administrative arrangements in connection with the Christmas celebrations and concerned

departments have been directed for cleanliness of surroundings of the churches besides ensuring repairing of roads and street lights. He said that special arrangement would be ensured at the public parks and picnic points for the celebrations of Christmas. He said strict security arrangements, vehicle parking, traffic managements were being made on Christmas. Representative of Christian Community thanked the Deputy Commissioner for making the comprehensive arrangements for the Christmas celebrations.

Police held narcotic peddler
Patrolling Police apprehended Narcotic peddler Says Mirza Anjum Kamal In compliance of directions of SSP PHP Region Faisalabad Kirza Anjum Kamal, patrolling post 419 JB apprehended narcotic peddler and seized about 8 KG Charas (Cannabis) from the notorious peddler accused Awais Aslam. Shift incharge ASI Aoun Abbas arrested the accused on the tip off and intercepted the narcotic assignment at Adda Murad Shah. SSP Patrolling Mirza Anjum Kamal while talking to media said that pro active patrolling is essential to safe and secure the highways. Further more, he told that his patrolling teams have handed over non custom goods and articles to custom intelligence that is more than 5 Crore rupees worth and handed over to Custom Intelligence. Moreover, crack down against over loaded tractor trolleys have already launched to enforce the implantation of rules and mitigate the accidents. The journey in fog requires extra care.

PHP campaign continue

DNA

FAISALABAD: Punjab Highways Patrolling (PHP) police Faisalabad region continuously holding awareness sessions for motorists in the region. In this connection, PHP held awareness sessions in 76 vocational and technical institutes, 29 banks, 60 public places, 49 petrol pumps, 21 hospitals, 19 union councils, 48 goods transport stands and provided guidelines about traffic rules and road safety in all the four districts. A spokesperson to PHP said that the education unit was also sensitizing the people about helpline 1124.

He said that during the awareness session, the motorcyclists were also asked to wear helmets and avoid one-wheeling.

51 Covid cases reported in Punjab

LAHORE: Punjab Primary and Secondary Healthcare (P&SH) Department Secretary Imran Sikandar Baloch Tuesday said that during the last 24 hours, 51 new cases of coronavirus were reported from across the province. In a press statement, he said that 25 positive cases were reported in Lahore, 11 in Rawalpindi, three each in Jhelum and Sahiwal, two each in Faisalabad, Multan, Nankana Sahib, one each in Mianwali, Kasur and Gujranwala. The secretary said that so far the total number of cases reached 444,277 besides 428,470 patients who fully recovered in the province. The total number of active cases was 2,751 to date, he added. In the last 24 hours, no death was reported in Punjab and the death toll stood at 13,056. He said that 17,340 tests were conducted in the last 24 hours and a total of 8.72 million tests were conducted altogether. Baloch said the overall rate of COVID -19 incidence in the last 24 hours was recorded as 0.3 per cent in the province, adding Lahore had 0.7 per cent, Faisalabad 0.3pc, Rawalpindi 1.0pc, and 0.1per cent in Multan. - APP

CM's aide for drug free educational institutions

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister on Excise and Narcotics Control Khaliq Rehman Tuesday called for expanding the scope of intelligence-based operations against drugs and making educational institutions free from drug abuse. Presiding over a high-level meeting here to review performance and recovery made by all District Excise Offices during last five months and also discussed ongoing reforms to further improve the performance of the department. The advisor directed provision of all kinds of facilities related to the excise department to the taxpayers, vehicle owners and general public. The meeting was given a detailed briefing on the illegal vehicles seized and their legal process while a detailed discussion was held on ongoing reforms in the department, online token tax, improvement in vehicle registration system, vehicle number

plates, GIS based system for property tax etc. were discussed in detail. The CM's aide instructed to expedite the work on reforms to enhance the efficiency of the department and also issued instructions to DG Excise for better monitoring of the performance of the department. The meeting commended the performance of directors and ETOs for their good performance and directed others to improve their revenue recovery and meet the target. In addition, the performance of the Excise Department in the anti-drug campaign was reviewed and necessary instructions were issued to make the Narcotics Control Wing more active. Earlier, Advisor Excise and Secretary Excise welcomed the newly appointed Director General Excise Mahmood Aslam Wazir in the department and presented a bouquet. - APP

17,155 POs, CAs arrested in 2021

LAHORE: Police claimed on Tuesday to have arrested 17,155 criminals from various parts of the city during the last one year from January to December 2021. The Lahore police arrested 9901 proclaimed offenders, 1,959 targeted offenders and 5,295 court absconders. As many as 1,041 POs were of category 'A' and 8,860 POs were of category 'B'. Capital City Police Officer Lahore Additional IG Fayyaz Ahmad Dev said that police has devised a special strategy to arrest the proclaimed offenders as most of them had been involved in heinous crimes including illegal possessions, murders, attempt to murder, kidnappings for ransom, extortion and narcotics. - APP

Parents Day held at Navy Cadet College Ormara

The Admiral expressed deep appreciation for the faculty of PNCCO for imparting quality education and laying strong career foundations for young cadets from Balochistan and across the country

KARACHI: An impressive 5th Parents Day Ceremony was held at Pakistan Navy Cadet College Ormara (PNCCO) where Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi graced the occasion as Chief Guest on arrival at the college. Naval Chief was received by Principal PNCCO Commodore Masood-ul-Hasan and presented Guard of Honour by the cadets, said a Pakistan Navy media release on Tuesday. While addressing the ceremony, Chief of the Naval Staff congratulated the prize-winners and appreciated their performance in academics and co-curricular activities. The Admiral expressed deep appreciation for the faculty of PNCCO for imparting quality education and laying strong career foundations for young cadets from Balochistan and across the country. The Chief Guest acknowledged and lauded Pakistan Navy's concerted efforts for socio-economic uplift, especially of the coastal belt of Balochistan in the fields of health and education. Naval Chief emphasized that Pakistan get beneficial results from different economic policies and projects in Gwadar Port and



CPEC by educating local populace. The Admiral also reiterated that, quality education is the only route to getting rid of poverty and unemployment in the region. Earlier in welcome address, Principal

PNCCO presented a resume of cadets performance in academics, curricular and co-curricular activities. The Principal extended his gratitude to Chief of the Naval Staff and parents of cadets for being the

part of Parents Day and Annual Prize Distribution ceremony. The ceremony was attended by civil and military dignitaries, local notables of Balochistan and parents of cadets. - APP

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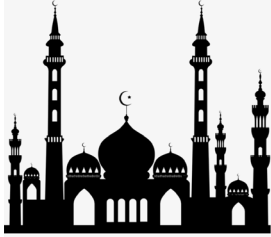
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Namaz Timings

Fajr.....	05:39 am
Zohr.....	12:06 pm
Asr.....	03:25 pm
Maghrib.....	05:03 pm
Isha.....	06:33 pm



Hotels & Restaurants

Serena Hotel.....	111 133 133
Marriott.....	051-2826121
Monal.....	0334-5421812



Airlines

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Emergency

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Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....	9209224
Potohar Town.....	9209224
Rawal Town.....	5773343

Wasa Water Tank

Rawalpindi.....	0331-5022125
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Dr. Sania discusses plan to expedite registration process

Outlining details of Ehsaas Roshan programme, Dr. Sania urged the district administrations in Punjab to support the ongoing registration drive

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection, Senator Dr. Sania Nishar in a meeting with Chief Secretary Punjab, Kamran Ali Afzal on Tuesday discussed a detailed plan to expedite the registration process under the Ehsaas Roshan Registration drive. DG Social Welfare, Secretary Food, Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners of all districts of Punjab attended the meeting. The briefing discussed a detailed plan with district administrations of Punjab to expedite the registration of Kiryana retailers and families under the ongoing Ehsaas Roshan Registration drive. Outlining details of Ehsaas Roshan programme, Dr. Sania urged the district administrations in Punjab to support the ongoing registration drive with Kiryana retailers and families.

"The successful roll-out of Ehsaas Roshan

programme relies on onboarding Kiryana stores who are not currently part of the digital ecosystem. The government will provide a subsidy amount and 8% specialized commission to Kiryana retailers directly in their bank accounts. Every quarter, lucky draws will also be held to award cars, motorcycles, mobile phones and several other prizes to best performing Kiryana owners," she said. During the meeting, all Commissioners and DCs of Punjab were encouraged to conduct awareness campaigns in lower income areas to raise cognizance on Ehsaas Roshan, conduct meetings with all local trader associations to apprise them of the programme and ask them to encourage their member Kiryana stores to register for the programme, visit Kiryana stores to answer their questions about the programme, and advertise the programme to potential participants. Under the programme, 20 million deserving families will avail a monthly subsidy of Rs.1,000 on flour, ghee/cooking oil and pulses. Kiryana retailers can also enroll in the programme through the web-portal:

<https://ehsaasroshan.pass.gov.pk/>.

Kiryana retailers all over the country need to have a bank account for registration. Those without bank accounts can contact any branch of NBP for account opening. The authorized Kiryana retailers will be able to participate in the programme by installing the mobile point of Sale App in their cell phones for which they will receive training from NBP.

Chief Secretary Punjab and district administrations widely lauded Ehsaas Roshan programme and ensured full support for its registration drive. It was agreed that a regular weekly meeting will be convened to track the registration drive across all districts of Punjab. Muhammad Ali Shahzad, Secretary Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division (PASSD), Captain (Rtd) Saeed Ahmed Nawaz, Additional Secretary of the Division, Hamayoun Sajjad, Chief Digital Officer, National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) and other senior officials of the bank also joined the briefing.



IESCO issues power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Tuesday issued a power suspension programme for Wednesday for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work.

According to IESCO Spokesman, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period from 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM, Choa Syidan Shah, Basharat, Bhara Kahu, T&T, Kialial, Gulshanabad, Dhok Noor, 502 Workshop, Adiala, Askari-14, Humayun-1, Humayun, Japan Road, Kahuta City-2, Doberan, Fazal Ahmad Shaheed, New Chuah, Nara Motor, Highway, Karor, Saudi Embassy, Mustafa Tower, G-10/4, PTH, I-10/4, G-11 Center, F-11/3, Bhara Kahu, Company Bagh, Berut, Kotli Satyan, Treat, Dhok Hukamdad, Committee Chowk, Qaidabad, Bagh Sardaran, Wesa, Hamza Camp, Shaheed Muhammad Din, Jinnah Camp, Farooq Azam, Kayani Road, Peshawar Road, Captain Amir, EME Complex, Noon, Mall Road, Sir Syed Road, Rehmatabad-II, FECHS, PWD-1, Model Town, Scheme-III, Askari-7, Kialial, Rojar, Shah Jeevan, Kholi No. 22, Chowk Pandori, Kahuta City-2, Hamid Jhangli, Kialiam, Karnab Kaswal, Syed Kasran, Bhal, Jala, N. Abad, Shahia, Rashid Minhas, AWC Housing, Munirabad, Hassan Abdal, Islampur, Brahma, Dherak, Museum, Hatian, Power Channel, People's Colony, Ishtiaq Shaheed, Nar Topa, Shamsabad, New Musa, Nika Kalan, Muslimabad, Gulzar Shaheed, Dhok Hasso, Pir wadhai, Raja abad, Social Security Hospital, Batiut, Azeem Shaheed, Jhang, Mumtaz Shaheed, Kot Sheera, Main Bazaar, Akwal, Bilalabad, Tauqeer Haider, Arsalan Alam, feeders and surrounding areas. - APP

Model Courts dispose of 259 cases

RAWALPINDI: The 465 Model Courts set up across the country to provide speedy justice and clear the massive backlog of cases decided 259 cases on Tuesday. Director-General Supreme Court Monitoring and Evaluation Cell spokesman said that Model Criminal Courts disposed of 54 cases, including 17 cases of murder and 37 narcotics. Similarly, the Civil Model Courts decided 87 family and rent disputes while Model Magistrate courts disposed of 118 cases. The fine of Rs 1,745,500 was also imposed on various accused in different cases while death sentence was awarded to one and rigorous imprisonment was also awarded to two accused. - DNA



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi exchanging views with Deputy Leader of the Opposition of the UK House of Commons Angela Rayner. - DNA

WHO evaluation teams term anti polio drive satisfactory

RAWALPINDI: The 3rd party evaluation teams of the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the performance of the district anti-polio drive as satisfactory. In-charge Anti-Polio drive Muhammad Islam told APP that WHO designated the APEX company for the post-monitoring of the drive, which had declared the results of 21 Union Councils (UCs) up to the standard of the total 30 UCs. He informed that the monitoring teams had asked the health authority to upgrade their performance in Union Council 21, Shamasabad, as four children were found unattended in the said area. Islam said that the evaluation of eight UCs was pending, which would be prepared within the next two days. The In-charge added that as many as 718,000 children below five years of age were administered anti-polio drops during the campaign launched in all tehsils and towns of the district on December 13. He informed that the campaign had been extended for one day to reach thousands of children who missed or were unattended during the campaign that was to conclude on December 17. Islam said that 2964 polio teams, 663 area in-charges, and 240 medical officers were involved in the immunization task while 129 children were vaccinated in transit points of the city. The health officer added that the drive was also utilized to create awareness about Covid-19 preventive measures. - DNA

World Health Organization

No political pressure, OGRA works as per law: NA body told

ISLAMABAD: National Assembly's Standing Committee on Energy (Petroleum Division) was told Tuesday that there had been no political pressure on the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) that was performing its duties as per the law. "There is no pressure over us and we are performing our duties as per rules and regulations," the OGRA chairman told the committee which asked whether there was any political pressure on him for performing the official commitments.

The body, met here with Member of National Assembly Junaid Akbar in the chair, also confirmed the minutes of its last meeting held on August 27, 2021. The committee deferred the 'The petroleum (Amendment) Bill, 2021' as the ministry requested further time to complete the consultation process with relevant stakeholders. The body asked the ministry about worsening gas shortage and increase in the petroleum products prices in the country. It was told that Karachi was facing a massive shortage in gas supply as there had been more demand for the commodity in Quetta during winter. The forum was told that the country had been lacking storage capacity, otherwise

the issue could be sorted out, permanently. While answering the committee regarding price hikes in petroleum products, the petroleum division officials stated that it was necessary to increase prices in Pakistan due to international price hikes. Among others, the meeting was attended by MNAs Malik Anwar Taj, Noor Alam Khan, Choudhary Amir Sultan Cheema, Choudhary Khalid Javed, Sardar Muhammad Irfan Dogar, Javed Murtaza Abbasi, and Mahar Irshad Ahmed Khan. - APP

SSP directs to ensure smooth traffic flow in Capital

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The newly appointed Senior Superintendent of Police (Traffic) Islamabad Rai Mazhar Iqbal has directed to ensure smooth flow of traffic at IJP road, Srinagar Highway and Islamabad expressway and take strict action against those creating inconvenience for the road users. Soon after assuming the charge as SSP (Traffic), he conducted special meetings with Zonal Deputy Superintendent of Police and beat Inspectors. In his maiden interaction with traffic police officials of Islamabad, he directed to improve traffic plans and ensure exemplary traffic system in the city. He asked Muharrars to devise new traffic plan and incorporate all recommendations of police officials in it so that smooth traffic flow could be ensured in the city. SSP (Traffic) Rai Mazhar Iqbal directed special measures to ensure smooth traffic flow during peak hours and said that performance of police officers would be reviewed on monthly basis. Those performing well would be encouraged and special prizes to be awarded to them, he maintained. The SSP (Traffic) asked to adopt courteous attitude with the public and make more efforts for the equal implementation of traffic laws on roads showing politeness and firm attitude.

9 gamblers arrested during raid

RAWALPINDI: Police have arrested nine gamblers and recovered amount at stake Rs 15,270, 10,000 Afghani currency and eight mobile phones from their possession, informed police spokesman here Tuesday. Those arrested were identified as Mohsin Ehsan, Hassan Ali, Waqas Masih, Azhar Abbasi, Tariq Ali, Shoab Khatib, Israr Ahmed, Tariq Hazrat Gul and Itifakir Ahmed. Police have registered separate cases against all of them under gambling act. - APP

IRSA releases 68128 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) Tuesday released 68128 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 32143 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in the Indus River at Tarbela Dam was 1431.47 feet, which was 39.47 feet higher than its dead level 1392 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 19700 and 40000 cusecs respectively. - APP

Police "Khadimat Center" to be established

CPO Rawalpindi Sajid Kayani said that the problems of lawyers would be resolved on priority basis

RAWALPINDI: Regional Police Officer RPO Rawalpindi Ashfaq Ahmad Khan and City Police Officer CPO Rawalpindi Sajid Kayani visited High Court Bar Association Rawalpindi on Tuesday.

The President High Court Bar Association Sardar Abdul Raziq Advocate Member Pakistan Bar Council Hassan Raza Pasha, Former President High Court Bar Association Syed Zulfiqar Abbas Naqvi and Sheikh Ahsanuddin welcomed high ups of police. Speaking on the occasion, RPO Rawalpindi Ashfaq Ahmad Khan said that bilateral cooperation between the bar and the police would be further enhanced.

City Police Officer Rawalpindi Sajid Kayani said that the problems of lawyers would be resolved on priority basis. In the meeting, it was agreed that "Khadimat Center" would be established at High Court Bar Association Rawalpindi. President High Court Bar Association Sardar Abdul Raziq thanked for their visit and appreciated RPO and CPO efforts for establishing the center. - APP

ICT police to establish welfare center for cops

The IGP said that immediate promotion would be made against all vacant seats and salary would not be deducted of those policemen getting injured during duty

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad police will establish a welfare center at Central Police Office with its link at all front desks of police stations where cops can register their issues. It was stated by Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Muhammad Ahsan Younus during 'Meet the Force Program' on Tuesday. He interacted with more than 350 policemen and officials of different divisions in this program and assured to resolve their problems on priority.



would be introduced at the level of police stations and every cop would be member of it. He said that quality meal would be provided at concessional rates there while policemen would manage themselves all mess related affairs. He said that Islamabad police will establish a welfare center at Central Police

Office with its link at all front desks of police stations where cops can register their issues. The IGP and DIG (Headquarters) would review the cases themselves registered through this center. Islamabad police chief directed continuity of all departmental and refresher courses for equipping policemen with modern techniques. He asked the police officials to contact with him in case of any disease or other issue to him as prompt assistance would be provided through welfare fund. The IGP Muhammad Ahsan Younus said that transfer

policy would be introduced at all divisions and all posting as well as transfers would be made through it. No transfer would be made before three months and option would be given after this period for getting transfer somewhere else. Islamabad police chief said that request would be made to the government for enhancement in salaries of the personnel. He assured to stand with those policemen accomplishing their responsibilities in professional manner and honesty while to take stringent action against black sheep as well as poor performers.

Briefs

KSRelief
launches aid
convoy to
Afghanistan

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) has launched a project to dispatch 200 trucks loaded with 1920 tons food and non-food items to meet the needs of Afghan families.

About 30,000 food packages and 10,000 non-food winter kits will help poor and deserving people living in Afghanistan.

This project comes under the umbrella of humanitarian projects by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, represented by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center to assist needy families living in Afghanistan.

Each food package comprises all necessary essential food items. In nonfood, 10,000 winter package comprises warm clothes for needy families living in the colder regions of Afghanistan. The project will benefit about 280,000 people in Afghanistan. — APP

Gold price
increases
by Rs150 to
125,450/tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of 24 karat per tola gold witnessed an increase of Rs150 and was sold at Rs125,450 on Tuesday against its sale at Rs125,300 in the local market the previous day. The price of 10 gram 24 karat gold also increase by Rs129 to Rs107,553 from Rs107,242 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat increased from Rs98,472 to Rs98,590.

The price of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs1460 and Rs1251.71 respectively. The price of gold in international market also remained stagnant at \$1797, the Jewellers Group reported, — APP

Expats'
expertise
imperative

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to the Prime Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Muhammad Ayub Afridi on Tuesday underlined the need for utilizing knowledge, skills and expertise of the expatriates to ensure national development.

"Award of right of vote to overseas Pakistanis is accomplishment of another promise made by Prime Minister of Pakistan," said the advisor while addressing a signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for establishment of Certiport Authorized Testing Centre (CATC) at newly established F-11 Campus of OPF Girls College Islamabad.

He praised the OPF for doing a magnificent job in providing quality education to the children of overseas Pakistanis and general public throughout Pakistan.

He said that the initiative of introducing such an IT enabled infrastructure in OPF's education system was a remarkable step which must be expanded to all regions. The OPF Managing Director briefed the Advisor about the project and stated that in this competitive market, it had been witnessed that certifications gave an edge to degree holders when they compete for jobs. In recent years, he said it had been observed that students during their studies also focused upon these certifications in order to enable themselves to compete in a job market immediately after securing their degrees. Certifications were usually awarded by credible organizations such as Certiport, he said, adding it was a third-party assessment of one's skills and knowledge for a given subject. He said that the establishment of CATC would help OPF to market these certifications amongst its students. Children of overseas Pakistanis would be offered discounted rates for certifications.

Earlier, both the organizations signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for establishment of CATC at newly established F-11 Campus of Girls College, Islamabad. — APP

ICCI shows concern over
current account deficit

Shakeel Munir said that the current account deficit of Pakistan had reached record level of USD 20 billion in 2018, which had created multiple problems for the economy and the country had to go to the IMF to overcome its economic problems

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Muhammad Shakeel Munir, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) has expressed great concerns over the ballooning current account deficit of the country that has risen to around USD 7 billion during the first five months (July-November) of the current fiscal year and called upon the government to take urgent remedial measures to arrest this dangerous trend as the surging current account deficit would put more pressure on our exchange rate, cause further depreciation of rupee and give rise to a new wave of high inflation in the country. Shakeel Munir said that the current account deficit of Pakistan had reached record level of USD 20 billion in 2018, which had created multiple problems for the economy and the country had to go to the IMF to overcome its economic problems. However, with great efforts of the current government, this deficit was changed into surplus in September 2020, but it was again on the rise, which was not a good sign for the economy. He said it was unfortunate that being an agricultural country, Pakistan was importing wheat, sugar, pulses and many other food items, which also contributed



to the rising current account deficit. He emphasized that the government should extend full support to the private sector in producing imports substitutions in the country in order to reduce dependence on imports and improve exports in order to convert current account deficit into surplus. He stressed that to sustain the strong economic growth, the government should reduce policy interest rate, ensure availability of easy credit and long-term financ-

ing to the private sector in order to help expand export capacity of firms that would help in promoting exports.

Jamshaid Akhtar Sheikh, Senior Vice President ICCI said that the value of Pakistani rupee has tumbled to over Rs.178 against a dollar, which showed that our currency was losing its value at an alarming rate. He said that the falling value of the rupee would put more pressure on the country's forex reserves and increase fore-

ign debt obligations. He said that the eroding value of rupee was also disturbing all future plans of the business community as they needed a stable exchange rate for long-term business and investment planning. He urged that the government should take urgent measures to stabilize the value of the rupee.

Muhammad Faheem Khan, Vice President ICCI said that Pakistani many industries were importing almost 70 percent of their raw

material for manufacturing activities and decreasing value of rupee would further push up their production cost making our exports more uncompetitive in the international market.

He emphasized that the government should support the private sector in setting up raw material producing industries in the country to reduce dependence on their imports that would help in reducing the current account deficit as well.

ANF seizes
93,600 kg
drugs, held 7
drug peddlers

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Anti-Narcotics Force has seized about 93,600 kilograms of drugs from two Toyota Corolla vehicles near Motorway Toll Plaza Islamabad and arrested seven drug peddlers.

According to a spokesperson, the drugs seized included 63,600 kg of hashish, 30 kg of opium. The force had also arrested Mohammad Yousuf, Mohammad Ali Nasir, Mohammad Usman, Saqlain residence of Sargodha and Shafiqullah, Niaz Ali, Sajjad Ali residence of Charsadda.

Further investigation has been started by registering cases against the accused under the Anti-Narcotics Act. — APP

Police plan
security
measures on
Christmas

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Police have planned comprehensive security arrangements on the eve of Christmas and special deployment at Churches and public places.

According to the police source, more than 1200 policemen will be deployed around churches in Islamabad and foolproof security arrangements have been planned for Christmas and special checking outside the churches.

The source said that it has been decided to make foolproof security arrangements on this occasion.

He said that green belts near the Churches would be completely searched while Mobile Eagle, Falcon squads and police Commandos would ensure patrolling in these areas. Security duties at the public places including parks would be made more effective. Security would be tightened at entry and exit points of the capital and special

checking has been ordered for this special occasion. The Islamabad General Police Islamabad, the source said, had directed all Superintendents of Police, Sub-Divisional Police Officers and Station House Officers for effective patrolling in their respective areas.

Plain cloth police officials and well-equipped policemen will also perform duties near the churches and public places.

It has been also ordered for strict action against the beggars and also conduct effective checking of hotels and inns.

Prices of
fertilizers
under control
in Rwp division

RAWALPINDI: The prices of fertilizers are under control in four districts of Rawalpindi Division due to solid steps taken by the administration.

According to a district administration spokesman, the price magistrates on the directives of Commissioner Rawalpindi Division, Syed Gulzar Hussain Shah, had launched a campaign to check prices of DAP and Urea in four districts of the division including Jhelum, Chakwal, Rawalpindi and Attock. He said that there was no shortage of fertilizers in the four districts of the division. The supply of DAP and Urea had improved after blacklisting of the fertilizer dealers involved in hoarding and profiteering, he added.

He said the administration, on the directives of the Commissioner, was taking strict action in accordance with the law against the rules violators besides checking of demand and supply situation. The prices of fertilizers were also being checked on daily basis, he added. He informed that sugar was being sold at Rs 90 per kg in Chakwal district.

The prices of both local and imported sugar were notified at Rs 90 per kg. Similarly, wheat flour was also being sold at Rs 1100 per 20 kg bag. — APP



ISLAMABAD: Wife of the Austrian ambassador posing for a picture with the children of SOS during her visit to the institution. — DNA

'OIC's financial
assistance to help
Afghan people'

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan Ulema Council and Special Aide to Prime Minister on Religious Harmony and Middle East, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi Tuesday said that financial assistance of One-Billion Riyal from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for Afghanistan and further assistance from other Muslim countries will help alleviate the sufferings of the Afghan people. He said the successful summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) Foreign Ministers' Council is demonstration of confidence and trust of the Muslim Ummah and the world leadership in Pakistan. While talking to visiting delegates of the Ulemas-Mashaykh of different religious schools of thought and ambassadors of different Islamic countries here, Tahir Ashrafi said that successful summit of OIC Foreign Ministers' Council on the situation in Afghanistan is great success of Pakistan, said a news release.

"We are grateful to the lead-

ership of all the Muslim countries and particularly of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", said Tahir Ashrafi. He felicitated Prime Minister Imran Khan, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, the Armed Forces of Pakistan and the country's security institutions on the successful summit of OIC Foreign Ministers' Council on Afghanistan. Pakistan Ulema Council and all the political and religious organizations of the country were grateful to Muslim world for their cooperation for the cause of Afghanistan, Ashrafi said. He underlined that on the alarming situation in Afghanistan, in the heading of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's hospitality was a clear message to the world that Pakistan wanted peace and stability in the entire region, including Afghanistan. — APP

IIUI commemorates
World Day of Arabic

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: President, International Islamic University (IIU) Dr. Hathal Homoud Alotaibi Tuesday said that Arabic language is imperative to be taught to youth and vowed that IIUI will always be available in this regard to cooperate with all the institutions.

He was addressing a seminar organized by the Faculty of Arabic on the occasion of World Day of Arabic at Faisal Masjid Campus of the university.

IIU President said, once the pandemic ends, the university will start comprehensive activities in the shape of conferences, seminars, courses and dialogues with the collaboration of Saudi Ministry of Culture.

IIU President said, Arabic is language of Quran and Sunnah and is a source of unity among the Muslims which introduces them to their legacy. He urged the Muslim societies to devise a strategy for promotion of Arabic language for the best understanding of the Islamic values and achievements.

Talking about the promotion of Arabic language, he said Saudi Arabia has given special importance to the promotion of language in its vision 2030 and dedicated institutions such as King Abdullah Centre for Promotion of Ara-



bic language are playing pivotal role in promotion of Arabic language.

Referring to the Faculty of Arabic, he said IT is one of the core faculties of IIUI that has produced numerous scholars and successful professional with the help of extra ordinary national and international faculty.

He said the faculty is encouraging students of other nationalities, interested to be inducted in the Faculty of Arabic. On the occasion, Dean Faculty of Arabic, Dr. Fazlullah thanked IIUI President, foreign guests and faculty mem-

bers for joining the event. He shed light on the importance of Arabic language and role of Faculty of Arabic of IIUI in its promotion. He also apprised of the vision and objectives of the faculty. The seminar was also addressed by a number of national and international academicians, experts of Arabic, scholars and researchers.

Later, IIUI President also visited the exhibition in which female students of faculty of Arabic had set up stalls in connection with Arabic language day.

President for imparting contemporary education

The chairman NCHD apprised the president that the commission was improving access to primary education, imparting literacy skills and fostering community participation, besides developing management efficiencies

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi Tuesday emphasized the need for increasing the number of students in educational institutions and imparting contemporary education, including computer literacy, to the students of Madaris. He said that education was a major component of the human and socio-economic development of a country.

He expressed these views while talking to Chairman National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), Col (ret'd) Dr Amirullah Marwat, who presented him an Annual Report of the National



Commission for Human Development, at Aiwan-e-Sadr, a press release said.

The chairman National Commission for Human Development apprised the president that the commission was improving access to primary education, imparting literacy skills and fostering community participation, besides developing management efficiencies.

He said the commission was promoting literacy by adopting a three-pronged strategy i.e., Universal Primary Education, Accelerated Learning Programme and Adult Literacy Programme.

He further said, the commission was striving for the mainstreaming of religious education institutions by providing education to those children who had never been to school or had dropped out. The president appreciated the performance and contributions of the NCHD for promoting human development and lauded the collaboration of the Ehsaas Program and National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) for mobilizing eligible families to enrol their children under the Ehsaas Waseela-e-Taleem Programme. — APP

Minimum wage

AFTER employers voiced their opposition against the Sindh government's notification to fix the minimum wage at Rs25000, the Supreme Court (SC) temporarily suspended the notice until it can decide on what can be done next. This has opened up the debate about whether the average income in Pakistan covers the cost of living. As all relevant authorities try to come to a resolution, it is vital that they factor in complexities like inflation rates as well as the financial capacity of businesses.

Given that the minimum wage is supposed to reflect the cost of living, it is fixed after a set period of time after taking into account various factors that alter the economic environment of a country. Pakistan is currently experiencing an inflation rate of 8.9 percent which has caused a significant rise in the prices of basic commodities like flour, wheat, oil, pulses, vegetables, meat and even petroleum products. The cost of living has nearly quadrupled in the last few years, reducing the quality of life of the general public as a result. In the face of such pressures, one can understand why the Sindh government was looking to increase the minimum wage to Rs25000 despite the fact that studies claim this estimate is well below the cost of living as well. Sustaining the average household, even if it keeps its consumption levels at the lowest possible rate, is expected to cost nearly Rs28000 in today's economy, according to some studies. Hesitation displayed by businesses is also understandable considering they are operating under uncertain times where profitability is either not guaranteed or is severely limited. Provincial and federal governments must strike the right balance—look to protect workers and allow for the best possible wages while allowing for businesses to remain profitable. With the notice suspended for the time being, there is ample time to dive into a serious discussion on the matter.

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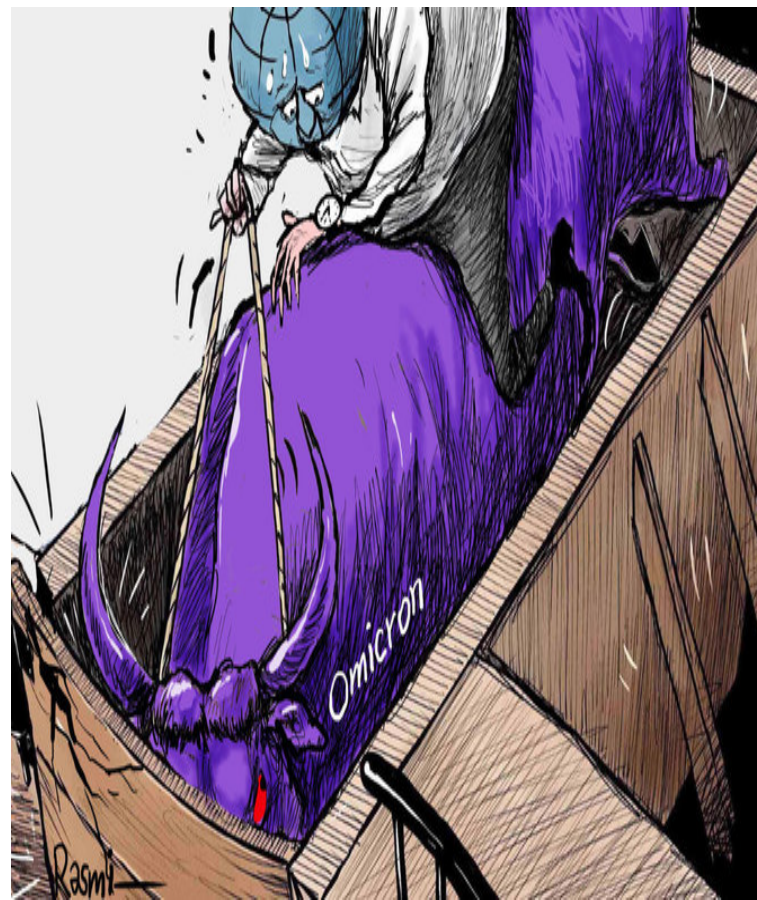
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Enjoy the season but keep your guard up

UNLIKE last year's holiday season, when the world seemed to have flattened the coronavirus curve, few months before the spread of the Delta variant, this holiday season is being threatened by another and likely more infectious variant, Omicron.

Hopes of a merry season may have been dashed in some countries already, but it is not all bad news. Consensus is that we have the tools to fight and hopefully beat the new menace.

The arrival of Omicron was announced by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on November 24, 2021. This new variant was first detected in specimens collected earlier that month in Botswana and South Africa. Two days later, WHO classified Omicron as 'a variant of concern' (VOC). So far, the variant has been reported in nearly 90 countries, according to the organisation.

The city of London, where new cases are getting out of control, declared a state of 'major incident'. Other cities like Paris cancelled the new year's celebrations. Ireland has ordered bars and restaurants to close at 8pm and Denmark shut down cinemas and other popular venues. Stock markets around the world plummeted and oil prices are hovering near multi months lows.

According to confirmed reports, Omicron is spreading rapidly even in countries with high rate of vaccination. A field study by the Imperial College London said the risk of reinfection with the Omicron variant is "more than five times higher" than with Delta. And there is no evidence that the symptoms would be milder. In the US, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) says it was investigating and adds that "more data are needed to know if Omicron infections, and especially reinfections and breakthrough infections in people who are fully vaccinated, cause more severe illness or death than infection with other variants," the agency noted.

In the UAE, where we have one of the most efficient anti-coronavirus systems, the situation fares much better than most. So let us enjoy the holiday. But we must not lower our guard. We must adhere to the preventive measures. And if you have not the booster shot, please get one immediately.

Israel's malign grip on Sheikh Jarrah

Yossi Mekelberg

In Jerusalem, Israel wants to have its cake and eat it, too. It de facto annexed and applied Israeli law to the city and those who live there, yet the city's more than 330,000 Arab citizens do not have full citizenship rights and so are disadvantaged and discriminated against in all walks of life, including recourse to the law — not to mention justice

THERE are many faces to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, and none of them should make the country feel very proud. Still, in some places the occupation manifests itself more brutally towards the Palestinians and their property than in others, and in these cases it usually expresses both the arrogance and the true intentions of the occupier. East Jerusalem is a case in point, and Israel's attempts to evict Palestinian residents from their homes there clearly highlight its ruthlessness and ill intentions. East Jerusalem, unlike the rest of the West Bank, was annexed, at least de facto, by Israel immediately after the 1967 war when Israeli law was applied to it. This was followed by the building of Jewish settlements all around it, aimed at isolating East Jerusalem and its Arab population from the rest of the West Bank. In recent years, however, the appetite for land and property among a number of settler organizations has increased to the point where they have been identifying Palestinian neighborhoods where they can enter into a lengthy process, based on an Israeli law that a priori disadvantaged Palestinian residents, to claim entitlement to homes that were owned by Jews before 1948, and push for the eviction of the current owners

of these homes. This is taking place in the Old City, and in the neighborhoods of Silwan, Ras Al-'Amud, A-Tur, Abu Dis, and Sheikh Jarrah, which in recent months has become the center of these controversial practices. It is bad enough that the State of Israel should expropriate occupied land from around Jerusalem to encircle its Palestinian eastern parts with Jewish settlements, with the sole aim of rendering nonviable a Palestinian state with its capital within Jerusalem. It is considerably worse to evict Palestinians from their homes and repossess them, and by doing so also signal to the rest of the Arab population of Jerusalem that they are unwelcome in their own city. In the long and disturbing history of Jewish settlements on occupied land, it has become impossible to discern whether the settlement movement has been serving government policies, or whether the governing bodies of the country have been serving the settlers and their ambitions.

Is it the case that settlers are pawns in some grand strategy of the state to retain in perpetuity the occupied West Bank, and eventually annex it to Israel proper? Or is it exactly the opposite, that consecutive governments over the past 50 years have been turned into simple tools and have become, for all intents and purposes, mere servants of the settlers and their maximalist vision of grabbing as much land in the West Bank as possible, and radically altering its demography to ensure that a viable and independent Palestinian state can never materialize? Nowhere is this ploy, this collaboration we have seen since the 1970s between Israeli governments and settlers, more obvious than in East Jerusalem, where Palestinians are second-class citizens and bluntly kept that way by Israel. Last week the case of the despicable attempts to push Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah out of their homes returned to the Supreme Court, thanks to a legal petition filed by the Israeli nongovernmental organization Ir Amim and the Sheikh Jarrah Community Association, representing residents of the Um Haroun section of the neighborhood. They filed a legal petition to the Israeli High Court against the General Custodian, which sits within the Ministry of Justice and oversees an Israeli law originally enacted in 1950. The sole aim of this law was to create a legal framework for Israel to confiscate movable and immovable property of Palestinians who are considered "absentees," defined by Israeli law as persons who were expelled, fled or left the country after Nov. 29, 1947. In its more recent form, especially after 1967, the law is used to evict Palestinians housed in

property that belonged to Jews before 1948. As the occupying force — with almost no limit to its hunger for land and in possession of absolute power vis-a-vis the Palestinians, whether that power be legal or based on sheer force — Israel continues to eject Palestinian residents from homes and land they have lived in for decades, many of them already as refugees.

One hopes, though strongly doubts, that the legal challenge to the eviction of yet more Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah will be successful. However, the issue is not only a legal one but political, too. If the Israeli government genuinely wishes to establish peaceful intercommunal coexistence in Jerusalem, it must clamp down on the actions of settlers who are trying, either through the courts or through intimidation, to claim land and property that indeed belonged before 1948 to Jews — but not to these settlers — and it must prevent the eviction of the Palestinians who currently live there. Those settlers with more extreme political views are mainly interested in inflaming the already fragile situation in Jerusalem, which they believe will be the means of accomplishing their messianic and distorted vision of Judaism, in which this holy city belongs to them and them alone. In their immorality and arrogance, and with the support of the Israeli authorities, they victimize those who are almost defenseless against Israel's legal and military force.

In Jerusalem, Israel wants to have its cake and eat it, too. It de facto annexed and applied Israeli law to the city and those who live there, yet the city's more than 330,000 Arab citizens do not have full citizenship rights and so are disadvantaged and discriminated against in all walks of life, including recourse to the law — not to mention justice. A comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians based on a two-state solution is nowhere to be seen, but this does not relieve Israel of its duties as the occupying, annexing power to ensure the well-being of all those who live in Jerusalem, East or West, and guarantee the equality of everyone in the eyes of the law. The new self-styled "change government" should live up to Israel's responsibilities toward the residents of Sheikh Jarrah and remove any attempt to make them refugees one again. This is a first, and important, step toward ending the government's role of being emissaries of the settlement movement. If the Israeli government does not guarantee the full rights of all of those who live in Jerusalem, it is the duty of the international community to make its concerns well heard and understood in the corridors of power in Israel.

— Courtesy: Arab News

Little joy for migrants and refugees this festive season

Hans Kluge

Looking beyond Europe, we can already anticipate that more people will have to flee the rapidly unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Right now, 8.7 million people in Afghanistan are not getting enough food, and winter in Afghanistan can be brutal

MANY of us welcome the first signs of winter and snow with delight. We associate it with warmth: knitted jumpers, cosy fireplaces, end of year festivities and children playing in the snow. But for others, the onset of winter marks the beginning of a potentially life-threatening period. We see it every day across Europe: The lives, health and wellbeing of refugees and migrants are put at risk because of geopolitics. Over recent weeks, thousands of undocumented migrants have been stranded in no-man's land on Belarus's borders with Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. Several have lost their lives, among them, wom-

en and children. More than 60 percent of the migrants that experts from the WHO Regional Office for Europe spoke to during a recent mission to the Belarus-Lithuania border needed medical attention.

During my visit last month to a site sheltering 2,000 migrants in Belarus, I saw first-hand how vulnerable their situation is. Those I met — families with children, young and grown-up — were living in very difficult, overcrowded conditions, with a lack of sanitary facilities. They were tired and desperate, but still holding on to the hope of a better life. Simultaneously, on the other side of Europe, hundreds of people are risking their lives to cross the seas in Europe, over the English Channel or the Mediterranean. Now deaths on these treacherous journeys barely make headlines. Just in the last month, 90 people have lost their lives in the Mediterranean and at least 34 in the English Channel.

Looking beyond Europe, we can already anticipate that more people will have to flee the rapidly unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Right now, 8.7 million people in Afghanistan are not getting enough food, and winter in Afghanistan can be brutal. The United Nations estimates a staggering 274 million people across the world will need humanitarian assistance next year, a 17 percent increase on this year. Providing humanitarian assistance to countries in need can go a long way in addressing the reasons why so many people leave in search of a better life in the first place.

On all these fronts, WHO is working with partners to alleviate human suffering, delivering essential supplies; engaging with national authorities to address immediate needs, including providing sanitary facilities, establishing medical units, and improving prevention measures

against COVID-19, such as testing and vaccination. Since we visited Belarus, concrete steps have been taken by local and national authorities to improve primary healthcare provision and sanitation facilities for the migrants. But no matter how important these actions, they are no substitute for more sustainable solutions.

This is a make or break moment. Regardless of political consensus or the lack thereof, refugees and migrants must receive humanitarian assistance and access to healthcare. As our region faces a new wave of COVID-19 with the emergence of a new variant and sharply rising cases, we must ensure protection against the virus for the most vulnerable. This pandemic has taught us that no one is safe until everyone is safe. Health should never be a matter of politics, and access to health must be safeguarded as a fundamental human right. The WHO Regional Office for Europe has long championed migrant and refugee health, with support to countries in preparing for large arrivals of refugees and migrants, and developing health systems that are inclusive and migrant-friendly. It is a principle of the European Programme of Work to leave no one behind. But we need to accelerate this work, with cross-sectoral and political backing. Good health is something that everyone, everywhere, should be able to enjoy. A change of season should not be a matter of life or death. Health is not a privilege: it is a fundamental right for all people, including refugees and migrants. Let us afford all human beings respect, dignity, and access to healthcare, not only this winter, but for years to come.

— The Writer is WHO Regional Director for Europe
— Courtesy: Al Jazeera

Pakistan and OIC meeting on Afghanistan

Dr. M Akram Zaheer



The Afghan delegation to the conference was led by its foreign minister, and it will be important for the people gathered to listen to them. However, it is just as important for the Taliban representatives in the delegation to hear what the world thinks of them. Pakistani officials have privately complained that the Taliban leadership is not accepting their demands. Many Western envoys in Islamabad have also...

THE Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) aims to promote Islamic solidarity by coordinating social, economic, scientific and cultural activities. It is also to support the peaceful struggle of Muslims for their rights. The organization devices of International Islamic News Agency, the Islamic Development Bank, the Islamic Solidarity Fund, and the World Center for Islamic Education.

The Organization has also been working to improve its role in Afghanistan post withdraw the United States. The situation of Afghanistan has deteriorated further and there is a fear of a humanitarian crisis and there are many concerns in Muslim world. The OIC member states have urged their members and non-member states to mobilize the necessary financial resources to organize and implement an urgent humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

In the statement of the inaugural session of meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers held in Islamabad, the organization's Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Tariq Ali Bakht Salah, stated that after decades of war and insecurity, the people of Afghanistan need relief and peace. It is challenge for the international community to act swiftly to ensure that the people of Afghanistan have unhindered access to life-saving aid and humanitarian facilities and services. He added that the OIC Humanitarian Office in Kabul, in collaboration with various international agencies, would fulfill its responsibility to provide much needed assistance to millions of needy people. He expressed confidence that the OIC with the collaboration of the United Nations and regional partners, as well as key stakeholders, would take all necessary steps for a lasting solution to the devastating hu-

manitarian situation in Afghanistan, in which millions of lives are at stake. The situation in Afghanistan is alarming. According to UN figures, almost half of the country's population has reached critical levels of hunger. The World Food Program estimates that 3.2 million children in Afghanistan are at risk of severe undernourishment. The United Nations Development Program fears that 97% of Afghans could fall below the poverty line if immediate steps are not taken to address the humanitarian crisis. In a meeting, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi expressed concern that the withdrawal of economic migrants from Afghanistan could begin. He had warned European officials that the migrants would be heading to Europe, thus Western nations should not be under the illusion that the crisis in Afghanistan would have no any effect on them.

The Afghan delegation to the conference was led by its foreign minister, and it will be important for the people gathered to listen to them. However, it is just as important for the Taliban representatives in the delegation to hear what the world thinks of them. Pakistani officials have privately complained that the Taliban leadership is not accepting their demands. Many Western envoys in Islamabad have also made it clear that their governments will not be willing to cooperate with the Taliban but in the areas of as girls' education, women's rights and a more comprehensive government in Kabul. Don't notice any obvious changes.

The key issue at this stage is the crumbling economy in Afghanistan. Lack of banking channels means to get financial aid into the system and then deliver it to the people who need it most is a major obstacle to reducing the country's precarious situation. Many Western ambassadors to Islamabad say their governments have promised huge sums of money for Afghanistan, although they are opposed to formal recognition of the Taliban government. However, there is no way to reach the desired recipients of this assistance unless proper banking system is established.

As a host, Pakistan can rightly claim of the credit significant progress is made. The forum provided an excellent opportunity for Pakistan to articulate its priorities as a key player in Afghanistan and to develop its strategic narrative so that it can be seen as a key driver for peace and stability in the neighborhood and the region. Prime Minister Imran Khan has done a good job of ensuring the solid participation of Muslim countries as well as key officials of international organizations. The Foreign Ministry has worked hard to bring this mega event together. Pakistan was in a good position to take many important steps from this platform. However, in parallel, it also had to deal with the challenge of countering the negative perception between the United States and other Western nations that it had helped engineer the defeat of the United States. So far, Pakistan has struggled to change that perception and has dangerously cooled its relations with Washington. US special envoys for Afghanistan were also attending the meeting, as well as Russian officials. It is hoped that the Pakistani authorities will use this opportunity to build a strong case for their diplomacy and try to eliminate the negative perceptions that escalate to anti-Pakistan sentiments.

— akramzaheer86@yahoo.com

Briefs

Fawad regrets
extremist
parties' rise

FROM PAGE 01

The information minister said it was the country's "misfortune that a party that should have been dismantled", won in the local body polls because of "our mistakes". "Due to administrative problems, we suffered some set back in the local body elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," Chaudhry maintained, adding the PTI is "the only national (level) party in the country". He said parties like JUI could not be considered a substitute for the PTI, whereas the PML-N and the PPP "had no place" in national politics. "Imran Khan is the leader of the federation. It is important for the leadership and workers of the PTI to put aside their differences and strengthen Imran Khan," Chaudhry said. "Without Imran Khan, Pakistan's politics would disintegrate," he added. The Opposition parties, particularly the JUI, have taken an unassailable lead in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's ongoing local body elections, leaving PTI behind, according to unofficial results.

The ruling party could not grab a single mayor seat, winning in only one tehsil in Peshawar out of six tehsils. Awami National Party's (ANP) Himayatullah has been elected as the mayor in Mardan with 56,458 votes, followed by the JUI's Amanat Shah Haqqani with 49,938 votes, according to unofficial results. JUI's candidates secured the remaining three seats of mayor in Kohat, Bannu, and Peshawar, according to unofficial results.

The results, however, for the election of mayor in Peshawar have been stopped by the Election Commission of Pakistan on account of postponement of polling on some polling stations due to disruption in law and order on election day there. In response to a question about PML-N Vice-President Maryam Nawaz, the information minister said that she "does not have much of a political standing". Speaking about former president Asif Ali Zardari's recent speech in Nawabshah where he slammed the government's policies, Chaudhry said: "If they even see the potential of a deal, all of them rush with their polish."

On the economic front, he said indicators show a positive trajectory and economic stability due to the "prudent policies" of the government, Radio Pakistan reported. The minister said that opportunities for wealth creation are on the rise in the country, with the textile, information technology, agriculture, and other sectors performing well. He said direct taxes have seen a 31% surge, adding that all the crops have witnessed record production resulting in additional income of Rs1,100 billion to farmers. Chaudhry said cotton recorded an increase of 19.5%, rice 4.8%, and sugarcane 8.7%. He said consumption of electricity and diesel grew by 13% and 26% respectively.

Shehbaz
felicitates...

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Thanking PML-N president, Maulana Fazl said that rigging in the last general elections in 2018 had robbed the JUI-F of the people's mandate. "Had that not been the case, we must have emerged as a majority party in the last elections just like we have done in these LBs polls," he claimed.

Bahraini
Naval...

FROM PAGE 01

The Naval Chief highlighted Pakistan Navy initiatives for ensuring maritime security and peace in the region through Regional Maritime Security Patrols. The visiting dignitary highly appreciated and acknowledged Pakistan Navy's efforts and commitments in support of collaborative maritime security in the region. Later, Commander Royal Bahrain Naval Force was briefed regarding PN roles and operational capabilities. It is expected that the recent visit of Commander Royal Bahrain Naval Force will further enhance bilateral collaboration between the two countries in general and Navies in particular.

Food security will remain
most pressing issue next year

The volume of loans allocated to domestic fish producers under the program "Every family entrepreneur" will be doubled, and next year 400 billion UZS and \$20 million will be allocated for these purposes

NEWS DESK

TASHKENT: President Shavkat Mirziyoyev chaired a meeting on ensuring food security, including through the development of one of the important sectors - fish farming, increasing the efficiency of fish harvesting based on cooperation, reports "Dunyo" IA correspondent. According to the press service of the President of Uzbekistan, the Head of the state focused on the problematic issues that remain in the field of food security, despite the resolution of financial issues and the creation of all opportunities for food provision of the population. It was noted that the issues of eliminating the

shortcomings, the formation of sufficient food stocks in the entrusted territory and ensuring price stability should be the focus of attention of hokims at all levels. Over the past five years, as a result of the implementation of 1,016 projects worth 2.2 trillion UZS in the country's fishing industry, the volume of fish harvesting has increased 6 times and this year will reach 400 thousand tons. Compared to 2016, fish consumption increased 5.7 times.

"The global rise in food prices and inflationary risks clearly indicate that food security will remain the most pressing issue next year. Therefore, the regional hokims should analyze the state of fish farming in their region and systematically



work to create all conditions for entrepreneurs and households", the President said. It was noted that these indicators are not enough. The available opportunities are not being fully used. Thus, the productivity of fish farming is only 3-4 tons per hectare in Navoi, Namangan, Syrdarya, Fergana and Tash-

kent regions. This is since the volume of intensive fish farming in these regions does not exceed 10 percent of the total production. In this regard, the issues of intensification of artificial reservoirs, development of clusters and cooperation in the industry were considered. The task is set to

increase fish production to 600 thousand tons next year. For this purpose, intensive fish farming will be organized in 10 thousand households next year based on Sharof Rashidov district experience. Clusters that grow more than 80 tons of fish per year based on cooperation will be exempt from taxes for a period of three years. And clusters that have attracted foreign specialists will be compensated for part of the costs. The volume of loans allocated to domestic fish producers under the program "Every family entrepreneur" will be doubled, and next year 400 billion UZS and \$20 million will be allocated for these purposes. The rate of land tax and the property tax for owners of households engaged

in fish farming will be reduced by 50 percent, and they will be transferred to the category of self-employed. Instructions were given to conduct an experiment in teaching fish farming to the population in Yangiylul and Quyichirchik districts and to implement its results in Navoi, Syrdarya and Fergana regions from June 1 next year. It is also planned to attract 20 million euros for major projects in fish farming. The need for increasing the productivity of 21 thousand hectares of low-yielding artificial reservoirs and harvesting an additional 190 thousand tons of fish in them was emphasized. To this end, an instruction was given to equip 2.2 thousand farms with aerators in the amount of 50 thousand.

UN urges Belarus, Poland to
address refugees' 'dire conditions'

AGENCIES

GENEVA: Belarus and Poland are pushing refugees back and forth across their border and leaving them with little if any food, clean water or shelter, the U.N. Human Rights office said on Tuesday, urging both countries to address "this appalling situation". Refugees and migrants interviewed by a U.N. human rights team on a Nov. 29 to Dec. 3 trip to Poland said they had suffered violence or threats in Belarus and been left hungry and cold, a spokesperson for the U.N. Human Rights office said. "Those interviewed described dire conditions on both sides of the border, with no or limited access to food, clean water and shelter, often amid freezing temperatures," Elizabeth Throssell told reporters. Most said that, while in Belarus, they had been beaten or threatened by security forces, who some refugees said had also demanded "extortionate sums" for food and water and forced them to cross the border. Belarusian officials had no immediate comment when contacted

Hungary to defy EU court
ruling over migration
policy, Orban says

BUDAPEST: Hungary will not change its controversial immigration laws despite a European court ruling, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on Tuesday, stepping up his nationalist campaign ahead of a closely-fought national election due early next year. Orban said migration and LGBTQ rights, two issues which have caused conflict with the European Union, would dominate the agenda as his right-wing Fidesz party prepares for its first contested election after three landlides since 2010. The row over democratic standards has led to a freeze in EU recovery funding to Hungary, complicating Orban's path to re-election because the economy relies heavily on the funds to finance investment and boost growth. The 58-year-old premier faces a united opposition as inflation hits at a 14-year-high, the economy is headed for a slow-down, and the budget deficit has surged to record levels due to high pre-election spending. Earlier this month, Hungary's Constitutional Court avoided ruling on the primacy of European Union law in deciding on a disputed government move against immigration, staying off a deeper crisis after a similar Polish challenge sent shock waves through Europe. read more The court had considered a challenge by Orban's government to an EU court finding that Budapest broke EU laws by deporting refugees over the border into Serbia. The court said Budapest had the right to apply its own measures in areas where the EU has yet to take adequate steps for common implementation of EU rules as well as to safeguard its national identity, which Orban took as vindication of his policies. - Agencies

by Reuters. Thousands of migrants are stuck on the European Union's eastern frontier. Poland and the EU accuse Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko of encouraging the migrants to travel to Belarus and cross the border illegally as revenge for sanctions imposed on Minsk over human rights abuses. Belarus denies this and says the EU is to blame for the humanitarian crisis on the border. Stanislaw Zaryn, a spokesperson for Poland's special services, said his country's actions were legitimate and aimed to protect the country's borders. "The migration route, controlled and organised by the Belarusian services, is only a tool used by the regime in Minsk," he said. Throssell said many migrants and refugees interviewed by the U.N. team had crossed the border several times in both directions due to "recurring practices by the two countries of pushing people up to or across the border". Some of them hid from security forces for weeks in the forest along the border, with one making 26 attempts to cross from Belarus to Poland.

Premier League
to plough through
festive schedule

LONDON: Premier League clubs have agreed to continue playing games scheduled over the festive period despite several fixtures being postponed due to a surge in Covid-19 cases, the league announced after a meeting between all teams. Ten Premier League games have been postponed this month due to outbreaks amid a busy schedule where teams are set to play three times between Boxing Day and Jan 3. The Premier League released a statement shortly after the meeting saying that a record 90 new Covid-19 cases were detected among players and staff in the past week, a significant increase from its total of 42 in the previous round on Dec 6-12. "The safety of everybody is a priority and the Premier League is taking all precautionary steps in light of the recent rise in Covid-19 cases across the country," the league said in a statement. Only four of the weekend's 10 fixtures were played after teams told the Premier League they were missing players due to Covid-19. The Premier League only grants a postponement if a club has fewer than 14 players available, with the board examining requests on a case-by-case basis. "While recognising a number of clubs are experiencing Covid-19 outbreaks and challenges, it is the league's collective intention to continue the current fixture schedule where safely possible," the Premier League said. "A range of issues were discussed at this afternoon's meeting, including the adaptation of the Premier League Covid-19 postponement process in response to the impact of the Omicron variant. - Agencies

All set for Birmingham
2022 Queen's Baton Relay

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: The countdown is on, as in just six days, the Birmingham 2022 Queen's Baton Relay will arrive in Pakistan, the 23rd destination out of the 72 Commonwealth nations and territories. President Pakistan Olympic Association (POA) Lt Gen (Retd) Syed ArifHasan and POA Secretary general Muhammad Khalid Mahmood will officially welcome the Baton which it will be visiting on 27 December at Karachi. A busy schedule of activities and events are planned for the Queen's Baton Relay, with opportunities to showcase untold stories from Baton bearers, athletes, and young people who are striving for change in their community. During its time in Pakistan, the Queen's

Baton Relay will visit British Deputy High Commission, Karachi, Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, Mazar-e-Quaid-e-Azam, Karachi Grammar School and Moulana Muhammad Ali Johar Park (Kakri Ground), Karachi and will experience the celebrations by the local communities including students, athletes and notables from all sections of society. The Queen's Baton will be carried by Jahangir Khan, who is Squash Legend and Muhammad Inam, who is World Beach Wrestling Champion and Commonwealth Games Gold Medalist. The Queen's Baton will arrive here having previously visited Seychelles; since its inaugural appearance at the Cardiff 1958 Commonwealth Games, the Queen's Baton Relay has been a tradition for the Commonwealth Games.

The Birmingham 2022 Queen's Baton Relay started at Buckingham Palace on 7 October 2021, when Her Majesty the Queen placed Her Message to the Commonwealth into the Baton and passed it to four-time Paralympic gold medalist and Team England athlete Kadeena Cox, who had the honour of being the first of thousands of Batonbearers to carry the Baton. Fatima Lakhani, Chairperson, Organizing Committee of QBR Event in Pakistan said "I am delighted that Pakistan is a part of this extraordinary journey. It's a way to highlight and promote the beauty of Pakistan to people across the Commonwealth." President Pakistan Olympic Association Lt Gen (Retd) Syed ArifHasan said that we are looking forward to celebrating the arrival

of the Birmingham 2022 Queen's Baton Relay in our community and are well on track with our planning for the occasion. "Everyone here is excited to get involved with the festivities and to cheer on the Batonbearers" he added. The 16th official Queen's Baton Relay is an epic journey covering the entirety of the Commonwealth as it will travel to all 72 nations and territories, covering a distance of 140,000 kilometres. For 269 days, the Baton will travel to Europe, Africa, Asia, Oceania, the Caribbean and the Americas, before it embarks on the final stretch of its journey across England for 25 days. The Queen's Baton Relay will complete its journey at the Opening Ceremony of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games on 28 July 2022.

17th Astana talks on Syria begin in Kazakhstan

A Security Council resolution adopted in December 2015 unanimously endorsed a road map to peace in Syria that was approved in Geneva on June 30, 2012, by representatives of the UN

FOREIGN DESK

NUR SULTAN: Delegations from Turkey, Russia and Iran have met Tuesday in Kazakhstan's capital Nur Sultan for the 17th meeting of the Astana process that aims to find a solution to the decade-long crisis in Syria. Within the scope of the Astana talks, bilateral and trilateral meetings are being held. The Turkish delegation is headed by the foreign ministry's Syria Director General Selçuk Ünal while Russia is being represented through the country's special envoy to Syria Alexander Lavrentiev, Iran by Ali Asghar Khaji, a senior adviser to the Iranian



foreign minister on special political affairs, and the Syrian opposition by Ahmet Toma. Khawla Mattar, deputy special representative of the United Nations to Syria is also attending the talks while Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon are participating as observers. The Turkish delegation's first meeting was with the United Nations delegation.

The talks are scheduled to take place two days and will address several issues including the current situation, the transfer of humanitarian aid, the launching of the Syrian constitutional committees works in Geneva, the exchange of prisoners, the release of hostages and further confidence-building measures. The Astana meeting was in-

ited by Turkey, Iran and Russia to bring the warring sides in Syria together to find a permanent solution to the decade-long war. The main agenda items have been the constitutional system, political transition, security and resettlement. The first Astana meeting was held in Turkey in January 2017 to facilitate U.N.-sponsored peace talks in Geneva.

Syrian opposition makes
'unacceptable' demands

NUR-SULTAN: The Syrian opposition often makes demands that are unacceptable to other negotiators, hindering the talks of the Syrian Constitutional Committee in Geneva, Russia's presidential envoy for Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, said on Tuesday. UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen visited Damascus earlier where he enlisted the support for the work of national delegations, Lavrentiev said. "We very much hope that similar work will be done with the opposition," he said after consultations with the Turkish and Iranian delegations. The opposition has a way of making demands and asking questions that prompts the pro-government side to adopt the hard line, the envoy said. "We need to go down the path of finding compromises, of not provoking each other to take tough steps," he said. "You can't dictate something and can't make proposals that are absolutely unacceptable for the other side, for example, for Damascus," Lavrentiev said. - Agencies

Int'l
community
lauds...

FROM PAGE 01

the difficulties being faced by the 40 million Afghans, Radio Pakistan reported. Pakistan's image has "significantly improved at the international level in the last three years", the prime minister said, two days after Islamabad hosted the 17th extraordinary session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of the OIC. Muslim nations, during the session, resolved to work with the United Nations to try to unlock hundreds of millions of dollars in frozen Afghan assets in a bid to tackle a growing humanitarian crisis. The prime minister congratulated the Foreign Office for successfully conducting the 17th extraordinary session. He also praised the law enforcement agencies that made the event a success, making the nation proud, with a strong sense of self-belief. The prime minister, while lauding the nation's mettle to face different testing times in the country's history, stressed upon the inculcation of "self-belief", a quality that could serve as a beacon of light in hard times.

OIC moot
productive:
FM

FROM PAGE 01

The Opposition of the UK House of Commons in Islamabad today (Tuesday), he said the international community, including Britain, need to come forward to help the Afghan people. Qureshi said India's unilateral actions in the Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir are clear violation of international laws. He said the violations of human rights and international laws cannot be described as a bilateral matter between Pakistan and India. He said Pakistan wants that serious human rights violations in the Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir are raised at the House of Commons and other international forums. The PM said Pakistan desires to further strengthen bilateral relations with the United Kingdom.

Maryam
asks PM...

FROM PAGE 01

taker for the PTI ticket in the next round of polls. Talking to the media after her court appearance in Avenfield reference in Islamabad on Tuesday, Maryam Nawaz said that what happened in the KP with the ruling party was quite obvious.

Imran Khan has been buried under his own 'performance', she said sarcastically. She was of the view that the PTI MNAs and MPs were not standing with their own candidates of the LG polls. She predicted that nobody would like to take PTI ticket anymore. She, however, advised the PTI ticket holders to go into public after wearing 'helmet'. Maryam deplored that the current rulers had completely ruined the robust economy of Nawaz's era and crushed the people of this country under the wheel of inflation. She stated that the PTI ran away from Lahore by-election extending an excuse of 'technical ground'. Imran Khan must accept that he is unable to run this country, she added.

'Maryam
should be...

FROM PAGE 01

KPLG polls. He said after facing losing elections of Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir the people of KP rejected the PML-N in local government elections. There was a lack of leadership in PML-N as it had split into factions due to internal rift, he said adding if Shehbaz Sharif looks active in the party than Maryam goes on a rest for two months. Farrukh said the courts has declared the PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif a fugitive, if [Nawaz] had dare than did not flee the country under the pretext of medical treatment. He said, "Inflation is a global phenomenon and its effects were felt across the world. He said how people like Maryam who never made purchases from their own money can talk on inflation. Pakistan Tahreeke-Insaf (PTI), he said, has received dozens of applications by the party workers for contesting each seat in the local body elections of KP.

Briefs

14 dead in ongoing Malaysia floods

WEB NEWS

KUALA LAMPUR: At least 14 are dead in floods that have ravaged Malaysia since Saturday, local news reported on Tuesday.

Eight bodies have been recovered in the western state of Selangor, where the capital Kuala Lumpur is located, along with six others in the neighboring Pahang state, and four more still reported missing the Bernama news agency reported.

"This brings the tally of people who perished in the floods which struck eight states to 14," it said.

Despite an improvement in the weather, the floods have not receded in most of the states affected by the natural disaster since Saturday, it added. More than 60,000 flood victims across the country have been evacuated from their homes, according to the National Disaster Management Agency, including nearly 35,000 in Pahang. In a statement, Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob announced intensified efforts to evacuate residents still trapped in their flooded homes.

"The government has allocated 100 million Malaysian ringgits (\$23.7 million) for post-flood recovery activities to repair damaged houses and infrastructure," he said. The prime minister said the Social Welfare Department was also preparing cooked meals to be sent to victims at home and relief centers.

Sweden tightens COVID restrictions

STOCKHOLM: Sweden will urge all employees to work from home if possible and impose tighter rules for social distancing, the government said on Tuesday, as it ratchets up restrictions aimed at fighting a surge in new infections of the COVID-19 virus.

The number of new virus cases in Sweden, which sparked international attention last year for its rejection of hard lockdowns, have shot up in recent weeks after a calm autumn when most restrictions were phased out.

While hospitalizations and the number of patients requiring intensive care are still among the lowest per capita in Europe, these have also begun rising. "We must now take joint responsibility and we need adapt to the new reality," Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson told a news conference. "I understand that many are tired of this - so am I - but we now have a new virus variant, which means we are in a new situation."

Meanwhile, fresh projections from the Public Health Agency of how the pandemic will develop showed the pace of new infections continuing to increase in the coming weeks and peaking in January. The latest restrictions - the second stage of the government's plans - also included a limit of 50 people at private gatherings and the need for a vaccination pass for public events where there are more than 500 people. - Agencies

CGGC achieves another milestone

ISLAMABAD: China Gezhouba Group of Companies (CGGC) has completed the entire breakthrough of the top heading of the Diversion Tunnel 1 of the Mohmand Dam and Hydropower Project (MDHP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

According to Gwadar Pro, the total length of the Diversion tunnel No.1 is 1681.14 m. The CGGC team, while terminating the completion of diversion tunnel one as a "big achievement", held a short ceremony at the tunnel site on Saturday.

On the occasion, the CGGC workers carried a banner with the inscription "celebration for the entire breakthrough of the top heading in DT-1".

The MDHP consists of two diversion tunnels namely T1 and T2. The accumulated length of both the tunnels is more than three kilometers. - APP

SCO chief stands firm to counter foreign meddling

The SCO ensures the equality of states and makes decisions based on consensus, and no state imposes its will or interests upon the others," Vladimir Norov stressed

NEWS DESK

BEIJING: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will coordinate multilateral efforts to counter any foreign meddling attempts in the internal political affairs of its member states, SCO Secretary General Vladimir Norov said on Tuesday.

"The main principles of our organization's activity are non-interference in domestic affairs and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our states. The SCO is a new-type regional organization that seeks equality and takes the interests of each state into account," the chief of the Moscow-Beijing-led bloc stressed at a press conference, replying to a question from TASS on the prospects of multilateral interaction for settling corresponding issues based on the consensus of the Russian and Chinese leaders.

The SCO unites those countries "that differ in their military and economic potential," the secretary general noted. "We draw attention to the fact that it is necessary to strictly observe the supremacy of international law, the principles of non-interference in internal affairs and contribute to strengthening the UN's role," Norov added.

"The SCO ensures the equality of states and makes decisions based on consensus. And no state imposes its will or interests upon the others," the organization's chief stressed.

The statements recently made by the Russian and Chinese leaders on this issue, "are another reminder for all those who intend to interfere in the internal affairs

of states, in particular, the SCO countries," he specified.

China's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian earlier told Russian media that the Chinese authorities viewed the SCO as "a heavyweight, constructive force for resolving global issues" and would contribute to bolstering interaction between the organization's members. As the spokesman pointed out, this organization that is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year "is a completely new format of tolerant cooperation that stimulates stronger international solidarity."

Members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are ready to maintain dialogue with all interested international organizations and have no plans to act against other states, SCO Secretary General Vladimir Norov said at a press conference on Tuesday.

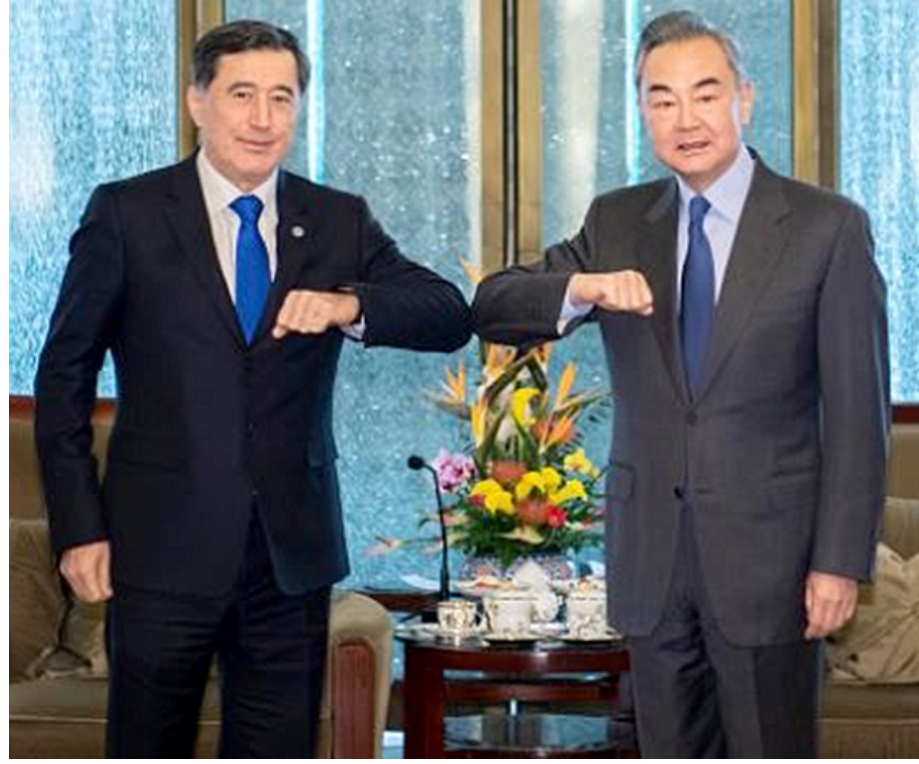
"The SCO's efforts to build international contacts are based on openness and its desire to establish dialogue with all interested international organizations, which helps bolster its authority and role globally," he specified.

Norov clarified that the SCO remains committed to its principle enshrined in its charter, which says that it's "not aimed against other states." "This implies openness and a willingness to cooperate with other countries, as well as with regional and international organizations," he added.

"The fact that 17 countries have already filed requests to either establish relations with the SCO or raise the level of their ties is clear evidence of our organization's growing international authority," the secretary general emphasized. "Requests have particularly come from countries outside Eurasia," he noted.

Norov also affirmed that the SCO would continue to facilitate the activities of the United Nations who "plays a central coordinating role in maintaining global peace and security, as well as in fostering global development, promoting and defending human rights."

Norov calls on Chinese FM



SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov (right) and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (left) shake hands during a meeting in Beijing. Norov expressed gratitude to the SCO Secretary-General for his contribution to the development of the organization. China's FM praised the results of the three-year activity of Vladimir Norov as the head of the SCO headquarters and expressed the hope that he would continue to play an active role in the development of the organization and strengthen the friendship between China and Uzbekistan. Vladimir Norov expressed gratitude to the leadership of China's Foreign Ministry for the support and attention given to the activity of the SCO Secretariat during his work as head of the organization's headquarters. SCO Secretary-General emphasized that for him it was a special honor and a great noble mission for the first time in the history of Uzbekistan to represent the country as the head of the largest regional organization, the members of which are the Central Asian countries, four nuclear powers and two permanent members of the UN Security Council. - DNA

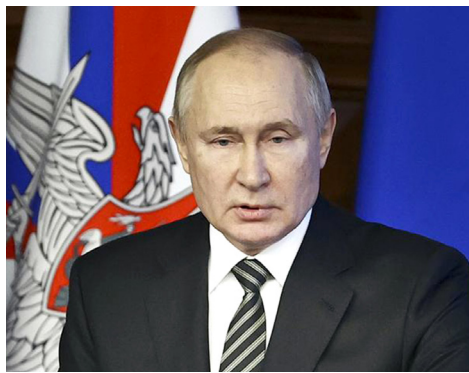
Putin blames west for tensions, demands security guarantees

FOREIGN DESK

MOSCOW: The Russian president on Tuesday reiterated his demand for guarantees from the U.S. and its allies that NATO will not expand eastwards, blaming the West for "tensions that are building up in Europe."

Russian President Vladimir Putin's speech at a meeting with Russia's top military brass came just days after Moscow submitted draft security documents demanding that NATO deny membership to Ukraine and other former Soviet countries and roll back the alliance's military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe - bold ultimatums that are almost certain to be rejected. The demands - contained in a proposed Russia-U.S. security treaty and a security agreement between Moscow and NATO - were drafted amid soaring tensions over a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine that has stoked fears of a possible invasion. Russia has denied it has plans to attack its neighbor but pressed for legal guarantees that would rule out NATO expansion and weapons deployment there.

Putin charged Tuesday that if U.S. and NATO missile systems appear in Ukraine, it will take



those missiles only minutes to reach Moscow. "For us, it is the most serious challenge - a challenge to our security," he said, adding that this is why the Kremlin needs "long-term, legally binding guarantees" from the West, as opposed to "verbal assurances, words and promises" that Moscow can't trust. Putin noted that NATO has expanded eastward since the late 1990s while giving assurances that Russia's worries were groundless. "What is happening now, tensions that are building up in Europe, is their (U.S. and NATO's) fault every step of

the way," the Russian leader said. "Russia has been forced to respond at every step. The situation kept worsening and worsening, deteriorating and deteriorating. And here we are today, in a situation when we're forced to resolve it somehow."

Russia's relations with the U.S. sank to post-Cold War lows after it annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 - gaining control over long coastlines of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov - and backed a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine that still controls territory there. Tensions reignited in recent weeks after Moscow massed tens of thousands of troops near Ukraine's border.

Putin has pressed the West for guarantees that NATO will not expand to Ukraine or deploy its forces there and raised the issue during a video call with U.S. President Joe Biden two weeks ago. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu charged Tuesday that more than 120 staff of U.S. private military companies are currently operating in two villages in war-torn eastern Ukraine, training Ukrainian troops and setting up firing positions in residential buildings and different facilities. Putin said the U.S. "should understand we have nowhere to retreat."

Pak-China bilateral trade to cross \$25 billion

ISLAMABAD: "Despite COVID-19 pandemic, this year our bilateral trade is expected to cross \$25 billion value with a great momentum with Pakistan's exports to China expected to cross \$3.54 billion, which is unprecedented and historic figures," said Moin ul Haque, the Ambassador of Pakistan to China.

Ambassador Haque was addressing China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)'s Industrial Cooperation B2B Investment Conference in Lahore via video link with the objective of transforming CPEC into a true economic hub by establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Punjab and business ventures in different sectors. - APP

Pak follows liberal investment regime

LAHORE: Minister of State and Federal Board of Investment (BoI) Chairman Mohammad Azfar Ahsan said on Tuesday that Pakistan was following a liberal investment regime and facilitation was its foremost cornerstone for instilling confidence in investors and creating conducive environment to attract local and foreign investment.

He also invited investors, business and industrialist community from not only China but also from other

countries to come and invest in various sectors in Pakistan.

He expressed these views in his welcome address at the inaugural session of Punjab Chapter of CEPC Industrial Cooperation and B2B (business to business) Investment Conference, at a local hotel. Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on CPEC Khalid Mansoor gave a detailed presentation on the CPEC projects, "Way forward on the process of industrialization in Pakistan". - APP



LAHORE: SAPM on CPEC, Khalid Mansoor, Minister of State & Chairman BOI Muhammad Azfar Ahsan, Provincial Minister Mian Aslam Iqbal and Secretary BOI Fareena Mazhar on CPEC Industrial Cooperation B2B Investment Conference organized by BOI in Lahore. - DNA

Ex-spy confirms Israel's role in Soleimani killing

Soleimani headed the IRGC's elite Quds Force and helped orchestrate Iran's involvement with paramilitary groups abroad. He was killed in a US drone strike at the Baghdad airport in Jan 2020, an incident that threatened to pull the countries into full-blown conflict

AGENCIES

JERUSALEM: Israel's former military intelligence chief says the country was involved in the American airstrike that killed Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in January 2020. It was the first public acknowledgement of Israel's role in the operation.

Soleimani headed the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force and helped orchestrate Iran's involvement with paramilitary groups abroad. He was killed in a U.S. drone strike at the Baghdad airport in January 2020, an incident that threatened to pull the countries into full-blown conflict. A week after the airstrike, NBC News reported that Israeli intelligence helped confirm the details of Soleimani's flight from Damas-

cus to Baghdad. Earlier this year, a Yahoo News reported that Israel "had access to Soleimani's numbers" and gave that intelligence to the United States.

But Maj. Gen. Tamir Heyman, the now-retired general who headed military intelligence until October, appears to be the first official to confirm Israel's involvement. Heyman's comments were published in the November issue of a Hebrew-language magazine closely affiliated with Israel's intelligence services. The interview was held in late September, a couple weeks before his retirement from the military. The authors wrote that Heyman opened the interview by talking about the American airstrike that killed Soleimani, but in which Israeli intelligence played a part. "Assassinating Soleimani was an achievement, since our main



enemy, in my eyes, are the Iranians," Heyman told the magazine. He said there were "two significant and important assassinations during my term" as head of army intelligence. "The first, as I've already recalled,

is that of Qassem Soleimani - it's rare to locate someone so senior, who is the architect of the fighting force, the strategist and the operator - it's rare," he said. Heyman called Soleimani "the engine of the train of Iranian entrenchment" in neighboring Syria.

Israel has carried out hundreds of airstrikes in Syria in the past decade, but rarely publicly comments on them. Israel has said, however, that it has targeted bases of Iranian-backed force and arms shipments bound for Iran's proxy, the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah. Heyman said that Israeli strikes had succeeded in "preventing the attempt by Iran to put down roots in Syria."

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Heyman's remarks. The interview was published as

world powers and Iran were engaged in negotiations to reach a new agreement to curb Iran's nuclear program. The previous deal, struck in 2015, unraveled after the United States unilaterally withdrew in 2018 and re-imposed crippling economic sanctions on Iran. On Wednesday, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan was scheduled to meet this week in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to discuss "a range of issues of strategic importance to the U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship, including the threat posed by Iran," National Security Council Spokesperson Emily Horne said.

Israel considers Iran its regional arch-foe, and says it will take any steps needed to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

Japan executes 3 death-row inmates

NEWS DESK

TOKYO: Japan on Tuesday hanged three convicts marking a first under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida who assumed power in October this year.

It is also the first time in two years that Japan has hanged death-row inmates.

Japan's Ministry of Justice identified the three convicts as Yasutaka Fujishiro, 65, who had killed seven of his relatives in Hyogo province in 2004, and Tomoaki Takanezawa, 54, and Mitsunori Onogawa, 44, who were convicted of killing two employees at two separate pachinko parlors in Gunma province in 2003, Kyodo News reported.

At a time when two-thirds of countries around the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice, Kishida's government has insisted that Japan cannot abolish the law.

"Many Japanese think the death penalty is unavoidable in the case of extremely malicious crimes," Seiji Kihara, Japan's deputy chief cabinet secretary, told reporters following the executions. Japan has 107 death-row inmates.

France kills IS militant

PARIS: The French army says it has "neutralized" a regional Islamic State group leader wanted in connection with the killing of seven aid workers, mostly French citizens, and a leading guide in a Niger giraffe park in August 2020.

France's Defense Ministry said Tuesday that, in cooperation with Nigerian authorities, operatives from France's anti-insurgent force Operation Barkhane struck Soumana Boura, an Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) leader, in a fatal airstrike. The force located him in a ISGS sanctuary north of the town of Tilibéri, identifying his body following the operation.

France claims Boura was among the perpetrators of the attack that occurred Aug. 9, 2020, in Kouré Park, Niger.

The victims had been on a day of sightseeing Sunday when they were attacked just before noon, according to one of the aid groups they worked for, Paris-based NGO ACTED. An ambulance sent by the French military stationed in Niger found the bodies later in the day in their burned-out vehicle in the giraffe reserve, the group said. - Agencies

China imposes sanctions on US officials

BEIJING: China announced sanctions on Tuesday on four members of the U.S. government's Commission on International Religious Freedom in retaliation for penalties imposed on Chinese officials over complaints of abuses in the country's northwestern Xinjiang region.

The tit-for-tat sanctions add to spiraling tension over Xinjiang. Washington has banned imports from the region that might be made with forced labor, while activists are calling for a boycott of February's Winter Olympics in Beijing. China has denied accusations of abuses and earlier retaliated by publicizing calls for boycotts of foreign shoe and clothing brands.

The chairwoman and three members of the U.S. panel are barred from visiting mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau, and any assets they have in the country will be frozen, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said.

Zhao identified those targeted as chairwoman Nadine Maenza, deputy chairman Nury Turkel and members Anurima Bhargava and James Carr. Zhao gave no indication whether they have assets in China. China threatened to retaliate after the U.S. Treasury announced sanctions Dec. 10 on two officials accused of involvement in repression of Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. Beijing is accused of mass detentions, forced abortions and other abuses. - Agencies

Briefs

KSRelief sends relief package for Afghanistan

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) has launched a relief package for Afghanistan.

Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani was the chief guest at the launching ceremony of the project. Under this initiative, initially 200 trucks loaded with 1920 tons of food and non-food items from Saudi Arabia left for Afghanistan via Pakistan.

Each food package contains all necessary essential food items. The project will benefit about two hundred and eighty thousand people in Afghanistan.

In non-food, ten thousand winter package comprises warm clothes for the needy families living in the colder regions of Afghanistan.

Talking to media on this occasion, Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani said the distribution of 30,000 food packages and 10,000 non-food packages will help the poor and deserving people living in Afghanistan.

Welcoming this humanitarian initiative of Saudi Arabia, he said such initiatives are of great importance to avert a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

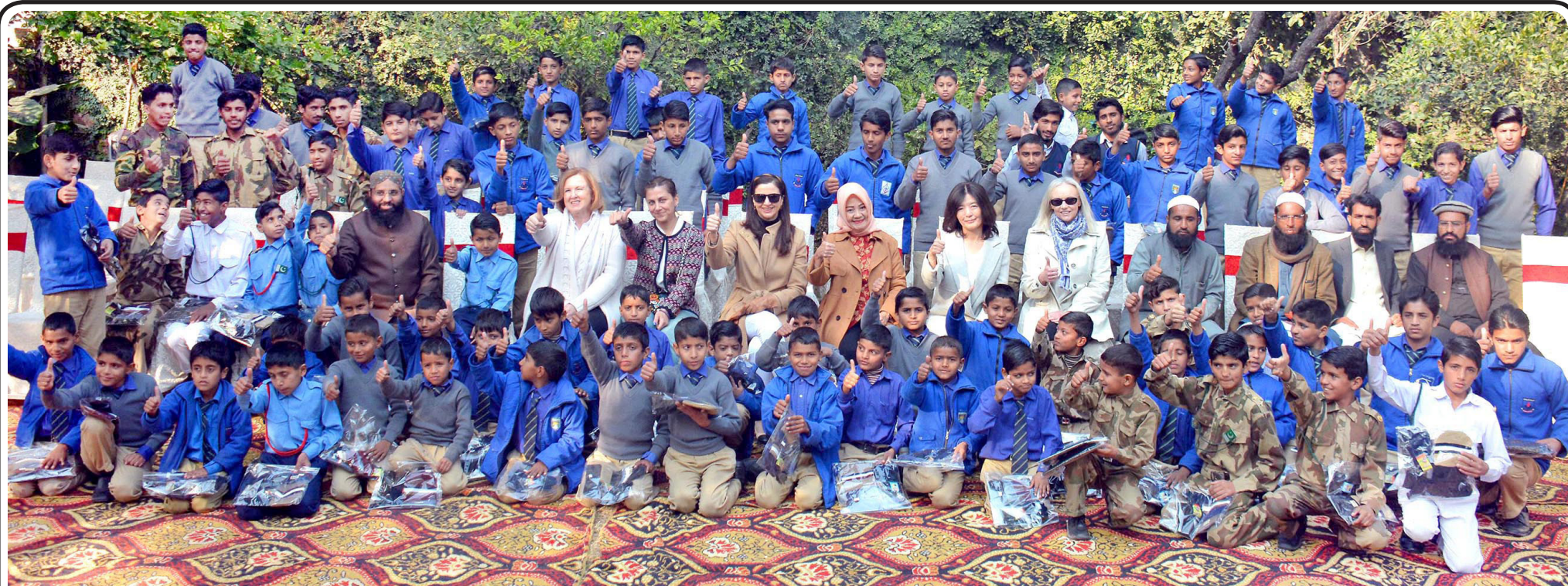
The Chairman Senate urged the international community including developed countries to take such steps following the footprints of Saudi Arabia.

Afghan protesters call for release of frozen assets

KABUL: Hundreds of protesters have marched through the streets of Kabul towards the shuttered United States' embassy, urging the release of Afghanistan's frozen assets. Holding banners reading, "Let us eat" and "Give us our frozen money", the protesters chanted slogans and marched down a central avenue on Tuesday, with the ruling Taliban providing security.

International funding to Afghanistan has been suspended and billions of dollars of the country's assets abroad, mostly in the US, were frozen after the Taliban took control of the country in August. The lack of funding has battered Afghanistan's already troubled economy, leading to increasing poverty while aid groups warn of a looming humanitarian catastrophe.

State employees, from doctors to teachers and administrative civil servants, have not been paid in months. Banks, meanwhile, have restricted how much money account holders can withdraw. On Sunday, Muslim nations resolved to work with the United Nations to try to unlock the frozen Afghan assets in a bid to tackle a growing humanitarian crisis. — Agencies



ISLAMABAD: Spouses of heads of missions posing for a picture with boys of the Suffa Sweet Home after distribution of Hats, socks, gloves and scarves. The donation was raised with thanks to the personal funds of the Ambassador's Wives from Turkey, Italy, Tajikistan, Nepal, Belarus, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, Ukraine, Cuba, World Bank, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Kenya and Yemen. — DNA

Europe considers new curbs as Omicron sweeps world

Omicron infections are multiplying across Europe, the United States and Asia, including in Japan, where a single cluster of COVID-19 cases at a military base has grown to at least 180

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Countries across Europe were considering new curbs on movement on Tuesday, with German scientists urging maximum and immediate restrictions on social contacts as the Omicron variant swept the world days before the second Christmas of the pandemic.

Omicron infections are multiplying across Europe, the United States and Asia, including in Japan, where a single cluster of COVID-19 cases at a military base has grown to at least 180.

Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and South Korea are among countries to have reimposed partial or full lockdowns or other social distancing measures, in recent days. New Zealand COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said his country, which imposed some of the world's toughest COVID-19 measures, was delaying the start of a staggered reopening of its border until the end of February.

"All of the evidence so far points to Omicron being the most transmissible COVID-19 variant yet," he said. Germany's Robert Koch Institute for infectious diseases on Tuesday recommended that "maximum contact re-

EU vaccine passports only valid 9 months

BRUSSELS: The European Commission announced Tuesday that COVID vaccine certificates in the bloc would only be valid for nine months without a booster shot. The move comes as European countries scramble to secure more vaccine doses amid a surge in COVID cases and a spread of a likely highly transmissible new variant, omicron.

Announcing the decision, the EU Commission said that a harmonized validity period for COVID vaccine passports "is a necessity for safe free movement and EU level coordination." The new rule concerns traveling within the European Union, but the Commission said in a statement that it recommends EU countries also apply it on a national level to "provide certainty for travelers and reduce disruptions." EU residents are

recommended to receive a booster shot six months, at the latest, after they're fully vaccinated. But the certificate will be valid for three additional months as a grace period to ensure access to booster doses, the Commission added. The validity of the COVID vaccine passport after a booster shot will be extended further without a set limit, an EU official told the Reuters news agency, citing a lack of scientific evidence about the duration of protection from the booster. The Commission has also introduced a new rule for the recording of the booster shot in vaccine passports.

A booster dose following a two-dose full vaccination should be recorded as "3/3" in the certificate. A single-dose vaccination followed by a booster should read "2/1." — Agencies

measures, which were likely to include contact restrictions even for the vaccinated and those who have recovered from

SAARC Secretary General due today

ISLAMABAD: Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Esala Ruwan Weerakoon will arrive in Pakistan on Dec 22, Wednesday on a three-day visit. This is his maiden visit to the country since he assumed the office in March 2020, a spokesperson for the Foreign Office said in a statement. The secretary general will call on Prime Minister Imran Khan and Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi beside meetings with other high officials. "The visit is an opportunity to reiterate Pakistan's commitment to the objectives and principles of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and share our perspective on various aspects of cooperation with South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and highlight Pakistan's efforts for promotion of peace, security and development in the region," the spokesperson said. — DNA



ISLAMABAD: Leader of the House in Senate, Dr. Shahzad Waseem interacts with Tehsin Ertugruloglu, Foreign Minister of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. — DNA

India deploys S-400 system in Punjab borders

NEW DELHI: India has started deploying its S-400 air defence missile system in the Punjab sector.

"The first S-400 air defence missile system squadron is being deployed in the Punjab sector," India Today reported quoting top government sources as having said. Russia has started supplying the S-400 Triumf air defence systems to India, the first unit of which will be deployed near the western front. The announcement was made by the Director of Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FSMTC) Dmitry Shugaev at the Dubai air show. FSMTC is the Russian government's main defence export control organisation. Industry sources claim the first parts of the squadron have already started reaching India, and they would be deployed to a location where it can take on threats from both Pakistan and Chinese airspace.

According to sources, the parts of the missile systems are coming via both air and sea routes and would be quickly deployed in the designated locations. "The first squadron delivery would be completed by the end of this year and after its deployment, the Indian Air Force would start focusing towards the eastern front," they said.

The IAF would also dedicate some of the resources to training its personnel within the country. — DNA

Pakistan test launches Babur cruise missile

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Army on Tuesday conducted a successful test launch of an 'enhanced-range' version of the indigenously developed Babur Cruise Missile 1B, said a statement by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). According to the military's media wing, Director General of Strategic Plans Division (SPD) Lieutenant General Nadeem Zaki Manj congratulated the scientists and engineers on achieving excellence in the domain of cruise missile technology. He also expressed his full confidence that this test would further strengthen Pakistan's strategic deterrence.

EU mission chief urges Israel to halt evacuations

Sven Kuhn von Burgsorf led a high-powered EU delegation on a visit to the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, where they called at the home of the Salem family, who are facing eviction on Dec. 28

WEB DESK

AMMAN: The head of the EU mission to the West Bank and Gaza Strip issued an impassioned appeal to Israel on Monday to halt the eviction of Palestinians from their homes in occupied East Jerusalem to make way for Jewish settlers. Sven Kuhn von Burgsorf led a high-powered EU delegation on a visit to the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, where they called at the home of the Salem family, who are facing eviction on Dec. 28.

"How on earth is it possible that a family can be evicted at Christmas, in the middle of the winter?" von Burgsorf said.

The EU delegation ran a photo on Twitter, adding: "Members of Nassar family continue gathering on their land in the neighborhood of #SheikhJarrah in the occupied #Jerusalem after Israeli settlers placed barbed wires around the land in an attempt to seize it. #SaveSheikhJarrah." Israel has been waging a concerted campaign to take over as many homes as possible in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of occupied East Jerusalem to turn it into a Jewish area. An appeal

against the evictions is currently before the Supreme Court.

Under a controversial Israeli law, land rights belong to Jews who lived in the area before 1948, and can be transferred.

However, the law does not apply to Palestinians who lost homes in West Jerusalem and now live in East Jerusalem — they are not permitted to claim their homes back. The Israeli-controlled administration of absentee properties is a major enabler of Jewish settler groups. Fatmeh Salem, 69, who was born in the family home in Sheikh Jarrah and has lived there all her life, has paid rent for the house to the Jordanian government since the 1950s.

The Israeli-controlled administration of absentee properties is a major enabler of Jewish settler groups, while Palestinians who lost homes in West Jerusalem and live now in East Jerusalem are not even allowed to have their homes back. The last evictions in Sheikh Jarrah took place in 2017.

On Dec. 19, the opposition Israeli website Plus972 gave details of what occurred while their reporter visited the Salem family in Sheikh Jarrah early this month.

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