



# Islamabad POST

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**Lionel Messi's World Cup hopes heat up in Quarter final tie**

Detailed News On Page-06

**EU stepping up pressure on Russia**

Detailed News On Page-07



**German envoy highlights cooperation**

Detailed News On Page-08



**Fixtures**

Croatia vs Brazil  
Dec 9 (8pm)  
Netherlands vs Argentina  
Dec 10 (12 midnight)

**Briefs**

**Pakistan for SAARC's revival**

**DNA**  
ISLAMABAD: — Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said Pakistan was ready to play its part in reviving the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). In a tweet on the SAARC Charter Day, he said the day was a reminder of the vast untapped potential of regional development, connectivity, and cooperation among the countries of South Asia. Shehbaz Sharif pointed out that the people of SAARC countries were victims of these missed opportunities. "Pakistan is ready to play its part in the revival of SAARC," he said. The SAARC Charter Day is observed every year on 8th December. On this day in 1985, SAARC Charter was adopted in Dhaka, during the first summit of the group.

**Imran deprived of legal right**

**STAFF REPORT**  
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Central Secretary General Asad Umar said that PTI Chairman Imran Khan did not get the legal right to lodge an FIR on the assassination attempt on his life in Wazirabad hitherto. However, he raised question that will the mother of a well-reputed Shaheed journalist Arshad Sharif get her legal right to file an FIR? In a statement on Thursday, Asad Umar said that Imran Khan was deprived of his legal right to register the FIR of the tragic incident till date. He said that now Arshad Sharif's mother also was trying to lodge an FIR of her son's brutal murder.

## Corruption allegations Daily Mail apologises to PM Shehbaz

The British publication removes the article written by David Rose from all platforms of Mail publishers

NEWS DESK/DNA

LONDON: Daily Mail Thursday tendered an apology to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif while withdrawing each and every allegation of corruption against him and his son-in-law Imran Ali Yousaf. The British publication also removed the article written by David Rose from all platforms of Mail publishers. The United Kingdom-based publication has failed to prove the allegations levelled by its journalist David Rose in an article against Premier Shehbaz about the alleged misappropriation of public funds. Since the publication of the report, the prime minister has maintained that he was not involved in any wrongdoing and also approached a court in the UK challenging the allegation — resulting in an apology from the Daily Mail. The Mail Online, in its clarification statement, mentioned that their article concerning PM Shehbaz titled "Did the family of Pakistani politician who has become the poster boy for British overseas aid STEAL funds meant for earthquake victims" was published on July 14, 2019. The report was based on an investigation by National Accountability Bureau into PM Shehbaz and suggested that the money under "investigation included a not insubstantial

sum of British public money that had been paid to the Punjab province in DFID grant aid", the statement said. "We accept Mr Sharif has never been accused by the National Accountability Bureau of any wrongdoing in relation to British public money or DFID grant aid. We are pleased to make this clear and apologise to Mr Sharif for this error," the clarification read. British publication The Mail on Sunday and news site Mail Online apologised on Thursday to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for an "error" in an article it published on July 4, 2019 — in which it had accused the premier of "stealing British foreign aid money". The said news story, written by investigative journalist David Rose, has now been removed from the publication's website and other platforms. The article had claimed that Shehbaz had embezzled funds provided by UK's Department for International Development (DFID) for the rehabilitation of the 2005 earthquake while he was chief minister of Punjab. It had quoted former accountability chief Shahzad Akbar and a few other individuals — none of whom were in an official position.

## FM holds important meetings in Indonesia Pakistan, Indonesia agree to pursue mutually beneficial cooperation



NEWS DESK/DNA

BALI: At the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, the Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari undertook an official visit to Bali, Indonesia. Foreign Minister held a meeting with his counterpart from Indonesia H.E. Retno Marsudi. The two Foreign Ministers reviewed the state of bilateral relations and agreed to further strengthen dialogue at all levels and pursue mutually

beneficial cooperation. They also signed a landmark MoU on the establishment of a Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) at the Foreign Minister level. JMC will oversee mutually beneficial cooperation and promote regular bilateral engagement. In Bali, the Foreign Minister also held a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina H.E. Dr. Bisera Turkovic and expressed Pakistan's desire to further strengthen bilateral engagement

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi confers the award of Nishan-i-Imtiaz (Military) upon the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS), General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, and Chief of the Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir Shah at a special investiture ceremony.—DNA

**President confers NI (M) upon CJCS, COAS**

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi Thursday conferred the coveted Nishan-e-Imtiaz (Military) award upon Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir Shah. President Arif Alvi decorated the CJCS and the COAS with the Nishan-e-Imtiaz (military) awards in recognition of their meritorious services, at a special investiture ceremony held at the Aiwan-e-Sadr. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani, Speaker of the National Assembly Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, and the cabinet members and ministers were also present at the ceremony. Last month, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza replaced General (R) Nadeem Raza as the new CJCS. He assumed charge of his office in an impressive ceremony held at Joint Staff Headquarters, Rawalpindi. Two days later, on November 29, General Asim Munir took charge as the 17th army chief of Pakistan at a ceremony held at the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi.

**Foreign reserves at lowest since 2019**

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) plunged to an alarming level after falling 10.45% to a four-year low. The foreign currency reserves held by the SBP were recorded at \$6,714.9 million as of December 2, down \$784 million compared with \$7,825.7

Continued on Page 06

## Imran instructs lawmakers to fully prepare for polls

On the audio leaks, Khan says those clips were leaked as part of a plan

ALI HAMZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan instructed the party's lawmakers and ticketholders to speed up their preparations for the next general elections. Talking to PTI lawmakers from Attock, Jhelum, Chakwal and Sialkot along with ticket holders of Gujranwala, who called on him here on Thursday, PTI Chairman said that they should devise a comprehensive political strategy and be fully prepared for the next electoral battle. Central and regional leaders of Tehreek-e-Insaf were also present in the meeting. During the meeting, they discussed the country's political situation, PTI's political strategy and future plan of action in detail. On the occasion, the members of the assembly full supported and endorsed the announcement of the dissolution of the assemblies and resignations from the houses. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman claimed the homecoming of Suleman Shahbaz, son of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, was a part of the "National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) II". Talking to journalists at his residence

Continued on Page 06

## Dissolution of Punjab assembly by Dec 20

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Punjab government spokesperson Musarrat Jamsheed Cheema on Thursday announced to dissolve provincial assembly till Dec 20. The Punjab government spokesperson in a statement on Thursday confirmed that PTI Chairman Imran Khan has taken a final decision on the matter of dissolution of the provincial assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Musarrat Cheema said Imran Khan has decided to dissolve both the provincial assemblies of KP and Punjab between December 15 and 20. Talking about the ministership of Khayal Ahmad Kastro, the Punjab government's spokesperson said he has become a minister for a week only. She said Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi had talked to

Continued on Page 06

## US welcomes steps to expand ties with Pak

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: The US State Department Spokesperson, Ned Price says Washington welcomes opportunities to expand cooperation between Pakistan and the United States in areas of mutual interest. Addressing a regular news briefing in Washington, he said Pakistan is an important partner of the United States in a number of respects. To a question, he said United States has only interest in the interest of Pakistani people and Pakistan's constitutional system. Amid increasing cross-border attacks against Pakistan, the United States plans to work with Islamabad to deal with the threat

of terrorism in the region, especially from Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a State Department spokesperson said. "It is, of course, our broader goal to see to it that terrorists and others aren't able to use Afghanistan as a launch pad for attacks on Pakistan," the department's Spokesperson Ned Price said in response to a question about the rise of violence and the regrouping of terrorists in Afghanistan. The Taliban, he said, was either unable or unwilling to live up to the commitments that they've made in a number of areas, especially on counterterrorism. However, the US have capabilities when it comes to counterterrorism in the region that does not leave them entirely beholden to the Taliban, Price added.

**Inside...**

- Revenue Dept occupies Press Club building — Page 02
- Religious ministry plans to crackdown against fraudsters — Page 03
- 40 years of diplomatic ties between Pakistan, Korea — Page 04
- Saudi Arabia and China linked by shared interests, a promising future — Page 05
- Risk of nuclear weapons has diminished: Scholz — Page 06
- Romania, Bulgaria's Schengen dreams in significant doubt — Page 07
- German envoy highlights cooperation with Pakistan — Page 08

## Japan grants US\$ 3.87 m for polio eradication efforts

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Japan extended its support to the Pakistan Polio Eradication Programme by providing more than US\$ 3.87 million as a grant. The grant will be used for the procurement of essential oral polio vaccine, which will reach more than 18.61 million under five years old children in Pakistan living in endemic and outbreak districts. The notes of the grant were signed and exchanged between the Government of Japan and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and between Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and UNICEF. Minister Abdul Qadir Patel, the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination and other dignitaries were present during the signing event. "Pakistan has come a long way in the last 30 years. From thousands of children paralyzed by poliovirus in the 1980s and 1990s, we have managed to reduce the number of cases and affected communities drastically," said Health Minister Abdul Qadir Patel. Referring to the commitment of the government to polio eradication, the Minister said, "The Programme has successfully restricted virus circulation to endemic districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; we are committed and optimistic about eradicating polio by 2023." The Minister extended his sincere appreciation for the support of the Gov-

ernment of Japan and partners for their unwavering commitment to Polio eradication. The Government of Japan has been supporting the Polio Eradication

Programme in Pakistan since 1996. The long-standing partnerships have helped to reach millions of children with life-saving vaccines over the years.



The grant and loan contribution from the Government of Japan to date has amounted to more than US\$ 238.66 million dollars to support the Polio Programme in Pakistan through UNICEF. H.E. WADA Mitsuhiro, Ambassador of Japan commended the Government of Pakistan and UNICEF for their tireless efforts in emergency vaccination campaigns in southern KP and establishing transit points in North Waziristan to limit the spread of Wild Polio Virus. He also reiterated his continuous support for eradicating poliovirus, by saying that "I would like to renew my commitment to achieve the polio-free world. Japan will continuously support the Government of Pakistan and UNICEF in this regard. I sincerely hope that the national and sub-national campaigns of the next year will be safe and successful." "It is very appreciative that polio program has supported the flood relief efforts in the flood affected districts. Health camps have been opened to provide basic clinical services, treatment of water-borne, vector-borne diseases and immunization for children and women of reproductive age. The Government of Pakistan, UNICEF and Japan has a strong target to achieve polio-free in Pakistan by the end of 2023. I would appreciate the continuous and unwavering leadership and commitment of the Government of Pakistan and UNICEF,

Continued on Page 06

# Revenue Dept occupies Press Club building

QAZI SHOAB KHAN

ATTOCK: The district management of Attock seems reluctant to get the fully furnished building of Attock Press Club vacated by the Revenue Department in a peaceful manner despite repeated various orders of the higher authorities dragging the working journalists in the corridors of powers for protection of their constitutional guaranteed rights since last nine years. This was stated by the senior journalist and patron in chief of the Attock Press Club (Reg) Syed Raza Naqvi while narrating the agonized story to this scribe on Thursday. He said that the building of the Attock Press Club (Reg) was allotted to the working journalists for performance of their journalistic activities in pursuance of a resolution passed by the District Council Attock during the chairmanship of ex-MPA Attock Syed Ejaz Bokhari in 1985. The rent of the

building was also being contributed by the working journalistic community to the District Council Attock without any break. Meanwhile, different constitutional bodies of the office bearers were also elected to perform their day to day official business along with making arrangements of media projection of all provincial, federal visiting dignitaries, public departments, socio-political figures in all print and electronic media. Syed Raza Naqvi further said that suddenly the Revenue Department of Attock forcefully occupied the same building of the Attock Press Club (Reg) including furniture, fixture worth of rupees lacs without completing any codal formality. The unbridled management even did not bother to serve any legal notice or cancel allotment with the consent of the members of the Attock Press Club (Reg). He said that the aggrieved journalists also lodged a protest sit in before the office of the

DC Attock besides filing their appeals to the higher authorities for redressal of their genuine problems. But, the then Deputy Commissioner and Deputy Director Public Relations Department Attock concerned only called a formal meeting with the complainant journalists to discuss the entire but nothing could be heard till to date from any responsible quarter. The journalist community of the District Attock led by senior journalist and patron in chief of the Attock Press Club (Reg) Syed Raza Naqvi demanded of the Chief Minister Punjab Chaudry Pervez Elahi, Director General Human Rights Supreme Court of Pakistan, Chief Secretary Punjab, Inspector General Punjab Police, Director General Public Relations Punjab and Commissioner Rawalpindi Division to interfere in the burning issue. Besides, initiating departmental and criminal inquiry against the delinquents involved in the crime.

# Centre of excellence for youth inaugurated in Sindh

DNA

ISLAMABAD: While empowering youth and transforming technical and vocational training scenario in Pakistan, the European Union, Germany, and Norway handed over a modernized Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to the Government of Sindh. The Center has been upgraded with the latest technologies and training opportunities for youth and teaching staff in the province. The new facility is the result of an upgradation of an existing TVET centre

which has been supported by a TVET Sector Support Programme and funded by the European Union (EU), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Norwegian government. Addressing the participants of the ceremony, Saleem Raza Jalbani, Chairman Sindh TEVTA appreciated the efforts of development partners especially the European Union for supporting the skills sector in the province: "Our solemn responsibility is to offer adequate training to the youth of the province in emerging technologies with state-of-the-art facilities

that are available in this facility for both, teachers and trainees". This Centre will play a significant role in the region for a cascading model of teachers' training and imparting skills training for the youth. Modern lab facilities, career counselling and job placement services can now be found under one roof Mr. Ovidiu Mic, Head of Cooperation of the European Union Delegation to Pakistan said that the European Union considers TVET as a priority sector for the socio-economic development of Pakistan and has supported the TVET policy and reform process for over a decade. "The es-

tablishment of the Centre of Excellence in Kotri, is one of the key achievements of our support. We expect that it will become the benchmark for all other institutes in Sindh, providing services at par with the international standards," he added. The Head of Development Cooperation at the German Embassy, Dr Sebastian Paust, highlighted "the great potential in not only relying on jobs but entrepreneurship models in Sindh under the umbrella of the Centre of Excellence. Germany is strongly committed to continuing its work in the skills sector of Pakistan until 2026.

## British Council announces winners of grants

ISLAMABAD: The British Council on Thursday announced as many as five winners of its Gender Ecologies Grant Project which was aimed at supporting the development and delivery of those projects which explored the intersection of women, climate change and arts. The grants, which sup-

port collaboration between Pakistan and the UK, were open for applications from October to November 2022, said a news release. The five winners included "The Way We Ate" by SOC Films and Legacy West Midlands, "Breaking the Waves: Stories of Women from the Indus Delta" by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Pakistan and Film London, "Understanding Indigenous Theory on the Environment through the Female Lens" by Marvi Mazhar & Associates and University of Westminster, "The River's Daughter" - a

multilingual theatre musical by ALLAONE Communications (Private) Limited and Insaan Culture Club Limited, and "Permaculture Gardens of Resilience" by Apnakam and Adrian's Croft. "The five winning grants represent the best of Pakistan and UK collaboration and feature some extremely innovative ideas," said British Council Pakistan Head of Arts Laila Jamil. She said from a virtual 'Museum of Food' to theatre musicals and community kitchens teaching permaculture, there was a real diversity of platforms

and ideas. "I cannot wait for the projects to get underway so they can be shared more widely," she added. "Climate change is one of our main priorities at the British Council as it is one of the most urgent global challenges we face, particularly affecting the Global South," she maintained. Through artistic engagement, she said the projects were aimed at communicating climate issues and promoting sustainable practices, highlighting the essential role women play in mitigating the impact of climate change.—APP

# DG Punjab Food Authority visits RCCI

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Director General, Punjab Food Authority Mudassar Riaz Malik along with his team visited Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) here on Thursday. President RCCI Saqib Rafiq gave a briefing on the ongoing activities of the chamber in his opening remarks. He said that the efforts of Punjab Food Authority to improve food quality are commendable, the license and medical fees should be reduced and the amount of fines should be reviewed. The chamber's platform for awareness is available for policy advocacy. Group leader Sohail Altaf said that a representative of the chamber or association

should also be included in the committee for inspection. He recommended taking stakeholders on board for policy reforms. Director Punjab Food Authority Mudassar Riaz Malik said that Food Authority is being developed on modern lines, software system, Enterprise resource planning (ERP) is being introduced, so that the intervention of the staff be brought to minimal. Classification of fines is being introduced. Food businesses will not be raided to some extent, however inspection will be notified. Cards will be issued for medical now for the year and a 1223 helpline for complaints has also been introduced. Reforms and amendments are also being brought under which the right to appeal against fines will be given, he

said. He said that loose milk is a major cause of diseases, it will be banned and loose milk will be allowed to be sold only in packaging. QR code is also being introduced to eliminate adulteration. He said that this is his first visit to any chamber, a food expo

will be organized next year and a tea festival will also be organized in January 2023. On this occasion Chamber President Saqib Rafiq, Group Leader Sohail Altaf, Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Executive Committee Members. Chair-

man of Standing Committee Muhammad Farooq, President of Anjuman Tajran Punjab Shahid Ghafoor Pracha, Chairman of Hotel and Restaurant Association Mumtaz Ahmed and members and officials of associations were also present.



# COMSTECH organizes foundation meeting of the alliance of Islamic Universities of Africa

ISLAMABAD: (COMSTECH): COMSTECH organized foundation meeting of the Alliance of Islamic Universities of Africa at COMSTECH Secretariat on Thursday. Vice Chancellors/Rectors of Muslim Universities from Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Kazakhstan, and Pakistan participated in the meeting. Chairman HEC, Prof. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed was the chief guest of the meeting. He welcomed the delegates to the foundation meeting of Alliance of Islamic Universities of Africa and appreciated the efforts of Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, for organizing this much needed meeting to support our Muslim brothers/sisters, and young

minds of Africa in the fields of science, technology and higher education. Chairman HEC suggested that the collaborations, knowledge sharing, best practices, exchange of scholars, educational technology transfer, and joint programs among higher education institutions of Africa and Pakistan can help to overcome the challenges if initiatives like the Alliance of Islamic Universities of Africa are well thought-out and well executed in true spirit. Dr. Mukhtar pointed out that the one of the major developmental challenges in the African region is the limited number of skilled professionals and workforce and suggested that this issue can be addressed by improving their tertiary education system. Dr. Mukhtar said that this initiative will

help us to build an ecosystem of collaboration and enable knowledge-based economic growth in the OIC member states, particularly in the African region. He said that the alliance will open avenues to share ideas, skills, expertise, and best practices to pool resources for mutual support and benefit for each institution. He, on the behalf of the Higher Education Commission, assured sustained and full support



to COMSTECH programs. The Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary said that the idea of forming an alliance of Muslim Universities in non-OIC countries or in Muslim majority areas of OIC member states came out of discussion with Prof. Ismail, Vice Chancellor Islamic University in Uganda. He said the key motivation of this vision was to foster linkages between the Islamic universities of Africa and leading universities of the OIC region. Prof. Choudhary said that harnessing the creative potential of young African Muslims is the only way forward for the prosperity and development of Muslim communities in African continent. With this objective in mind, this alli-

ance is created under the leadership of Prof. Ismail Gyaganda. He said that this alliance in linkages with the COMSTECH Consortium of Excellence member institutions will initiate: Exchange visits of senior management, Sabbatical and training visits of faculty and staff, Initiation of new academic and skill development programs, Joint research projects, Exchange of students, researchers and technicians, Workshops and training courses, and Special programs in emerging technologies. Prof. Choudhary concluded his remarks with the commitment to work closely with universities in Africa and Pakistan for a prosperous future of youth in African countries.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: S ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance Senator Ishaq Dar holds a meeting with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Hina Rabbani Khar. - DNA

## Sports is a vital source of national unity

I will try to activate playgrounds of Islamabad

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Waqar Zafar Bakhtawari, a prominent businessman of Islamabad, has said that sports play an important role in the unity, integrity, and solidarity of the nation in the present era, we should focus on the sports and play grounds. As a first step we will initiate activities from F7 and F8 for the promotion of sports and playground. He said that he will try to open the playgrounds in schools and colleges in both sectors for the public so that these grounds can be used in the best interests of the residents. Addressing the people who had gathered to clean the park of F81, Waqar Bakhtawari said that work should be done for the development and promotion of cricket, hockey and other sports. committees will also be formed for the promotion of the sports in these areas. The youth have been appealed to contact him for the promotion of their relevant sports. Mian Amjad Mehmood, Arshad Raheem, Anam ullah khat-tak, Malik Haroon Umar Ali haider and sezhan Dania were also present on the occasion.

## KP farmers to get training under US assistance project

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The US Embassy and the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Planning and Development Department have jointly launched a new development project worth \$1 million to provide training to farmers, improve irrigation systems, and increase household income in the province. "This US assistance will fund 200 training courses targeting approximately 4,000 farmers, with a special focus on women farmers," a US Embassy news release said on Thursday. It would also fund the construction of irrigation systems to reduce flood risk and improve water resource use, helping increase crop yields and improve economic livelihoods, the embassy added. This new assistance

follows the successful completion of development projects worth over \$6 million, which have benefited over 44,000 families from the Bajaur, Khyber, Mohmand, and Torghar districts since 2019. US Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Andrew Schofer, Director of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) Lori Antolinez, Additional Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah, Director General of Planning & Development Department KP, and Joint Secretary Economic Affairs Division Islam Zaib attended the project signing ceremony in Islamabad. Andrew Schofer lauded the longstanding partnership between the US and the KP governments for curbing illegal crop production in the province. "This investment will provide important skills

training to women farmers in the newly merged districts, helping to increase crop yields and promoting economic opportunity in Mohmand, Bajaur, Khyber, and Torghar districts," he noted. Since 1988, Andrew Schofer said, the US government's crop control programme had invested more than \$80 million in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "This assistance includes construction of over 1200-kilometer roads, 1300 water supply and irrigation projects, and over 75,500 acres of demonstration plots for high-yield substitute crops, benefitting over 360,000 families." "Poppy cultivation in Pakistan has been reduced by 87% during this period, a powerful indicator of the success of our longstanding partnership," he added.

## WOMENBIZ2022 paved way for Gender inclusion

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Women Business Network, have paved the way for delivering gender inclusion agenda for Pakistan at their recent event of WOMENBIZ2022 meetup in Islamabad club. The WOMENBIZ2022 meetup was held on 7th December 2022 as part of their efforts for policy advocacy and women empowerment series of networking events held throughout the year. The meetup brought together from Corporate, Government sector, Embassies and Women Chambers across Pakistan, to discuss the challenges and opportunities of Gender Inclusion in Pakistan and move from dialogues and talks to definitive actions and initiatives taken by government, various corporates, and women networks and building the future based on these initiatives to improve the representation and inclusion of women in economic

growth of Pakistan. The event was convened by WBN in partnership with the add major sponsor(s) here. Speaking at the event Ms. Sam Dada, Co founder of WBN <add other designations here>, said WBN is active in advocating for gender inclusion and mainstreaming the gender in business, facilitating women to network, policy advocacy and bringing together all stakeholders to collectively further the agenda of improving the Pakistan's image and ranking on the global index for gender parity." Add any designatory here, Designation from add org/embassy name, said the event made it possible for Pakistani Corporate, Women in business and gender champions to connect, to discuss challenges and identify opportunities. "The event has reminded me of the importance of collective power and partnership and really connecting between communities, at the national, regional and global levels and the influence that this can have."

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## EU must work closely with others

WHILE officials from the United States and the European Union reportedly touched on other issues such as the spill-over effects from the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and a "joint road map" to assess trustworthy artificial intelligence technologies, it was the US' Inflation Reduction Act that dominated their trade discussions on Monday. The act, designed to accelerate the US transition to a low-carbon economy, contains around \$370 billion in subsidies for the green energy industry in the US, as well as tax breaks for US-made electric cars and batteries. This has had the EU up in arms. It says the act is "distortive" and that it will be forced to take action "to rebalance the playing field". Monday's meeting of the US-EU Trade and Technology Council, the third such talks, was part of a push to resolve the dispute and "to grow the bilateral trade and investment relationship", according to a statement from the US National Security Council.

But that looks far-fetched given the EU's concerns that the subsidies are a "job killer" and it will effectively decimate the green industries in Europe. The EU initiatives on the transition to a green and digital economy have made European industries more competitive, but that competitiveness will essentially be wiped out by the US subsidies. EU Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton did not even take part in the meetings, stating that they did not give enough space to issues of concern to many European industry ministers and businesses. Breton has threatened to take the matter to the World Trade Organization and take retaliatory measures if the United States does not drop the subsidies. The US has offered some olive branches. But asked about the potential "tweaks" to the act that US President Joe Biden mentioned as a possibility last week, a European official involved in the talks dismissed them on Monday, saying that the assessment was they would be "extremely difficult" to realize.

And although the EU's trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said after the meeting, that the EU was leaving it "slightly more optimistic" than it was on entering it, the EU should be aware that the US will expect a price to be paid for any concessions. The EU should look at the bigger picture. The world is made up of more countries and regions than the US and the EU, and if the two giants adopt subsidy policies that will only make it more difficult for the rest of the world. The EU should be working with other economies to make the world flatter for the benefit of all, not competing with the US to see which of them can build the biggest wall.

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## Rightwing extremism in Israeli government

THE crisis in the Holy Land is once again at "boiling point", with blood being spilled on both sides. Tor Wennesland, the UN's peace envoy, did not mince his words to the security council this week. The rising death toll in the West Bank, the worst since 2006, is roiling the waters. Since January, about 140 Palestinians have been killed in this territory, nearly all by Israeli forces. Palestinian attacks targeting Israelis have left 30 dead. Days earlier, Mr Wennesland had been "horrified" by the fatal shooting of an unarmed Palestinian man during a scuffle with an Israeli border police officer. The macabre video of the killing revealed he was right to be alarmed. Yet rather than upbraiding the officer for a public execution, the incoming national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, from the far-right Jewish Power party, hailed him as a hero. The Religious Zionism bloc, led by Mr Ben-Gvir and the Jewish supremacist Bezalel Smotrich, is now the third-largest group in the Knesset. Harboring racists and homophobes, it was the big winner in last month's elections. The losers were Israeli democracy and the Palestinians. Yaakov Katz, editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem Post, has good reason to call Mr Ben-Gvir "the modern Israeli version of an American white supremacist and a European fascist". The proximate cause for violent extremists in Israel's government is Benjamin Netanyahu. On trial for corruption – charges that Mr Netanyahu denies – he seems willing to pay any price to end the cases against him. In return for an assault on Israel's justice system through new legislation advanced by his far-right and ultra-Orthodox allies, Mr Netanyahu appears to be reshaping government to their advantage – notably handing over virtually untrammelled powers in the occupied territories. He seeks to ride the radical wave surging through Jewish Israeli society. About 60% of such voters now consider themselves rightwing – up from 46% in 2019. Among young Israelis, support tops 70%. These trends should worry Israel. Since 1967, the country has given itself plausible deniability over deepening an illegal occupation in the West Bank by claiming the region was under an apolitical, military-administered legal regime that respects international law. This, said successive Israeli governments, was a temporary solution until a permanent deal was reached with the Palestinians. Putting Mr Smotrich's party in charge threatens to expose this as a charade, confirming that Israeli occupation is a form of apartheid.

Mr Netanyahu appears to be betting the world will blink first. His friends in the Gulf are sticking by him. The Biden administration says it will judge the new government by its policies, not its personalities. But the far-right march to their own drum. Mr Smotrich supports the annexation of the West Bank, the expansion of settlements and the demolition of Palestinian homes. Mr Ben-Gvir plans a provocative ministerial "visit" to Haram al-Sharif, site of the third-holiest shrine in Islam, under the pretence that Israeli Jews are struggling for their religious rights. If such words become deeds, then a Palestinian uprising – a third intifada – won't be far away. This is a dismal thought, but it seems to be where the unfortunate evolution of Israeli politics is heading.

# Saudi Arabia and China linked by shared interests, a promising future

Ishtiaq Ahmed



**China is the most attractive option in this respect, especially for the \$620 billion Public Investment Fund and the \$190 billion Saudi Green Initiative**

SAUDI Arabia and China have shared interests in economic development, regional security and a multipolar world order. China's global Belt and Road Initiative and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reflect these mutual aspirations, which are expected to receive impetus during President Xi Jinping's forthcoming visit to the Kingdom. On this occasion, the Chinese leader will also attend the first ever Arab-China summit, which is likely to boost Beijing's economic relationships with several other Arab nations, particularly in the Gulf. It is, however, the expected progress of six years of Sino-Saudi "comprehensive strategic partnership" that will matter the most. There is already extraordinary synergy between the Belt and Road Initiative and Vision 2030, both in spirit and scope. The two strategic plans represent major success stories of formidable socioeconomic development in a world gripped by a deep economic crisis, which has equally impacted the developed nations of Europe and North America. China's initiative has extended the fruits of its development to well over 150 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America since its launch in 2013. President Xi's global vision of "shared destiny" seeks to meet their infrastructure and energy needs as a means to promote a global free trade regime that respects the diversity of local politics and cultures. Saudi Arabia's value to Belt and Road lies in its geographic location between Asia and Africa and its proximity to strategic sea lanes. Vision 2030, unveiled by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2016, has transformed Saudi Arabia socially and helped to diversify its economy away from oil through investments in other vital sectors, such as service,

tourism, technology and renewable energy. It seeks to make the Kingdom a hub of international trade, tourism and investment. While the post-pandemic economic recovery has geared up progress in Vision projects like NEOM city, integrating the Saudi economy with the Belt and Road Initiative is crucial to achieving this strategic goal. The comprehensive strategic partnership between Saudi Arabia and China, which began with Xi's last visit to the Kingdom in 2016, was preceded by steady growth in energy-centric relations. Each year since then has seen greater alignment between the Belt and Road and Vision 2030, as well as rapid progress in bilateral cooperation in trade and investment. Consequently, China is today the largest trading partner and crude oil customer of Saudi Arabia. Last year, it took 27 percent of Saudi oil exports.

Their annual bilateral trade volume was worth \$87.3 billion at the end of 2021, a more than 200-fold increase since the establishment of diplomatic relations more than three decades ago. Saudi Arabia is also the largest recipient of Chinese investments in the region, receiving nearly \$43.5 billion between 2005 and 2021. These investments are operational in diverse areas such as the development of seaport and transportation facilities, industrial complexes, 5G networks, artificial intelligence, emerging technologies and renewable energy. For its part, the Kingdom has invested in or is planning to invest about \$35 billion in refinery and petrochemical projects across China. This includes a major deal, inked this year, between Saudi Aramco and China's Sinopec for cooperation in carbon capture and hydrogen technologies. With nearly \$200 billion worth of investments, the Belt and Road Initiative has, over time, expanded to the entire Arab world. This serves the Saudi interest in leading an economically integrated region. China is also the GCC's largest trading partner. It has concluded strategic partnership accords with the UAE, Egypt and Algeria. Just last month, Beijing signed a landmark \$60 billion agreement for purchases of liquefied natural gas from Qatar over the next three decades. Xi is visiting Saudi Arabia after securing the leadership of the ruling Chinese Communist Party for a third term. He is expected to conclude a number of agreements with Arab counterparts in non-oil sectors, such as smart and green technologies. China is the most attractive option in this respect, especially for the \$620 billion Public Investment Fund and the \$190 billion Saudi Green Initiative. Indeed, a promising future awaits the Arab world as the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Saudi Arabia moves forward to consolidate the respective gains of the Belt and Road Initiative and Vision 2030. It is clear from the preceding course of this partnership that the premier powers of Asia and the Arab world are interested in harnessing economic opportunities and are not bothered about buying into the binary vision of world politics being advocated by the US. Beijing and Riyadh seek to deepen ties and advance a vision of a multipolar world in which the US no longer dominates

the global order. Saudi Arabia and its Gulf and Arab allies have time and again been disappointed by successive US administrations on issues of domestic politics, regional security and global energy. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have, therefore, firmly resisted US pressure by not taking sides in the US-China rivalry or the Ukraine war and have not compromised on the recent production cuts by the OPEC+ group of oil-producing states, which includes Russia. China, on the other hand, has emerged as a reliable partner, with a political and economic model idealized by Arab leaders. It adheres to the principle of noninterference and does not, therefore, link its diplomatic and economic role with issues of democracy and human rights. It also has no imperial impulse to coerce trusted Gulf allies, as the US often does, over military support or security commitments to manage regional threats from Iran, Yemen and elsewhere. However, Saudi Arabia and China do have a shared interest in the continuing US security commitment in the Middle East. After all, Washington is a major reason for the festering regional conflicts. It also has the necessary military wherewithal to protect vital sea lanes in the Arabian Gulf. China, on the other hand, does not have the ability or the will to substitute the US security role. The Chinese military footprint in the region and defense ties with the Kingdom are also minimal. The absence of a military alliance component in China's "partnership diplomacy" keeps it out of regional

rivalries. Saudi Arabia understands these geopolitical compulsions. It has not objected to the 25-year cooperation deal, worth \$400 billion, between Iran and China, which is also largely on paper. In order to supplant the declining US security role in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia will forge deeper defense ties with European powers, BRICS nations and even Turkey to contain the danger from Iran and its proxies. Ultimately, the future of the Sino-Saudi strategic partnership and China's economic engagement with the Arab world will depend on the power trajectory of Beijing and Riyadh, which rests on progress in their respective strategic vision programs. Surplus capital and production capacity will help China to expand its Belt and Road footprint in emerging markets and replace the US as the leading world economy by 2030. This is also the deadline for Saudi Arabia to emerge as an economic powerhouse under Vision 2030. As China's strategic partner, G20 member and OPEC+ leader, the Kingdom will continue to seek stability in global energy markets and generate necessary revenue from energy trade, economic diversification and international investments to achieve this pivotal national goal by the end of the decade.

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# Pakistan's Geostrategic significance: A potential to become a transit economy

Gul Ayesha Bhatti

**The majority of Afghan trade, which includes everyday necessities and critical foods, passes through Pakistan. After the US and NATO withdrawal, Pakistan would unavoidably need help throughout the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase of Afghanistan. Pakistan practically continues to be the most practical choice for regional connection with Afghanistan, notwithstanding Indian investment or desire for alternatives like the Chahbahar Port of Iran**

POST-Cold-war a shift is observed in the world politics and system. But the primary actor in the international system is still a state because all the activities of the world politics and affairs revolve around the state. To ensure its survival and security a state enhances influence and control over its neighbors and region through economic activities and military equipment. Today these activities and measures are creating highly complicated situation. The new trends of economic activities, mutual trade and the access to resources like coal, oil, gas, and coal as well as to control geo-economic instruments are being introduced.

The physical entrance into a certain region or state is referred to as routes, which are both a topographical and a tactical concept. The domestic growth impacts by routes or in area of security and development. Routes are also a key instrument for revealing the qualitative relationships between the states and for providing open doors to greater economic efficiency, safety, rural growth, and access to urban or international markets. Having easy access to market is the most important of all these benefits since without it, a state cannot maintain its economic and commercial events. The boundaries of Pakistan, particularly the province of Baluchistan, have historically been crucial for gaining control of influence, pursuing development, and attracting attention from the globe. In the contemporary world, the position of Gwadar is highly appealing to regional and global powers who are interested in the South, West, and Asia from a strategic and economic standpoint. Gwadar lies at the entrance to the Persian Gulf in the south while being adjacent to the Chinese region of Xinjiang in the north. The proximity of its harbor to the Hormuz Strait, a route for nearly 17 million barrels of oil per day, makes it the ideal location between three important regions: South Asia, the Persian Gulf (rich in oil), and Central Asia (resource-rich in oil and gas), which further increases its strategic value.

Moreover, powerful states like China, United States, Russia and regional states are willing in extending economic dominance in this region due to its terrestrial and strategic value. Gwadar stands out in the global maritime scene as an alternative to Dubai (beyond the Strait of Hormuz's choke point and shallow seas), due to its closeness to important SLOCs and its importance to the new great game as a member of the so-called String of Pearls. China is Pakistan's main partner in commerce, investment, and defense relations. CPEC, the centerpiece project of China's larger Belt and Road Initiative, is being vigorously pursued as it moves forward with economic projects in the area. China has an alternative for the Strait of Malacca because of Gwadar, which shows that all the participating nations may benefit strategically from using the coastlines of Gwadar and Makran owing to the access to the coastline that can provide economic and strategic goals in the region. It can increase access across the Hormuz Straits and the northern Indian Ocean, enabling admission to marine channels for China.

Furthermore, in comparison to Iran (4500 km) and Turkey (5000 km), Pakistan gives the CARs the quickest land route (2600 km via Afghanistan) to the Arabian Sea for trade. Additionally, the CPEC route has been operating since 2004 under a Quadrilateral Trade Agreement between China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. It also extends to Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. TAPI (Termez, Kabul, Peshawar, Islamabad) is an alternative project of TAPI with a length of 750 km (almost half of TAPI: 1700 km) to reach Islamabad. TKPI (Termez, Kabul, Peshawar, and Islamabad) is an alternative project of TAPI with a length of 750 km (nearly half of TAPI: 1700 km). The majority of Afghan trade, which includes everyday necessities and critical foods, passes through Pakistan. After the US and NATO withdrawal, Pakistan would unavoidably need help throughout the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase of Afghanistan. Pakistan practically continues to be

the most practical choice for regional connection with Afghanistan, notwithstanding Indian investment or desire for alternatives like the Chahbahar Port of Iran. The geopolitical interests of the main countries converge in Pakistan. Two Muslim and two non-Muslim states are positioned on either side of a vast body of water. It is situated between three nuclear-armed states and also possesses nuclear weapons of its own. Due to its geostrategic and geopolitical significance, it has been and continues to be the focus of the desires of the great powers. According to academics, the benefits of 21st-century economic progress are being felt throughout the Asian continent. The Asian continent may benefit from this evolution in terms of both affluence and the scope of power. However, some academics also assert that political instability and personal vendettas are promoted by economic development slogans. Political unrest results from economic growth because it disturbs regional and international power dynamics.

Stephen Cohen rightly stated that Pakistan's geography has been its greatest benefit. Owing to the fact that Pakistan can gain extreme economic benefits by utilizing its geographic location intelligently, however, Pakistan is facing internal and external security issues that give rise to a less productive economic environment for neighborhood states and superpowers. The government's role to deal with internal stability issues related to terrorism and insurgency, specifically in Baluchistan and in the north of Pakistan, is crucial. Furthermore, without comprehensive planning and infrastructure for international trade and transportation, it is almost impossible to achieve the benefits of our transit routes. On international level, Pakistan, being a littoral state, must develop positive relations with the rest of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. Rigorous efforts to meet international Maritime standards will further top our efforts in becoming a transit economy.

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**Briefs**

**241 out of 9,133 missing persons found dead**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A report compiled by the Commission on Missing Persons has been submitted to the Supreme Court on Thursday. According to the report, 81 people have reached their homes. There were complaints about 9,133 people who went missing. The commission found the whereabouts of 5,574 people, and 3,743 reached their homes. The report says that 974 missing persons are in detention centres and 616 are in jails. It further reveals that as many as 241 dead bodies of missing persons have been found. So far, 6,926 cases of missing persons have been disposed of. Till November 30, the number of missing people cases which are sub judice is 2,207. The commission received 98 cases in November, and 101 cases have been disposed of, the report concluded.

**IHC seeks final arguments in Imran Khan case**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Seeking final arguments in PTI Chairman Imran Khan's disqualification case, the Islamabad High Court has adjourned the hearing of the case till December 13. IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq on Thursday heard the petition filed by former prime minister and PTI Chief Imran Khan challenging his disqualification by the Election Commission of Pakistan in Toshakhana reference. Imran's lawyer Ali Zafar, ECP lawyers and PML-N leader Mohsin Shah Nawaz Ranjha along with his lawyer appeared before the court. At the outset of the hearing, PTI lawyer requested the court to stop the election commission from taking any action in this regard.

**Italian airline kicks off operations in Pakistan**

DNA

LAHORE: Another foreign airline has commenced its flight operations in Pakistan as Italian airline Neos Air announced to operate four charter flights from Milan to Lahore. One way ticket from Lahore to Milan will cost 400 euros. Neos Air will operate two flights in a month from Lahore airport. On the other hand, SalamAir has shifted its flight schedule to Lahore airport due to the closure of Sialkot airport. From now onwards till December 20, SalamAir will operate its Musqat-bound flights from Lahore airport. Lahore airport administration has completed all arrangements in this regard.

**German envoy highlights cooperation with Pakistan**

Photo Exhibition launched in Islamabad's National Art Gallery to highlight local governance in Pakistan's Merged Areas

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The week-long exhibition is showcasing the efforts of integrating the Merged Areas into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the region's rich culture and potential as well as Germany's support to its Pakistan counterparts in local governance, health and education. To mark the development cooperation between Pakistan and Germany, GIZ Pakistan and the Embassy of Germany in Islamabad jointly launched a photo exhibition on the Merged Areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Islamabad. The exhibition is being held at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) from the 8th to 13th of December. Some 150 representatives and officials of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Government and its line departments, the German Embassy, the European Union, donor agencies, Members of KP's Provincial Assembly, implementing and development partners, academia as well as the media attended the inaugural ceremony of the photo exhibition. Various photographers have contributed to this photo exhibition, most notably Mr. Abdul Majeed Goraya of Peshawar and Mr. Alamgir Khan of Mohmand in the Merged Areas. Their pictures show people following their trades, earning their livelihoods and striving to provide their children with a better future. The photographs also illustrate an emerging local governance system, community development initiatives, women standing up for their rights, and improvements in the education and health sectors. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, guest of honor, Mr. Shahram Khan Tarakai, Minister of Elementary & Secondary Education of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa expressed his gratitude to the German Government and the European Union for their support to the province in various fields of development. "The Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is highly valuing the partnership with GIZ Pakistan and the joint work in areas such as good governance, education and health. This has led to major changes in the lives of the people in the Tribal Districts and has contributed to reduce the development lag. Our cooperation has also enhanced public trust in government institutions and has helped to improve public services." Among the important achievements, he listed improved school curricula, the training of



over 5,000 members of Parent's Teacher Councils, capacity development for over 3,000 managers in the health and education sectors, as well as training of several hundred officials of the Local Government Department. In his opening remarks, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr. Alfred Grannas, highlighted that "the photo exhibition and its catalogue not only offer vibrant insights into the regions' history, its rich and diverse culture and traditions, but also into the lives of the people and their development needs." He pointed out the long-standing and successful development cooperation between Germany and Pakistan over a period of 60 years during which countless development projects have been implemented. This cooperation has over the decades been continuously adapt-

ed to meet new challenges and changing social, economic and ecological conditions, he said. "The FATA Development Programme is also an example of joint European efforts in the field of development. Over the years the program with its budget of almost 40 million Euro was co-funded by the Government of France, the Government of Switzerland and currently by the European Union." In his address to the audience, Mr. Karim Kettani, Head of the Finance and Audit Section at the European Union Delegation to Pakistan, outlined that the European Union's programme "Aid to Uprooted People", which has been implemented by the GIZ's FATA Development Programme since 2017, has supported the KP Education Department in improving education for internally displaced and host communities in Merged Areas.

**FO concerned over Indian state sponsored terrorism**



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch has expressed concerns over state sponsored terrorism, emanating from India to destabilize Pakistan. Responding to a question at her weekly news briefing in Islamabad on Thursday, she urged the international community to take notice of this reality. Replying to a question regarding allegations by some foreign countries about presence of terrorist outfits in Pakistan, the Spokesperson said we completely reject such accusations. She said Pakistan is the country that has suffered enormously from terrorism for the last several years. She said the instability in Afghanistan and in our region has created a situation, where many people of Pakistan, including personnel of security agencies, have lost their lives. She said Pakistan is a victim of terrorism. She said there have been undeniable proofs of India's direct involvement in the state sponsored terrorism inside Pakistan and the global community should take notice of India's approach of pointing fingers at others. Answering another question, Mumtaz Zahra Baloch condemned the atrocities being perpetrated in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. She said India is continuing with repression of Kashmiris without any consideration of international human rights laws and norms. She called upon the international community and human rights organizations to pay attention to the deteriorating human rights situation in IIOJK. Regarding import of gas and oil from Russia, the Spokesperson said we are in touch with Moscow to import crude oil from Russia. She said Prime Minister's Special Assistant Musadik Malik recently paid a special visit to Russia to discuss matters related to the import of gas and oil from Russia. - DNA

**Death toll in nationwide Iran protests rises to 458**

TEHRAN: The death toll from the ongoing protests in Iran sparked by the death of a young woman in police custody has risen to 458, according to a Norway-based rights group. "At least 458 people including 63 children and 29 women have been killed in the ongoing nationwide protests in Iran," the Norway-based Iranian Human Rights said on Wednesday. The most deaths were reported in Sistan and Baluchistan, Kurdistan, Western Azerbaijan, Tehran, Mazandaran and Kermanshah provinces, according to the nongovernmental organization. "Authorities have also reported death sentences being issued against five protesters, bringing the total number to 11 people," the rights group said. "Iran Human Rights considers the execution of protesters to be in violation of all human rights laws and standards, and calls on the international community to react appropriately," it urged. Iran has seen widespread protests in recent months following the death of a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini, in the custody of Iranian police. Thousands of people have been detained, according to human

*"Iran Human Rights considers the execution of protesters to be in violation of all human rights laws and standards, and calls on the international community to react appropriately," it urged*

rights groups, while more than 200 people have died, as acknowledged by the Iranian Interior Ministry last week. On Thursday Iran executed a prisoner convicted for a crime allegedly committed during the ongoing nationwide protests, the first such death penalty carried out by the country, according to local media. The execution was ordered for Muhsin Shikari, who according to the Mizan News Agency, affiliated with Iran's judiciary, "threatened citizens with a cold weapon and injured a security guard during protests on Sattar Khan Street." - APP

**SC wants report on Arshad's killing in two weeks**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan Thursday ordered the newly formed Joint Investigation Team to immediately start its probe into the killing of journalist Arshad Sharif and present its progress report within two weeks. The Supreme Court said that the JIT would devise its method of the investigation itself. Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial directed that the probe team should investigate the murder of Arshad Sharif without taking any pressure from any quarter. If the JIT confronts some problem, it must immediately file a plea, the CJP said. A five-judge larger SC bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial and comprising Justice Jazul Ahsan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Mazahir Ali Akbar Naqvi and Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar heard the case. At the outset of the hearing, Additional Attorney General Amir Rehman submitted the notification of a new special Joint Investigation Team (JIT) formed by the government to the apex court. The AAG told the court that the new JIT was comprised of five officers of BS-20 including Awais Ahmad (Islamabad Police DIG Headquarters), Sajid Kiyani (Intelligence Bureau DIG), Waqarud Din (FIA), Muhammad Aslam (ISI), and Murtaza Afzaal (Military Intelligence).

**Kremlin sees 'risk' of Ukraine attacks on Crimea**

MOSCOW: The Kremlin said Thursday that the Moscow-annexed Crimean Peninsula was vulnerable to Ukrainian attacks after officials said they had shot down a drone near a key naval base. The latest drone attack comes after Russian President Vladimir Putin recently visited the only bridge connecting Crimea with the Russian mainland to survey work to repair the key artery damaged in a blast Moscow blamed on Kiyiv. "There are certainly risks because the Ukrainian side continues its policy of organising terrorist attacks. But, on the other hand, the information we get indicates that effective counter-measures are being taken," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. The Moscow-appointed governor of Crimea Sergei Aksyonov said last month that Russia was strengthening fortifications on the peninsula in the wake of recent attacks. The governors of two Russian regions bordering Ukraine have said they inspected the construction of defence lines days after Ukrainian drones struck key military airfields. - Agencies

**Huge Wirecard fraud trial opens in Germany**

MUNICH: Germany's mammoth Wirecard fraud trial opened on Thursday, with ex-CEO Markus Braun and two former executives in the dock over their roles in the country's biggest-ever accounting scandal. The trial in Munich comes two and a half years after digital payments firm Wirecard collapsed in spectacular fashion after admitting that 1.9 billion euros (\$2 billion) missing from its accounts didn't actually exist. Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who was finance minister at the time of Wirecard's implosion, described the scandal as "unparalleled" in Germany's post-war history. The first day of the high-profile trial, held in a high-security courtroom inside Munich's sprawling Stadelheim prison complex, will mainly consist of prosecutors reading out the 90-page indictment. Notably absent from the trial will be Wirecard's former chief operating officer Jan Marsalek, a

shadowy figure with ties to foreign intelligence agencies. Marsalek evaded arrest in 2020 by staging a daring escape from Austria by private jet. He was reported earlier this year to be hiding out in Russia. Wirecard's veteran CEO Braun, in custody since July 2020, faces charges of commercial gang fraud, breach of trust, accounting fraud and market manipulation. The 53-year-old denies the allegations and claims to be a victim of the fraud, painting Marsalek as the mastermind. His co-accused are ex-accounting boss Stephan von Erffa and Oliver Bellenhaus, the former head of Wirecard's Dubai subsidiary. Bellenhaus has admitted wrongdoing and will act as a key witness for the prosecution. If found guilty, the trio risk lengthy prison sentences. The court has scheduled 100 trial dates for the complex case. - APP

**US groups flay State Dept's failure to confront Modi gov't crimes**

WASHINGTON: The Indian American Muslim Council (IAMC) and Hindus for Human Rights along with their allies have expressed disappointment over the US State Department's failure to follow the recommendations of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and designate India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), a label reserved for the world's most egregious violators of religious freedoms. Despite being recommended as a "Country of Particular Concern" by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom for three consecutive years, India was left off the CPC list for 2022. For the past three years, USCIRF has recommended that the State Department, headed by Secretary Antony Blinken, designate India as a CPC due to exponential rise in violence and discrimination against Muslims and Christians in the country. The USCIRF in a statement expressed its "outrage" over the State Department's failure to list India as a CPC and said that there was no justification for the government body ignoring the USCIRF's warnings about steep decline in human rights under the BJP government. "USCIRF is tremendously disappointed that the Sec-

retary of State did not implement our recommendations and recognize the severity of the religious freedom violations that both USCIRF and the State Department have documented in [India]," said USCIRF Chair Nury Turkel. "The State Department's own reporting includes numerous examples of particularly severe religious freedom violations in [India]." "Over and over again, the Modi regime has demonstrated how hateful it is towards religious minorities by restricting their citizenship, spreading hate speech against them, encouraging Hindu vigilante groups to physically assault them, allowing riots in their neighborhoods and bulldozing their homes when they protest," said Rasheed Ahmed, Executive Director of IAMC. "Repeated failure to designate India as a CPC will only encourage the Indian government to double down on its persecution of religious minorities," he added. Governmental and non-governmental organizations across the globe have expressed their concerns regarding India, especially as countries noted the Modi government's mistreatment of minorities at India's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations in November. - DNA

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