



Islamabad POST

Thursday, December 29, 2022

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 25

North Korea's Kim lays out key goals to boost military power

Detailed News On Page-08

Berlin pledges to ramp up sanctions against Moscow

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Williamson hits century as NZ past Pak total

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Briefs

Benedict's health is "worsening"

DNA
VATICAN CITY: Former pope Benedict, 95, who in 2013 became the first pontiff in 600 years to step down, is "very sick", his successor Pope Francis said on Wednesday, asking the church to pray for him. The Vatican later said in a statement Benedict had suffered a sudden "worsening" of his health in recent hours. It also said his condition was "under control" and that he was receiving constant medical attention. "I would like to ask all of you for a special prayer for Pope Emeritus Benedict, who, in silence, is sustaining Church," Francis said in his surprise announcement in Italian at the end of his weekly general audience.

Kaira lambastes Imran Khan

SAIFULLAH
ISLAMABAD: While coming down hard on PTI Chairman Imran Khan, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Kashmir Affairs Qamar Zaman Kaira said Wednesday that one politician was provoking the army every day to interfere in politics. During an address to the high court bar in Sukkur, Kaira said that it was an honour for him to address at a place where a leader like Bhutto had also delivered his speech. He added that leadership had an important role in the development of the country, adding that the lawyers had an important role in the restoration of democracy.

Vawda submits his resignation

STAFF REPORT
ISLAMABAD: Former federal minister and PTI ex-leader Faisal Vawda Wednesday submitted his resignation to Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani in pursuance of the Supreme Court's ruling in his disqualification case. Vawda was elected as a senator on the PTI ticket in 2018. On December 9, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) restored the former federal minister as a senator after SC revoked his lifetime disqualification.

Zero chance of Pakistan's default: Dar

Says certain elements involved in dirty politics and spreading disinformation about the country's economic condition and created chaos



NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI, Federal Finance and Revenue Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar on Wednesday while rejecting the rumors about Pakistan's going to default assured that Pakistan has resilience and will survive all challenges. Pakistan has a very beautiful future. However, he stressed on joint and targeted efforts by the public and private sectors to come out of this pressing economic situation. These words were expressed by the Finance Minister (through a video link) at the ceremony held here. The Pakistan Stock Exchange celebrated the first listing of a development REIT titled "Globe Residence REIT." It was largely attended by capital market players, leasing businessmen and bankers. The prominent were PSX Chairperson PSX

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PTI ready for parliamentary role: Qureshi

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is willing to play a role in Parliament but the government is not ready to make a serious commitment in this regard, claimed former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. The PTI leader made the remarks while reacting to Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's statement against PTI chief Imran Khan. Bilawal, addressing a gathering in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh held to mark the 15th death anniversary of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, asked the PTI chief to return to parliament as neither he nor his party "could bear" what's coming to them. Issuing a statement, Qureshi said that the PTI is ready to play a parliamentary role, but the government is not announcing a date for general elections.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairs the Cabinet meeting. - DNA

Pak, Bahrain agree to work together



SHJUAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday apprised King of the Kingdom of Bahrain Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa of the 'International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan', to be held in Geneva on 9th January next year, and requested a high-level participation from Bahrain. The King of Bahrain expressed firm support for the initiatives to strengthen Pakistan's response during its reconstruction and rehabilitation phase, after the climate-induced floods in the country. During a telephonic conversation with King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, the prime minister underscored the importance Pakistan attached to its cordial and historical relationship with the Kingdom of Bahrain, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

Govt's 'backers' nod must for elections

Govt of technocrats not a solution: Khan

I don't see elections happening now. There is hearsay about a technocrat government being brought forward," the PTI chief claims

ALI HAMZA / DNA



LAHORE: Reiterating his insistence on early elections and hinting at the establishment's role in the process, former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan Wednesday said rather than the incumbent government, it is necessary for those "backing it" to get convinced for the polls to be held soon. Khan, who was removed from premiership through a vote of no-confidence in the National Assembly in April this year, said that he isn't foreseeing polls to be conducted soon and made claims of a technocrat government under consideration. "I don't see elections happening now. There is hearsay about a technocrat government being brought forward," the PTI chief claimed while speaking with senior journalists in Lahore. For the past several months, Khan has been demanding snap polls. His stance intensified after his party's "Haqeeqi Azadi" march came to an end last month and he announced that Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies would be dissolved.

Bajwa helped Imran to get NRO

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Malik Ahmad Khan, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, has claimed that former army chief Gen (ret'd) Qamar Javed Bajwa had influenced the then chief justice of Pakistan, Saqib Nisar, to favour Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan in the Bani Gala house case. Imran Khan was declared "Sadiq" (truthful) and "Ameen" (honest) in the same case. Terming the claim rubbish and completely baseless, the former CJP however stated that the chief of the army staff (COAS) never influenced his decisions directly or indirectly. Saqib said that the entire Bani Gala was built illegally, and the case was about regularising all the properties on the premises. PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry also rejected the SAPM's claim, saying the COAS controlling the CJP was a serious allegation. He demanded that the Supreme Court registrar take notice of claims.

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Army top brass resolves to crush terrorists

It was resolved to fight against terrorists without any distinction and eliminate this menace



NEWS DESK

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Army's top brass Wednesday resolved to uproot terrorism "without any distinction" as the country battles a fresh wave of insurgency, which has left many soldiers martyred and several others injured. The resolve was reiterated at the 254th Corps Commanders Conference

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7,000 and 10,000 TTP men in region: Rana Sanaullah

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah has said that the number of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters in the region was between 7,000 to 10,000, adding that some of the militants who had previously laid down arms have now secretly resumed activities. In an interview he revealed that there were around 7,000 to 10,000 TTP fighters in the region and they were accompanied by 25,000 members of their families. Sanaullah pointed out that some locals were also involved in crimes such as extortion and blackmail and alleged that the provincial government had failed to stop them. "The biggest reason for this is the failure of [the] Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and Counter Terrorism Department [...] It is their job to stop it." - DNA

US, EU urge immediate deescalation

WASHINGTON: The European Union and the United States urged Kosovo and Serbia Wednesday to take "immediate" steps to deescalate tensions amid mounting unrest in their border region. "The European Union and the United States of America are concerned about the continued tense situation in the north of Kosovo," they said in a joint statement. "We call on everyone to exercise maximum restraint, to take immediate action to unconditionally deescalate the situation, and to refrain from provocations, threats, or intimidation," they said, after Kosovo closed its biggest border crossing with its northern neighbor. - APP

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Imran's narrative reflects his undemocratic thinking

The foreign minister said the PTI chairman had no more facilitators in the Establishment, adding that he might have facilitators in any other institution

STAFF REPORT

LARKANA: Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Wednesday, while launching a scathing attack on former prime minister, said the narrative of Imran Khan was a reflection of his undemocratic thinking and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman was doing politics of lies, hatred and incitement. Speaking to the media in Larkana, he said the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) toppled his [Imran Khan] government and this would be the third parliament to complete the term as the general election in the country would be held at the scheduled time. Bilawal said Imran Khan wanted the door of dictatorship open and he could once again become the



Ch. Fawad sends message to Shehbaz

ISLAMABAD: A purported audio tape of PTI senior leader Fawad Chaudhry has surfaced in which he was sending a message to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif through a "common friend". Fawad Chaudhry also told the friend to convey "Let's sit together and talk. For how long political parties will keep using shoulders of the army officers." Fawad further said that the politicians should have a common framework for themselves rather keep looking towards military thinking "What would be their next move?" The PTI leader told his friend to ask Shehbaz Sharif "what they want from PTI?" "Disqualifying Imran Khan will create a mess," he maintained. Fawad in the end told the common friend to deliver this message to Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

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Advertisement for Murree Sparkletts bottled drinking water. The ad features a large image of a water bottle with a blue label and a mountain scene. Text includes: "Estd. 1860", "MURREE BREWERY", "Bottled Drinking Water", "MURREE SPARKLETTS", "WATER the most Precious Currency of all!", and "Also Available in Glass bottle".

Govt takes actions to prevent new Covid sub-variant

ISLAMABAD: Health authorities on Wednesday said that there was a surveillance system in place at all entry points of the country to monitor the incoming passengers in the wake of threats of new BF.7 Omicron variant of COVID-19. According to an official of the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, several additional measures have been taken to prevent the spread of Omicron BF7, a new sub-variant of COVID-19. He added that instructions have been issued to the concerned authorities to take steps so that people, coming from other countries, go through thermal scanners at the entry points of the country at airports. He said that an efficient system with a proper management team was fully

functional in the country to remain vigilant and was ready to make an emergency plan to deal with any sub-variant of Covid-19. He said that in case of any untoward situation the health system was fully prepared to deal with any sub-variant of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 including BF.7 in the country. He added medical staff at intensive care units (ICU) of hospitals across the country was also active to handle any situation. The official said that genome sequencing was started in laboratories of all four provinces and the federal capital. They added that 90 percent of the country's population already got the COVID-19 vaccine so they are safe, he added. They said that special directions had been issued to ensure the availability

of an adequate quantity of ventilators, oxygen supply, and antiviral medicines in the hospitals. Meanwhile, as per data shared by the National Institute of Health (NIH), 26 new Coronavirus cases were reported during the last 24 hours across the country. The case positivity ratio is 0.75 percent, while 14 patients were in critical condition. No death was reported from Covid-19 in the last 24 hours while 3,488 tests were conducted. Around 404 tests were conducted in Islamabad, 756 in Lahore, and 363 in Peshawar. As many as four confirmed cases with a 1.10% case positivity ratio were reported from Peshawar, one case with a 0.25% case positivity ratio was reported from Islamabad, and one case with a 0.13% case positivity was reported

from Lahore. Minister for National Health Services Abdul Qadir Patel appreciated the efforts of all stakeholders, healthcare staff, vaccination teams, and administration working across Pakistan despite multiple challenges. He advised all provinces and regions to administer booster doses to further improve protection against COVID-19 transmission. He said that in view of the global pandemic situation, the Central Health Establishment (CHE) will be strengthened to enhance its functionality. The minister emphasized the importance of precautions, including social distancing and mask-wearing, especially in crowded places. He also highlighted the need to strictly follow the guidelines for the management of markets.—APP



LAHORE: Engineer Amir Muqam, Advisor to Prime Minister for Political & Public Affairs addressing a press conference. — DNA

SC adjourns Imran's plea in Shehbaz defamation case

DNA



LAHORE: Supreme Court of Pakistan's Lahore registry on Wednesday adjourned Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) plea against terminating his right to defence in a defamation case filed by Prime minister Shehbaz Sharif. As per detail, a three-member bench headed by justice Mansoor Ali Shah heard the case. PTI chief Imran Khan's lawyer Barrister Ali Zafar completed his arguments in this case. The court summoned Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's lawyer tomorrow to present his arguments in the defamation case and adjourned the case till December 29. Earlier, the Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday dismissed PTI chairman Imran Khan's plea against terminating his right to defence in a defamation case filed by Prime minister Shehbaz Sharif. It is pertinent to note here that five years back, Shahbaz Sharif filed an Rs10 billion defamation lawsuit against PTI chief Imran Khan for accusing him of offering a bribe to stay silent over the Panama Papers allegations against the Sharif family.

IHC serves notice to ECP for delaying local polls

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Wednesday served a notice to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) for delaying local body polls — scheduled to take place on December 31 — in the federal capital. The development came after Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir took up the petition of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) seeking to nullify ECP's decision to postpone the local government elections in Islamabad. The IHC also issued a notice to Attorney-General for Pakistan Mansoor Usman Awan for assisting the court in the hearing. The plea was filed as the ECP delayed the polls a day earlier after it held a hearing and listened to all the parties involved in the matter, upon the IHC's orders. The bone of contention between the political parties, the ECP, and the federal government is that of an increase in the number of union councils, which the centre notified earlier this month. At the outset of today's hearing, Awan's lawyer Advocate Sardar Taimoor said the election commission had issued the sched-

ule for local body polls for 50 UCs on June 2. "The federal government increased the number of union councils to 101. Then, the election commission delayed the polls for fresh delimitation," the lawyer said. Later, the ECP issued a revised schedule for the local body polls on October 22 and in line with the timetable, the elections were supposed to take place on December 21. The lawyer mentioned that as soon as the preparations were done for the polls, the federal government once again increase the number of UCs. He added that the Islamabad Metropolitan Corporation administrator moved the summary for the new UC 12 days back. "How did the administrator get data that the population increased without a fresh census?" he wondered. In response, Justice Tahir said the summary to increase the UCs was approved within 24 hours. However, he noted that the prosecution act has not been passed despite repeated notices from the court. The lawyer then told the court that the government had increased the UCs from 101 to 125 and that once the schedule has been issued, the number cannot change.

Zhao Shiren presents Pak-China Friendship Award-2022 to PCJCCI

LAHORE: Chinese Consul General in Lahore Mr. Zhao Shiren on Wednesday presented Pakistan-China Friendship Award-2022 to Pakistan China Joint Chamber of Commerce & Industry (PCJCCI). PCJCCI Secretary Salahuddin Hanif received the award here at a ceremony held in this connection. On this occasion, Mr. Zhao Shiren appreciated the working of PCJCCI related to regional connectivity and bilateral trade and declared it as one of the best chambers working in Pakistan. He also praised various initiatives of the PCJCCI which included Pak China Knowledge Portal, China-Way magazine, Chinese language courses and Pak-China Technology Gateway. Mr. Zhao Shiren said, "Pakistan is the owner of all CPEC projects and we are here to facilitate them in all aspects. The trade, investment, business between two nations could be much better if we work with unity and harmony. So here, I will raise my motto; Let's work together; let's grow together." Salahuddin Hanif thanked the Consul General for honoring PCJCCI with such prestigious award and said that Pakistan China Joint Chamber was resolute to serve as a model chamber and a vibrant platform for promoting mutual investment and friendship between Pak-China. "Our objective is to adopt an innovative stratagem to promote trade and development not only between Pakistan and China, but also over the entire region in order to ensure future stability, security and prosperity for all of us." He added China had emerged as second largest economy of the world and international experts were envisaging a far bigger role for China on the economic horizon of the world. The way China managed the global financial crisis was commendable and an example of hard work for all of us.—APP

PTI will clean sweep in forthcoming elections

QAZI SHOAB KHAN

ATTOCK: The Central Leader of Pakistan Tehrik e Insaaf and candidate for NA-50 Attock Syed Zulfiqar Abass Bukhari (Zulfi Bukhari) while talking to the local journalists here in Attock on Wednesday has said that PTI under the leadership of Imran Khan will also clean sweep in the forthcoming elections and run the country with full majority. Mr. Zulfi said that PDM has dragged the country into a severe political-economic crisis and only Imran Khan will make political stability due to his revolutionary approach. He said that living

standard of masses is being upgraded in the changing socio-political scenario of the country. Responding different questions of the media persons Mr. Zulfi Bukhari said that all out efforts are being made for the development of his constituency. He said various development schemes of millions of rupees have been got approved and tenders were also floated in the national press to complete all these development schemes within the stipulated period. He said that work orders for development schemes of Rs.114 million include metaling of streets, pathways and construction of

roads already been issued. He while giving details of the schemes said that six schemes in village Akhlaas, 04 schemes in Nara Pindusultani, 02 schemes in Qutbal, 05 schemes in Sharae Saadullah, six schemes in Dharek, 03 schemes in Tarap, 07 schemes in Bahatar one scheme in Khunda and 14 schemes will be completed in Jhang. Zulfi Bukhari said that a large number of people will be benefitted after completion of these schemes. He said, similar schemes will be completed in Langar, Makhad, Malowali, Kharpa, Mithial, Jalwal, Maira Sharif, Jaba and Domel, he added.

ECP making efforts for votes' registration of transgenders

PESHAWAR: Joint Provincial Election Commissioner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Javed Rahmat Khan has said that the commission is making all-out efforts for the issuance of national identity cards (NICs) and vote' registration of transgenders.

Addressing a meeting regarding NICs and voting registration of transgender here on Wednesday, he especially appreciated the role of NADRA, the Social Welfare Department and civil society in this regard. The meeting was organized under the auspices of a non-governmental organization (NGOs), the Hawa Lur. Besides, Director of Local Government Election, Zulfiqar Ahmad, Assistant Director of Social Inclusion, Syed Aun Ahmad Naqvi, Assistant Director NADRA/ Focal Person, Shahid Khan

and Spokesman PEC KP, Sohail Ahmad and a large number of transgenders also attended the meeting. In his briefing, Spokesperson NADRA said that a special desk has been established in NADRA Headquarters Islamabad for the facilitation of transgenders and other deprived segments of society. He further said for the resolution of the problems of transgender 300 personnel have been imparted training and are ready to send mobile registration votes to their residential place.—APP



LARKANA: Chairman Pakistan People's Party and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari showering flowers at the grave of former Prime Minister Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh. —APP

Aiming for sufficient wheat production to avoid import

ISLAMABAD: Minister for National Food Security and Research Tariq Bashir Cheema on Wednesday said agriculture loans worth Rs 663.9 billion were released during the month of November 2022 and it was expected that the loan disbursement would reach Rs 800 billion by the end of the current month (December). Addressing a press conference, he said that the agriculture loan was the component of Prime Minister Kissan Package of Rs 1,819 billion to revive Pakistan's agriculture sector, particularly restoring the agriculture of areas affected by catastrophic floods during monsoon season. He said the package comprised 15 main points to restore and revive the agriculture sector in the country in order to ensure food safety and security in the country, adding that significant pro-

gress has been made in all the points. The prime minister on October 31, 2022, he added, had announced the package and the cabinet accorded the approval to this effect on November 17. Prime Minister was taking a keen interest and holding a fortnightly meeting in order to review the progress on the package, said Cheema. Besides, the government has also announced to waive off markup for the farmers from the flood-hit areas, he said, adding that the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has also issued a notification to this effect, and a 100 percent markup amounting to Rs10.62 billion would be waived off. The government under Kissan Package has also earmarked an amount of Rs 8.2 billion for the provision of subsidized agricultural inputs and issued a notification on December 2022, which would help

in providing inputs at controlled rates to boost per-acre crop output, he added. Cheema further informed that for the first time in history, Prime Minister Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme was introduced to engage youth in the agriculture sector to get maximum dividends for the young population, besides providing them employment opportunities in this sector. He said despite the fiscal and financial crunch, the SBP has issued notifications of all the above-mentioned schemes, and prices of fertilizers were also brought down under markup and risk management scheme, adding that prices of DAP fertilizer came down from Rs 13,000 to Rs 9,000 per bag and sufficient quantity was also available for local farmers. Besides, he added, Rs 30 billion was also allocated for the subsidy on imported

urea and it would be provided in a transparent manner in collaboration with the provincial governments. Under the package, an amount of Rs 4.787 billion comprising 75 percent of agro-based small and medium enterprises were also disbursed, besides the government has also initiated interest-free loan for landless farmers and the central bank has also issued a circular to commercial banks to disburse Rs 5 billion to all eligible farmers, he added. The minister said that under the special directives of the prime minister, the value of PIU was enhanced from Rs 4,000 to Rs 10,000, adding that Finance Division has already notified that it would equally benefit the large and small-scale growers. Besides, he said, a summary was also moved to allow the import of 3 years used tractors to facilitate the local growers and introduce mechanized

agriculture in the country. The ministry was also negotiating with private banks to provide financing facilities for the import of used tractors, he added. The minister further informed that the electricity tariff for farmers was reduced and the government was also working to chalk out a mechanism to provide affordable electricity to agricultural tube wells and it was intended to convert electric tube wells to solar energy. "This would help in reducing the cost of inputs and produce competitive agricultural goods." Cheema said due to hard work and efforts of the government, bumper wheat output was expected during the current season as crop sowing was completed over 91 percent of set targets for the 2022-23 season, adding that grains sowing was completed over 21 million acres as against the set targets of 22.85 million acres.—APP

Government of Pakistan
Utility Stores Corporation of Pakistan
Ministry of Industries & Production

Tender Notice for Purchase of Dates
(Aseel/Local or Imported equivalent to Irani)

Utility Stores Corporation of Pakistan invites sealed bids from the Suppliers registered with Income Tax and Sales Tax Department and who are on Active Taxpayers List of the Federal Board of Revenue for supply of Dates (Aseel/ Local or Imported equivalent to Irani) in 500gm Crystal Box packing on FOR (delivered basis).

2. Bidding Documents, containing detailed terms and conditions, etc. are available at (USC Head Office and Zonal Offices) free of cost. A separate Demand Draft/Pay order for Rs. 3,000/- (Non-Refundable) in favour of USC on account of tender fee be attached at the time of submitting bid/offer. Bidding documents can also be downloaded from USC website i.e. www.usc.org.pk.

The bids prepared in accordance with the instructions in the bidding documents along with sample of 5kg & 1 kg separately, must reach at USC Head Office plot No.2039, F-7/G-7, Jinnah Avenue, Blue Area, Islamabad on 17-01-2023 on Tuesday, before 01:30 hours, which will be opened on the same day at 02:00 hours. This advertisement is also available on PPRA website at www.ppra.org.pk PID (I) No. 4035/22

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(General Manager Procurement)
Utility Stores Corporation of Pakistan Private Limited
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Jinnah Avenue, Blue Area, Islamabad
Ph: 051-9245035, Email: uscspulses@gmail.com

International Workshop on Role of IT

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Ombudsman Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi opened on Wednesday an International Workshop on the Role of Integrated Computer Technologies (ICT) in the Public Grievance Redressal System. The two-day's Workshop is being held online by the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) whose Permanent Secretariat is housed within the Waqaf Mohtasib Secretariat at Islamabad. Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi is the current President of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA). The Workshop is being attended by 43 participants representing ombudsman institutions of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Macau, Malaysia, Thailand, Turkey, Uzbekistan as well as Provincial Ombudsman institutions of Sindh, KPK, Federal Tax Ombudsman and Banking Mohtasib Pakistan. Head of the Ombudsman institution Azad Jammu & Kashmir is also taking part in the said Workshop. Addressing the participants, Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi stated that the prompt and efficient disposal of complaints is of critical importance in the dispensation of justice. The use of ICT is essential in maintaining a credible, transparent, effective and efficient mechanism to sustain the trust of the general public. He added that the application of computer technologies in any field of human endeavor required regular up-gradation, R&D and adaptation in line with the emerging requirements.

RPO for finalizing arrangements for snowfall season

RAWALPINDI: Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Region, Nasir Mehmood Satti has issued instructions for taking precautionary measures in view of the rain/snowfall forecast in Murree and adjoining areas from December 29. According to a spokesman, the RPO instructed the District Police Officer Murree, Traffic Officers and others to utilize all available resources to facilitate the tourist in Murree. Coordinated efforts by all the departments concerned should be taken to give quick response in case of emergency, he added. The RO said that a comprehensive traffic plan should also be formulated and implemented in letter and spirit to avoid traffic congestion on the roads of Murree. Enhanced number of Traffic Wardens should be deployed to regulate heavy traffic load and facilitate the tourists, he added. The cops deployed on the field duties should also be briefed about the emergency plan. - APP

Noor Jahan remembered

ISLAMABAD: Queen of Melody, Madam Noor Jahan was remembered here on late Tuesday in a musical program at Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) as singers enthralled the audience with popular melodies of legendary singer. The show "Sada Hun Aap Pyar Ki" featured Ghazal, Geet, Urdu and Punjabi Songs by Sitara Younas, Gulshan Jahan and Bano Rehmat while Ustad Raees Ahmed will give violin performance. In his opening speech, Ayub Jamali, Director General, Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) paid rich tributes to Noor Jahan and said, "Personalities like Noor Jahan are born in centuries and Pakistani film industry is blessed to have the name of these personalities connected to it. Such artistes are the academy of performing arts within themselves and no one can ever replace them." He said, "National Heritage and Culture Division and PNCA hold programs regularly to remember and acknowledge the services of artistes and promote their art to the coming generations." Pakistan's iconic music legend, Queen of Melody Noor Jahan's career spanned more than six decades (1930s-1990s). - APP

IHC gives custody of kids to Polish mothers

The court also ordered to remove the names of both the children from the Exit Control List (ECL). The two polish women had filed a case for the custody of their children from their Pakistani husband

DNA

ISLAMABAD: While announcing its verdict in the kids' custody case, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday ordered to hand over the children to the Polish mothers. The court also ordered to remove the names of both the children from the Exit Control List (ECL). The two polish women had filed a case for the custody of their children from their Pakistani husband. IHC judge Mohsin Akhtar Kayani heard the case and asked whether the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) had seized the passports of both children and their father as per the court orders. "Yes, the passports have been seized," the FIA officials told the court. "We request

the court to interview the children in chambers," counsel for the petitioners pleaded with the court. "The father of the children brought them to Pakistan for vacations, but he did not return. He kept the children with him illegally for 14 months," he added. Earlier on Tuesday, the father of the children told the court: "I willingly brought the children to Pakistan. Only because of the religion our relations got damaged. They both used to take the children to the church." He added: "I have a big business in Poland. I used to help these two women a lot. I can also abandon the Polish citizenship for my children." The court asked him: "You should keep the Polish citizenship. You should go there and raise your children." He replied: "The mosque is 300 kilometers away from my residence."

The court told him: "You are the owner of so many restaurants that you can build a mosque near your house." The lawyer told the court that the Pakistani husband was Muslim while his Polish wives were Christian. "He has a son, Muhammad Ahmad, from Polish woman Iza Nawa and a daughter from another Polish woman Johana," he added. "He had married Polish woman Johanna on October 29, 2005, and the marriage ended in a divorce on February 28, 2017. A daughter was born in 2012 from the wedlock," the lawyer further informed the court. "He contracted Nikah with Iza Nawa because the second marriage cannot be registered in Poland. A son was born in 2015 from the wedlock," he added. When asked, both the Polish women refused to meet

their Pakistani husband. He told the court that he had obtained Polish citizenship in 2012. He also claimed that he had come to Pakistan in August 2021 with 18-day legal permission from the mothers of the two children. The permission letter to bring the children to Pakistan was also produced before the court. "Both the children attend school in Poland. They are the citizens of Poland, and their stay in Pakistan is over," the lawyer told the court. "The children should be brought to the court again tomorrow. The court will decide after hearing more arguments," the court said and ordered to submit passports of both children and that of the Pakistani husband to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). The court had then adjourned further hearing of the case till Wednesday.

Kazakh envoy visits Quaid-i-Azam University

The Ambassador of Kazakhstan spoke about the international initiatives and achievements of Kazakhstan over the period of independence

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kazakhstan, Yerzhan Kistafin visited the country's leading university - Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, where he delivered a lecture to students and faculty on Kazakhstan and bilateral relations between the two countries. During the lecture, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan spoke about the international initiatives and achievements of Kazakhstan over the period of independence, dwelled separately on aspects of the development of Kazakhstan-Pakistan cooperation. In addition, Kistafin answered questions related to the history and current situation in the development of cooperation between the two states both in bilateral and multilateral formats in the trade, economic, cultural, humanitarian and educational fields. The Ambassador expresses gratitude for the invitation and organization of the event to Prof. Dr. Razia Sultana of History Department of the Quaid-i-Azam University. -DNA



National Days and Armed Forces Days

December

Dec 01 / Romania	National Day
Dec 02 / UAE	National Day
Dec 02 / Laos Republic	National Day
Dec 05 / Thailand	National Day
Dec 06 / Finland	Independence Day
Dec 07 / India	Armed Forces Flag Day
Dec 09 / Tanzania	National Day
Dec 11 / Oman	Armed Forces Day
Dec 12 / Kenya	Independence Day
Dec 12 / Turkmenistan	Neutrality Day
Dec 16 / Bahrain	National Day
Dec 16 / Kazakhstan	Independence Day
Dec 18 / Qatar	National Day
Dec 18 / Niger	National Day
Dec 23 / Philippines	Armed Forces Day
Dec 23 / Japan	National Day



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- Serena Hotel.....111 133 133
- Marriott.....051- 2826121
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- Turkish Airlines.....8494949



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- Met Office.....9250360-6
- RDA.....5555864
- TMA.....5770886
- Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Islamabad Metropolitan

- Corporation.....9209224
- Potohar Town.....9209224
- RawalTown.....5773343

Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Employees allotted 'only one' plot during service: FGEHA clarifies

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government Housing Authority (FGEHA) has clarified that only one plot is allotted to the government employees and other specified groups during the entire service under its residential scheme. "The allotment is made as per approved policy of authority by the executive committee/board from time-to-time as per their entitlement according to their scales from BS-01 to BS-22," according to an official document available with APP. However, it said the government in 2006 had allowed an additional residential plot to the federal secretaries (BS-22) of officers in pursuance of approved policy/ criteria titled-Prime Minister's Assistance Package Scheme on the recommendations of Establishment Division. About this policy, the document said the Islamabad High Court had declared this policy as illegal in 2021, directing the Secretaries of Establishment Division, Housing and Works and Law & Justice to place the matter of entitlement of second plot to Federal Secretaries before the Federal Cabinet, who shall give its approval afresh after considering the law. Accordingly, the matter was before the federal cabinet who approved discontinuation of second allotment under Prime Minister's Assistance Package Scheme. "Matter is still subjudice in IHC/SCP: Meanwhile, the Jurists Foundation also filed an Intra Court Appeal (ICA) in Islamabad High Court against judgment announced by the IHC in writ petition No. 3277/2020 and prayed to explain a mechanism under which the illegal benefits could be taken back for public exchequer," the document explained. Moreover, it said the Islamabad High Court has suspended the balloting held for allocation of plot numbers to prospective allottees of sector F-14/15 (including PM Assistance Package for Federal Secretaries) and presently, "an appeal of FGEHA is subjudice in Supreme Court". - APP

Country entering another food security crisis

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain on Wednesday said the country has entered a serious crisis of food security after inflation and floods. The price of flour has increased by 40% across the country, which has increased the price of roti by 5 to 7 rupees in different parts of the country, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that due to the high cost of flour, the majority of the people cannot bring ample food to the table which is the result of the bad economic situation and smuggling. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that after the destruction of the agricultural sector by the floods, drainage of water could not be ensured due to which wheat sowing has been delayed.

UNHCR receives €1 million to support flood victims in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has received €1,000,000 [One million euro] donation by the L'Oréal Group, the world's leading beauty company, to provide emergency support for flood-affected communities in Pakistan as well as help rebuild community infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and shelters. The donation, which comes as the people of Pakistan continue to grapple with the devastating effects of the 2022 floods, will contribute to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees response for approximately 8.5 million people in the worst affected provinces of Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Key activities include the hand-over of emergency core relief items including blankets, emergency shelter, hygiene items, mosquito nets and solar-powered lanterns, says a press release. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in its leadership of protection activities is also working alongside partners to ensure that critical needs are identified and addressed through prevention, risk mitigation and other services by specialised actors. The grant will strengthen measures to address gender-based violence and child protection risks, to ensure timely aid for the most vulnerable and delivered in a safe and dignified manner. The funding will also assist in the early recovery process, including building up the resilience of refugees and their host communities and rehabilitating damaged public services such as schools, health, and water supplies. "The L'Oréal Group's contribution demonstrates a firm commitment towards solidarity and responsibility sharing with Pakistan,

which is among the world's largest host of refugees," said United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Representative to Pakistan, Noriko Yoshida. "This contribution will support vulnerable families affected by flooding and help them to rebuild their homes, their lives and their communities." Alexandra Palt, L'Oréal Chief Corporate Responsibility Officer and CEO Foundation L'Oréal said, "As the flood waters recede, every passing day is bringing more challenges for the communities as people continue to be displaced by the catastrophic floods and the scale of the destruction remains huge. Funding awarded to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees by L'Oréal will be directed towards rehabilitation and humanitarian assistance in Sindh, Balochistan and KPK." - APP

CDA ready to review signboard tax

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the business community is facing problems due to high signboard tax rate and trade license fee and stressed that the Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI) should address these issues by revising their rates. He said that the MCI should charge signboard tax rate @ Rs.60/- per sq. yds. and trade license fee should be fixed at Rs.1000/- per annum that would ease the problems of business community and facilitate them in growth of business activities. He said this while talking to Shakeel Arshad, Director, DMA, MCI during his visit to Islamabad Chamber of

Commerce and Industry. Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President ICCI said that the close cooperation of MCI is important to boost business and economic activities and stressed that the MCI should extend all possible facilitation to

the business community by addressing issues. Muhammad Ejaz Abbasi Convener, MCI Committee of ICCI, Zafar Bakhtawari, Shehzad Shabbir Abbasi President Super Market, Ahmed Khan President F-10 Markaz, Khurram

Khan President Islamabad Restaurants Association, Khalid Chaudhry and representatives of markets also highlighted various issues that needed the attention of MCI for redress. Speaking at the occasion, Shakeel Arshad, Director,

DMA, MCI accepted the demand of the business community to charge signboard tax @ Rs.60/ per sq. yds. He further said that the pending area signboard tax would be charged according to 2008 rate @ Rs.20/- per sq. yds. without any addi-

tional charges and stressed that after the notification, the business community should pay this tax to settle its dues. He said that the trade license rate would be finalized after further discussion, preferably according to the wishes of the stakeholders. He said that MCI is introducing a mobile app for renewal of trade licenses to facilitate the business community. He said that the CDA Board had finalized the tax of Rs.500 for outdoor areas of restaurants and it could also be revised by the Board. He assured that he would always cooperate with the business community to facilitate them. The issues of occupation of footpaths and green areas were also discussed and Director DMA said that MCI has allowed controversy-free areas for business activity.



Briefs

PIA offers discount to passengers on Beijing-Islamabad flights

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has offered a big discount to passengers travelling on Beijing-Islamabad route with immediate effect. The new fare from Beijing to Islamabad is now RMB 4,681 including all taxes, which will greatly facilitate those passengers who plan to travel to Pakistan to meet their families during the Chinese New Year holidays, a senior official told APP here on Wednesday. The national flag carrier has also announced a cut in the existing fare of Beijing-Islamabad-Beijing round trip and the new price is now RMB 12,050 including all taxes. PIA is currently operating weekly passenger flights on Islamabad-Beijing-Islamabad and Islamabad-Chengdu-Islamabad routes on Sunday and Wednesday respectively. In addition, PIA has also been granted approval to start weekly flights on Islamabad-Xian-Islamabad route by the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) and the airline is making necessary arrangements to start flights on this route. China will scrap the quarantine requirement for international arrivals starting from January 8. Passengers travelling to China need to take the nucleic acid test within 48 hours before boarding their flights to China. The nucleic acid screening and centralization after arrival will be cancelled, according to China's National Health Commission. Talking to APP, Ali Imran, a Pakistani educationist said that the new discount would greatly facilitate Pakistani professionals and businessmen who could not meet their families for many years as a result of Covid-19 travel restrictions and soaring travelling cost. Now they could avail this offer and visit their families in Pakistan during winter holidays, he added.—APP

ANF seizes huge quantities of drugs

ISLAMABAD: The Anti-Narcotic Force (ANF) has recovered a huge quantity of drugs during a nationwide crackdown against smugglers of contraband items. According to a spokesperson, ANF recovered 108 kg of hashish, 78 kg of opium and 6 kg of heroin from a car near D-17 centre Islamabad and arrested a drug peddler. In another operation, the force seized 102 grams of ice and 74 grams of heroin from a private courier office parcel in Islamabad. The ANF force recovered 118 capsules filled with heroin from the stomach of the accused travelling from Multan Airport to Bahrain. The force also recovered 120 capsules full of heroin from the stomach of the accused travelling from Faisalabad to Jeddah. In a joint operation, ANF and FC in Khyber recovered 35 kg of hashish and over 1 kg of ice. Cases have been registered against the accused under the Anti-Narcotics Act.—APP

Two fireworks dealers held

RAWALPINDI: Gungmandi police arrested two fireworks dealers and recovered an ample quantity of fireworks from their possession during a crackdown, said a police spokesman here on Wednesday. In line with special directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari, Gungmandi Police under the supervision of SHO launched a crackdown against fireworks. The team arrested two dealers identified as Shahrukh and Sajjad. The police also recovered an ample quantity of fireworks from their possession and registered separate cases against them. SP Rawal Babar Javed Joya directed the officers concerned to continue a crackdown against fireworks dealers and drug dealers on daily basis, the spokesman added.—APP

Alvi upholds order to grant COVID health risk allowance

President rejected the representation of Agency and upheld the orders of the WM as maladministration on behalf of the Agency was established on the above-mentioned grounds

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has upheld the orders of the Wafaqi Mohtasib (WM) to grant COVID Health Risk Allowance to 37 employees of the National Institute of Rehabilitation Medicines (NIRM) and Federal Government Services Hospital (FGSH) who had been deprived of the allowance earlier as being declared non-clinical. The President gave this decision while rejecting a representation of the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (the Agency) against the order of the Mohtasib recommending it to move a fresh summary to the PM Secretariat for grant of risk allowance to the

complainants. The President in his decision observed that in August 2021, the Agency had provided funds to Federal Government Hospitals/entities to grant COVID Health Risk Allowance to clinical staff and that the Federal Government Polyclinic Postgraduate Medical Institute, Islamabad was also one of the beneficiaries of the fund. He further observed that in 2020, all employees were given COVID Risk Allowance, however, in 2021, 37 employees were deprived of the allowance as being declared non-clinical. He noted that the Executive Director had recommended the Agency to grant the allowance to the remaining 37 employees as all clinical and non-clinical staff worked in the same risky environment,



and were equally vulnerable and exposed to infection without any exception. The President, in his decision, further highlighted that it was a reality that both clinical and non-clinical employees in the hospital were vulnerable and performing duties within

the same premises and environment without any exception. He rejected the Agency's view that the hospital staff had to work in a vulnerable environment usually, that it was the nature of their job, and that they were already drawing some exclusive allowances. He also rejected the view that only the clinical staff were actively engaged by the hospital administration in various COVID-19 units during the pandemic. As per details, Mr Maqbool Ahmad and Others (the complainants) had lodged a complaint with WM that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they kept on performing their duties despite their vulnerability and risk of lives on the directions of the Heads of their Departments along with so many others. Ac-

ording to them, COVID Risk Allowance was paid to a number of employees who performed duties like them but they were discriminated against by being declared as non-clinical staff whereas both the clinical and non-clinical employees performed duties in their hospitals while being equally vulnerable to infection. Feeling aggrieved they approached the Mohtasib who passed the orders to grant the allowance to the complainants. Ministry of Health, then, filed a representation to the President against the decision of WM. The President rejected the representation of the Agency and upheld the orders of the WM as maladministration on behalf of the Agency was established on the above-mentioned grounds.

Chinese companies participate in Solar Pakistan Exhibition

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chinese solar energy companies remained the focus of visitors and customers as Pakistan's largest Solar Pakistan Exhibition and Conference, which was successfully held at Expo Centre Karachi, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. The Conference attracted a large number of local and international solar power companies which had set up their booths to exhibit their products. Key industry leaders, government officials, manufacturers, suppliers, traders, contractors, and partners from across the country and abroad participated in the conference. The solar energy experts and government officials highlighted the latest innovations in solar and sustainable energy by offering a unique platform to forge



partnerships between the public and private sectors to develop innovative solutions. They said that everyone was opting for solar energy which is the cheapest source of energy and Pakistan is blessed with such a geographical location where sunlight falls adequately to run solar systems. Chinese companies including LONGi Solar, K-Solar and Diwan International (Pvt) Ltd. who is the authorized partner and distributor of

Trina Solar, Huawei FusionSolar, Chint Electric & Leoch Battery in Pakistan and many others participated in the exhibition. Besides government officials, Hashim Raza, CEO K-Solar, and General Manager LONGi Ali were amongst the panelists to highlight the importance and the future of solar energy in Pakistan while Majid, Robin Xing, Director of Digital Power Business Huawei Pakistan was one of the major speak-

ers on the occasion. K-Solar's Mr. Raza highlighted the increasing gap between global challenges and local realities, requesting relevant authorities to take immediate necessary steps to support and encourage solar revolution in Pakistan. LONGi booth attracted visitors with its new Hi-MO6 high-performance modules and they caused hot discussion while the new business model "Solar+" again broadens the application scope of components. LONGi also attracted many visitors with "LONGi Party Time" and offered snack boxes to everyone who visited the booth. SOLAR Pakistan is the only dedicated platform to bring the latest solar innovations and showcase the largest solar projects in the region providing a unique platform in building partnerships with all government and private sectors in pursuing innovative solutions.

Daily increase in inflation is failure of governance

ISLAMABAD: Former President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Dr. Shahid Rasheed Butt on Wednesday said politicians who always claim to serve the masses are busy in resolving their own problems and are serving themselves instead of the people. Politicians are least concerned about the plight of the masses, inflation is increasing on a daily basis putting an unbearable burden on the people and now the price of flour has been increased to an unprecedented level which is unacceptable, he said. Shahid Rasheed Butt said that the flour crisis has been deliberately created in the country to take out trillions of rupees from the pockets of the starving people to fill the coffers of the elite. The country that should have been one of the world's largest agricultural exporters is importing food items worth nine billion dollars and the volume of imports is continuously increasing due to the lack of attention of the ruling elite. The continued fall in agricultural output is evidence of failed policies and indifferent attitude of policymakers, he added. The business leader said that one and a half million acres of land in the country which is forty per cent of the total cultivable area, is affected by salinity and water logging and the recent floods have further damaged these lands. In some areas, the level of underground water has risen so much that it has become difficult to bury the dead, he informed. Shahid Rashid Butt said that all the institutions related to agriculture are causing harm instead of benefit and have failed to deliver for many decades wasting public money.—DNA

Pak earns US \$158m from travel services' export in 4 months

Imports of the country witnessed a decline of 11.83 percent, falling from US\$ 3483.37 million last year to US\$ 3071.13 million during the months under review

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan earned US \$158.140 million by providing different travel services in various countries during the first four months of the current fiscal year 2022-23. This shows negative growth of 13.59 percent as compared to the US \$183.006 million worth same services provided during the corresponding period of the last fiscal year 2021-22, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. During the months under review, personal travel services decreased by 13.77 percent, from US \$182.356 million last year to US \$157.250 million during July-October 2022. Among the personal services, the exports of health-related expenditure dipped by 59.09 percent while the education-related expenditure also dropped by 4.59 percent. In addition, other personal services witnessed a decrease of 13.62 percent. Meanwhile, the exports of business services grew by 36.92 percent, from US \$ 0.650 million to US \$ 0.890 million, the PBS data revealed. It is pertinent to mention here that the exports of services from the country, witnessed an increase of 3.97 percent during the first four months of the current financial year (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period of last year, it added. The exports of services during July-October (2022-23) were recorded at US\$ 2259.21 million against the exports of US\$ 2172.85 million in July-October (2021-22), showing a growth of 3.97 percent. The imports of the country witnessed a decline of 11.83 percent, falling from US\$ 3483.37 million last year to US\$ 3071.13 million during the months under review.—APP

Multi pronged strategy seems working to avert gas crisis

ISLAMABAD: The impact of the global energy crisis following the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the previous regime's failure to take prudent steps had led to the fears that the nation would experience the worst-ever gas crisis during the ongoing high-demand winter season. Everything is not all right, however, the current coalition government's multi-faceted strategy to tackle the situation seems working and so far it has sensibly regulated the gas supply to domestic consumers to a significant amount. There is no denial about consumers' complaints regarding commodity shortages in some areas of the country, but officials contend that these are results of the low-pressure or other technical and infrastructure-related issues, which are being fixed on a priority basis. Minister of State for Petroleum Dr Musadik Malik commenting on the issue said the local gas production was experiencing around a 10 percent decline annually, realizing this the government has arranged extra gas for

the months of November, December and January as compared to the same months of the last year. "Additional LNG cargoes for January and February have also been secured from Qatar." He said a Gas Framework Agreement with the Azerbaijani trading firm SOCAR was near completion for the availability of 'distressed' cargoes of LNG from the international market for purchase at the cheapest rate. Musadik Malik said the sui companies had been directed to ensure the gas supply, especially during 'breakfast, lunch and dinner' preparation timings i.e. 6-9 a.m., 12-2 p.m. and 6-9 p.m. He said an effective monitoring system of commodity's demand and supply, observed by the Petroleum Division, was in place but the poor infrastructure was a hurdle creating a gas pressure issue for the remote areas, which was being rectified. To bridge the demand and supply gap, the minister said the gas companies were providing more than 20,000 tons of Liquefied Petroleum Gas

(LPG) per month in the areas where gas-pressure issues and shortages prevailed. Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) has opened for the first time LPG cylinder outlets in the localities facing natural gas shortages. The minister said the government was cognizant of the industrial sector's energy demand and its importance to economic stability, exports and employment. Accordingly, he said the government was utilizing all available options and contacting different countries including the Central Asian States and, "We are reaching out to all [potential] countries for buying gas either through pipelines or Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) cargoes to meet the ever-increasing gas demand." He highlighted the importance of exploiting the country's indigenous oil and gas potential, saying that two new policies related to tight gas and the revival of old hydrocarbon wells, were being worked out. Russia, he said, had agreed in principle to provide

crude oil, petrol and diesel to Pakistan at a discounted rate. "We believe that there will be a crucial role of the light crude oil, which will be imported from Russia, in bringing down the energy price." In addition to that Pakistan has initiated negotiations with Russian private and public sector companies for procurement of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to meet our energy needs. The early establishment of the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline, commonly known North-South (Lahore-Karachi) Gas Pipeline, and another 'big gas pipeline' to get the commodity from Russian hydrocarbon deposits was also part of the plan, he added. Next month, an inter-governmental delegation of Russia, led by its Energy Minister, would visit Pakistan to make progress on oil and gas sale-purchase agreements between the two countries. The country's domestic gas extraction varies around 3.5-7 Billion Cubic Feet per Day (BCFD) against the demand of 8 BCFD.—APP

PM directs pacing up implementation of Kisaan Package

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said development of agriculture sector is the guarantor of food security and directed accelerating the implementation of the Kisaan Package to facilitate the farmers. He expressed these views while chairing a review meeting on the historic Kisaan Package introduced by the government for the development of the agricultural sector. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stressed the need to ensure food security in Pakistan at all costs. He directed paying special attention to the cultivation and production of wheat, cotton, canola and olives for food security in the country.

He emphasized ensuring the supply of better seeds to increase the production of other food grains including pulses. The meeting was informed about the implementation of the Kisaan Package, youth loan scheme, interest waiver for small farmers and provision of interest-free agricultural loans to small farmers in flood-affected areas through the State Bank notification to banks, for which instructions have been issued.

In the current financial year till November, agricultural loans of Rs 664 billion have been distributed to farmers, which is 36 percent more compared to the same period of the previous financial year. Finance Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Minister for National Food Security and Research Chaudhry Tariq Bashir Cheema, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah Khan, Industries Minister Syed Murtaza Mehmood, Information Minister Mariyum Aurangzeb, Minister of State for Petroleum Dr. Musadek Malik, Special Assistant to Prime Minister Dr. Jahanzeb Khan were present in the meeting.

Governor State Bank Jameel Ahmed, Prime Minister's Coordinator Rana Ahsan Afzal and senior officials were present.—APP

Food dept foiled two wheat smuggling bids

RAWALPINDI: The Food Department Rawalpindi and district police on Wednesday foiled two bids to smuggle wheat flour and seized 156 bags. According to a district administration spokesman, the authorities of the food department along with Potohar Division police conducted raids in different areas and rounded up two drivers namely Moman Khan and Sanaullah for carrying 156 wheat flour bags. He informed that the accused were trying to illegally ship out wheat flour bags out of Rawalpindi division. He said, the Food Department Rawalpindi and district police on the directives of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi were strictly monitoring all the exit points of Rawalpindi district to foil wheat and flour smuggling bids.—APP

IESCO issues power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Wednesday issued a power suspension programme for Thursday 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 AM, Islamabad Circle Abpara, New Marvi, T&T, Pindorian, Chatta Bakhtawar, Kirpa, Khanna Dak, F-8/2, G-9/2, Old United To, Golla, Khudadad Heights, Bhara Kaho, Company Bagh, Berut, Numbal, Upper Topa, Patriata, Mangyal, Treat, Bhara Kahu-2, Golf City, NIH, Athal, Capital Steel, New PTN, Potohar Steel feeders, Rawalpindi City Circle, Commercial Centre, B-Block, A-Block, Kurri Road, Tariq Shaheed, KRL, Zafar-ul-Haq, Arya Mohallah, Fawara Chowk, Sara-fa Bazar, Jinnah Road, Dhok Hassu, Quaid abad, Asghar Mall, Kayani Road, Misrial Road, Ameer Hamza, Colony, Azhar abad, Noon, BB Shaheed, Katarian feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, Kashmir Road.—APP

China finalized tree planting project around N-5

DNA

ISLAMABAD: China's Yunnan province sponsored a tree planting project around National Highway-5 (N-5), popularly known as "Go Green Pakistan, Yunnan Chapter, Page 1." has recently been finalized. According to China Economic Net (CEN) on Wednesday, 5000 high temperature and drought resistant tree saplings are now standing along N-5 in southern Sindh. As Pakistan increasingly faces the challenges of Climate Change, China's Yunnan, a region renowned for its efforts to restore forests and reduce pollution, stepped forward and made the donation via the Yunnan People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and the China Yunnan Sunny

Road and Bridge Corporation, which is working on various infrastructure projects in Pakistan. The project was carried out in Southern Sindh, one of the hardest hit areas of extreme weather, along the central separator and the interchange area of N-5, Pakistan's north-south traffic trunk road. The project is expected to increase green coverage, ease water-soil losses and raise local residents' awareness of environmental protection. Following that, the Chinese side will care for the saplings for a year to ensure their survival and maximize the project's impact. The project has received high praise from Pakistan's Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Capital Development Authority (CDA), and the National Highway Authority (NHA).



Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti
Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 03 Issue: 129

Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

Phone: 051-2266165 / 051-2261960

Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad

What's behind Kosovo and Serbia conflict?

North Kosovo is divided into four municipalities, with a population that is almost exclusively ethnic Serb that maintain close ties to Serbia. Most do not recognize Kosovo as a state. However, the municipalities have 10 guaranteed seats in Kosovo's parliament and are represented by two ministers in the government in Pristina. Since the end of the Kosovo war in 1999, the Kosovar government has never had full control in the north of the country – this means the area north of the Ibar River, which has a population of about 60,000, is effectively a lawless zone and thus perfect for criminals and smugglers. Without exception, the leading Serbian politicians in the area are loyal to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. The ethnic Serbs of Kosovo distrust the government in Pristina, which is underpinned by the fact that special police units are regularly sent into the northern area, allegedly to fight crime. Roadblocks and barricades set up by the ethnic Serb minority are a tried and tested tool in the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia. Organized in online chat groups, these barriers can bring the region to a halt within minutes, blocking roads and border crossings.

The background to the current protest is the arrest of former Kosovo police officers of Serbian nationality. The Kosovo prosecutor's office has accused one of the men of having carried out a bomb attack on the premises of the election commission in Mitrovica, in the Serb-dominated north. In addition to the release of the policemen, the protesting Serbs are demanding that special units of the Kosovo police withdraw from the northern part of the country. The aim of the Serb minority was to prevent local elections that became necessary in the north after all ethnic Serbs resigned from Kosovo's state institutions, both at the local and the national level, in early November. All four mayors in northern Kosovo resigned, several hundred Serb police officers left the Kosovo police force and Serb judges stopped going to work. This boycott was a reaction to Kurti's plan to introduce new license plate regulations, with the aim being to ban plates issued by the Serbian authorities and swap them for Kosovo plates. As far as Kurti was concerned, it was a matter of principle because Serbia does not accept Kosovo license plates. But for Serbian President Vucic and the Kosovo Serbs, the move was a preparation for "ethnic cleansing." The introduction of new license plates has been put on hold for now, as have the local elections, as a result of pressure from the European Union and the United States. The West has also called on Serbia to help ease tensions, but that doesn't seem likely at the moment. Though it's unlikely that Serbia would actually deploy them, Vucic has put troops on "heightened readiness" several times in recent years. In mid-December, the government in Belgrade officially requested KFOR to allow Serbian police and soldiers to be stationed on Kosovar territory. That request is possible under the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, adopted in 1999 after a de facto surrender by Serbia. It allows for a few hundred law enforcement officers to be sent to Kosovo – but only if the KFOR international peacekeeping mission agrees. Even Vucic has openly admitted that his proposal will probably be rejected.



Army's resolves to crush terrorists

Pakistan Army's top brass Wednesday resolved to uproot terrorism "without any distinction" as the country battles a fresh wave of insurgency, which has left many soldiers martyred and several others injured. The resolve was reiterated at the 254th Corps Commanders Conference (CCC) in Rawalpindi, the first chaired by Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir, who took up the charge as the military's head last month. At the conference, which took place from December 27-28, a comprehensive review of professional and organisational matters of the army was undertaken, according to a statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). "It was resolved to fight against terrorists without any distinction and eliminate this menace as per the aspirations of the people of Pakistan," the military's media wing added. The development comes after several terror attacks took place across Pakistan, with most of them in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, worrying the nation of a rise in terrorism. Recently, the Islamabad Police came up with a "special security plan" after a suicide attack left a cop martyred and injured several others. Security checkpoints have increased across the capital and "high alert" has been imposed while citizens have been advised to ensure cooperation with law enforcers. In light of the high alert, several embassies – including the United States, Saudi Arabia and Australia – warned their citizens not to travel unnecessarily in the federal capital. Pakistan's strategy against the outlawed terrorist organisation, Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), heavily depended on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan who now insist that such groups are not operating out of their country. Instead, they insist that this is an internal problem that Pakistan must deal with on its own. At the same time, cross-border attacks have increased exponentially ever since the Ashraf Ghani was ousted. There is an undeniable link here that must be explored and addressed further for the sake of a solution before more civilians get caught in the crossfire. Initially when the Afghan Taliban formed a government, they promised to facilitate talks between the Pakistani government and the TTP. Several rounds of dialogue took place but no successful agreement was reached, with the terrorist outfit ultimately ending the ceasefire agreed upon earlier. Ever since, the number of attacks from across the border, and within Pakistan, have increased by as much as 50 percent. The civilian death toll has increased by 19 percent as well. This signals towards a real problem that inevitably links directly to the rise of the Afghan Taliban. Most terrorist factions that are responsible for attacks in Pakistan are believed to be based in Afghanistan, with sleeper cells functioning silently here. Thus, there is an onus on Afghanistan to help out and take whatever actions necessary to control this menace and since it has substantial influence over such bodies, it can be successful. On top of this, we have always provided Afghanistan with the kind of support that it needs, be it financial or diplomatic. We have provided aid for the humanitarian crisis in time when our own country was struggling so, if nothing else, we have at least earned a helping hand in return.

Faith-Aligned Finance

Dr. AbdusSattarAbbasi

Impact only is about grants and philanthropy, however, surprisingly the market size for 'impact first' has been showed in billions of dollars with expected returns up to 11%. In the category of 'finance first' sustainable investment spectrum has the potential of trillions of dollars with expected returns as high as 18%. Report concludes that a greater movement of capital toward impact creation is about to takeplace, with faith-aligned actors potentially leading the way

Human progress usually remains a source of satisfaction and inspiration when we look at the comfort and convenience we have achieved during these centuries. Our systems have evolved to prompt delivery of innumerable services to maintain daily life. Going digital helped us save several resources including huge amount of time to utilize this precious resource for other productive undertakings. However some fundamental approaches to manage financial resources which occupy central place in human instinct couldn't manage escape from the clutches of self-interest and exploitation. In its current incarnation, a financial industry tempered by the "greed is good" era is scrambling to accommodate new generations of investors who place a high premium on environ-

mental and social goals. According to the equity funds tracked by Informa Financial Intelligence, the ESG (environmental, social and governance) subset or socially responsible investment (SRI) attracted over \$35 billion in 2019. Investors and fund managers must tackle individual challenges posed by this emerging trend. Each investor places varying emphasis on separate parts of the ESG trifecta. Investors' criteria vary, both in terms of duration and the degrees of return, in which each they are willing to forgo to achieve ESG goals. Financial professionals are struggling to find credible tools and benchmarks to construct, test and maintain ESG friendly portfolios with enough flexibility to meet the diverse goals of the investor pool and fiduciary responsibility. Making an impact involves stopping ignoring our world's problems and making even a small contribution towards a better future. It means to do our part in supporting initiatives which offer solutions to pressing problems such as famine, water scarcity, and poverty, to name a few. It is to join the movement of like-minded, compassionate people who realize that we have to act now, together, to have a better future tomorrow. Julie Taylor argues, "All people experience difficulties of one type or another. Some people have financial burdens and others deal with family problems. There are three durations of stress: life events, chronic strains, and daily hassles and uplifts. Life events include the birth of a child, divorce, and death; anything requiring adaptation during a short period of time. Chronic strains, such as illness and injury, occur over a long period of time. Daily hassles and uplifts are the common everyday stressors of life, including studying and family. No matter what gender, racial, or economic background a person is born into, there will always be stressors in life. How people handle stressors is significant. What people turn to in times of trouble is relevant. Similar to procrastination, some people strive under pressure and some cannot handle the heat. Likewise, with life's difficulties, some people turn to methods of coping like smoking or drinking. Others seem to strive in the midst of trouble. Something seems to separate the two responses. That is one's faith which helps them through the stressors of life. It allows them to see a different perspective and continue to have faith in something greater than they are." A recently published Oxford Faith-Aligned Impact Finance Report identified significant opportunities for faith-aligned capital to create an impact in climate-focused investing, and ESG/SRI initiatives. The faith-aligned finance and impact investing mapped 360 separate organizations connected

to Abrahamic, Dharmic and other religions. Total net assets mapped are valued at approximately US \$5 trillion. The breakdown by religion is as follows: Christian aligned capital (\$260 billion), Islamic sovereign capital (\$3 trillion) and Islamic private finance capital (\$1 trillion), Dharmic capital (\$300 billion) and Jewish capital (\$16 billion). According to the report, "Only 3% is specifically attributed to impact creation, or socially responsible investing, or ESG. For Christian funds, this number is 1% while for Islamic funds it is 3.22%. Impact investing represents between 0.6% and 2% of global assets under management, suggesting perhaps that Islamic finance may be ahead of the global average. Initial interviews aimed at understanding why more faith-aligned capital was not being used to create impact found that there is likely a significant number of investment decision-makers in the faith world that also prioritize return and do not necessarily accept that faith-aligned capital should be treated any differently than other capital when it comes to investments. In other cases, there appear to be religious objections to generating a return when the intention is to create impact." Impact investment has been defined as: Investments made with the intention to generate positive and measurable social & environmental impact alongside a financial return. Impact investments can be made in both emerging and developed markets and target a range of returns from below market to market rate, depending on investors' strategic goals. Report further suggests: millennials, 45% of whom consider social responsibility a factor in investment decision-making and also state a desire to invest their funds to help others, will over the next 10 years be benefitting from trillions of dollars. Moreover, 90% of women investors believe in making a positive impact on society. An exciting spectrum for sustainable investment aligned with SDGs has been delineated while identifying three categories including 'impact only', 'impact first' and 'finance first' with expected returns. Impact only is about grants and philanthropy, however, surprisingly the market size for 'impact first' has been shown in billions of dollars with expected returns up to 11%. In the category of 'finance first' sustainable investment spectrum has the potential of trillions of dollars with expected returns as high as 18%. Report concludes that a greater movement of capital toward impact creation is about to takeplace, with faith-aligned actors potentially leading the way.

The writer is Associate Professor Management Sciences Head, Center of Islamic Finance COMSATS University (CU) Lahore Campus

The Twitter Files

Tariq Al-Homayed

Dorsey also criticized the decision to ban Trump from the platform but also defended this step from a business standpoint. "We did the right thing for the public company business at the time, but the wrong thing for the internet and society." Despite all of that, the Twitter Files did not get the coverage they deserved, neither in the US, the West, nor the Arab world.

Something strange is happening. While the news is brimming with stories about the administrative decisions Elon Musk has made since acquiring Twitter, more important news about the company has not been covered by the media. In what has become known as the "Twitter files," Musk demonstrates that Twitter was not genuinely impartial and that it did not guarantee everyone freedom of speech. Among the most important of these files is how Twitter suppressed the story about the president's son Hunter Biden published by the 'New York Post.' Another of the files shows that the wife of former president Barack Obama had been involved in a campaign to ban Donald Trump from Twitter. The files also show that the FBI interfered with Twitter's oversight under the pretext of safeguarding the integrity of the elections, which the FBI commented on by saying it was normal procedure. That is not all. The journalist Twitter hired, Matt Taibbi, revealed that President Biden's team was in regular contact with Twitter, pushing the company to delete certain tweets attacking Biden. Taibbi has presented evidence to back up his claims. It has also been revealed that Twitter knew of secret accounts managed by the American army that sought to promote US interests in the Middle East, and they were not closed despite breaking laws against promotional accounts. Commenting on the news, Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey has said he blames himself for having given the company so much power in regulating "freedom of expression," adding that his biggest mistake was investing in tools that allowed Twitter to steer conversations instead of leaving this to its users, which made the company come under "external pressure." Dorsey also criticized the decision to ban Trump from the platform but also defended this step from a business standpoint. "We did the right thing for the public company business at the time, but the wrong thing for the internet and society." Despite all of that, the Twitter Files did not get the coverage they deserved, neither in the US, the West, nor the Arab world. To be fair, Issa al-Nahari, an upright journalist working at the Arabic language version of 'The Independent' provided the deepest coverage of this story. Though shameful, it is understandable that American and Western media outlets ignored it because of ideological divisions and the leftist media's pro-Twitter bias, which only ended with Musk's arrival, and its determination to mislead the public and further their liberal leftist agenda. However, the question here is: what justifies the Arab media's neglect of this important story, which could open the door to serious conversations about the agendas of social media platforms, warn users against the dangers of this ideological effort to misguide them, and show that "social media freedom" is a lie? We all remember how, during what was falsely called the Arab Spring, President Obama presented access to Twitter and Facebook as human rights, demonizing moderate states under the pretext that they were silencing their people by controlling social media. The truth unfolding before our eyes tells us the opposite. It has become clear that the American administration and federal authorities are the ones intervening, monitoring, and steering. And so, the pressing question is: why has the Arab media ignored this dangerous story? Is there an answer?

Can corruption scandal push major political reforms in EU?

Dong Yifan

From a historical perspective of European integration, the development of the EU as a political experiment in building a sovereign state association is a cyclical process of constantly encountering problems and carrying out institutional innovation and repairs. Can the current EU continue to turn opportunities into further development momentum?

Last week, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán called for the European Parliament to be abolished. The reason is the scandal known as "Qatargate," which relates to accusations of corruption which have rocked the European Parliament in recent weeks. Orbán proposed creating a new European Parliament,

consisting of national delegates. "This guarantees greater oversight, accountability and credibility. Give control back to the Member States!" he said. His remarks have pushed the discussion on the reform of EU's political and decision-making mechanisms. As the legislative body among the three major institutions of the EU, the European Parliament should ideally play a role in promoting and optimizing policy formulation in EU politics. Its elected members should downplay the partial and other interests of specific countries, serving the common interests of the EU. However, the Qatargate scandal shows that politicians, political staffers, lobbyists, civil servants and even a vice president of the parliament, are suspected of receiving large sums of money and gifts from Qatar to influence decisions in the European Parliament. It exposes the reality that some countries and interest groups' wield a secret and powerful influence on the European Parliament. As former MEP Michiel van Hulst said, "The Parliament is easily accessible and it has become an attractive ground for all kinds of lobbyists." Today, as the geopolitical situation is becoming tense and European politics is increasingly ideological, incidents involving infiltration and interference such as the Qatargate will greatly impact the sensitive nerves of EU institutions. The European Parliament is obligated to conduct a detailed investigation into it and formulate a corresponding transparent mechanism to prevent similar incidents from happening again. President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola has promised to introduce new ethical rules and unveil "wide-ranging reform package" in the European Parliament. However, it will be unrealistic to expect the European Parliament to make fundamental reforms. Like parliaments of Western countries, lobbying by various interest groups is a normal operation of EU-level legislative bodies. Enterprises and non-governmental organizations are not the only ones to influence legislators in the form of discussion and cooperation, many parliamentarians themselves are also keen to contact various lobbyists in order to seek policy influence, and even look forward to obtaining high-paying corporate consulting jobs through

the "revolving door" mechanism. A reform may undermine the cheese of quite a few people. Yet Orbán's remarks represent the dissatisfaction of some people and member states which have become disillusioned with the parliament. The European Parliament is supposed to represent the voice of the people. But over the past years, a growing number of MEPs have been putting forward increasingly radical proposals and views on diplomacy, environment, human rights, and so on, in order to win eyeballs, making only limited contributions to resolving real problems of people's livelihood issues and social problems. On the other hand, MEPs are elected based on political support in their home countries. Excessively stressing so-called political correctness of the common interests rather than their own countries' interests may, in some cases, run counter to the practical interests of certain member states. At present, EU institutions and major powers are worried about the shortcomings of the EU's decision-making efficiency and consistency, believing that it will put the EU at a disadvantage in the complex international situation and geopolitical games. Reforms of the EU's political and decision-making mechanisms are regarded as the only way to realize "strategic autonomy" and promote in-depth development of European integration. However, there are still major disputes when reform is touched upon. Some hopes the decisions can be made unanimously. Some wish the majority can have the final say to raise efficiency. From a historical perspective of European integration, the development of the EU as a political experiment in building a sovereign state association is a cyclical process of constantly encountering problems and carrying out institutional innovation and repairs. Can the current EU continue to turn opportunities into further development momentum? To a large extent, it depends on whether it can adhere to promoting peace and seeking development in the continent. The author is a research fellow with the Institute of European Studies, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations. opinion@globaltimes.com.cn

Briefs

Zero chance of Pakistan's default: Dar

FROM PAGE 01
Dr. Shamsad Akhtar, its MD, Faukh H. Khan and Arif Habib. Dar condemned that certain elements involved in dirty politics were active in disinformation about the country's economic condition and created chaos where the people had started buying gold and dollars. He expressed his satisfaction with the listing of another RIET at PSX. However, he observed, Pakistan could not progress much on this account since the first REIT was listed in 2015. He referred India who had a high REIT portfolio. He said when he took over as the Federal Finance Minister on September 28, 2022, he identified the areas with a special focus on the corporate sector, the Security Exchange Commission of Pakistan and the Pakistan Stock Exchange. He regretted that SECP, which is the regulator of the capital market of the country, performed not satisfactorily over the last couple of years. However, he has taken certain concrete steps. During his previous tenure, Dar added, he along with his team worked hard and brought many amendments to the SCEP laws including its outdated Act. And, he continued, helped give a boost to the capital market of the country. He recalled the challenges in the merger of the Karachi Stock Exchange, Lahore Stock Exchange and Islamabad Stock Exchange into one entity branded as the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX), which helped the Pakistan stock market to emerge as the fifth leading market in the world.

Govt of technocrats not a...

FROM PAGE 01
However, PTI's members of the National and provincial assemblies have yet to process their resignations. Meanwhile, Khan expects the establishment's role in conducting general elections but also claims he is not in contact with them. "There is no contact with the establishment at this time," the ousted premier added. Warning against any political engineering in the next general election quoting the example of Bangladesh—formerly East Pakistan—the former PM said: "If political engineering is attempted in the next general election, then the results won't be good." He added, "The mandate of the largest party in East Pakistan was not accepted," Imran said, warning of dire consequences if his party's mandate is messed with. Circling back to his stance on the former chief of army staff General (ret'd) Qamar Javed Bajwa and his policies impacting the country's economy, the PTI chairman said that the ex-COAS did "great injustice" to Pakistan. "Gen Bajwa did great injustice to this country, we are standing close to default," he said, underlining how Pakistan's threat to default has increased to 90% which was 5% during his government.

Bajwa helped Imran to get NRO

FROM PAGE 01
On regularising Imran Khan's Bani Gala residence, he said the PTI chairman built his home in the area when there were no rules regulating such constructions. He explained that the apex court in the case had directed the CDA to make rules to regulate construction in the Banigala area. A source close to the retired COAS said that Gen (ret'd) Bajwa never contacted Nisar or the judiciary in this case. However, he alleged that a key intelligence officer saved Imran Khan from disqualification. In a recent TV talk show, Malik Ahmad Khan claimed that Gen (ret'd) Bajwa had given an NRO to Imran Khan. When asked about the nature of the alleged NRO, he said that Imran Khan should come forward and say under oath that he had not been given the NRO in the Bani Gala residence case when it was being heard by the court of the then Justice (ret'd) Saqib Nisar.

Williamson hits century as NZ past Pakistan's total

Abrar Ahmed was the pick of the bowlers for Pakistan, claiming three wickets, meanwhile Nauman Ali bagged two. Earlier, home side claimed two wickets in the second session of the day with spinners Abrar Ahmed and Nauman Ali bagging a scalp each

DNA

KARACHI: New Zealand have reached 440-6 at stumps on day three of the first Test against Pakistan in Karachi. The visitors lead by two runs after Pakistan were dismissed for 438 in their first innings. Williamson was the star of the show with the bat on the third day after scoring a well-deserved century. This was his 25th Test ton and fifth against Pakistan in the longest format of the game. Williamson and Ish

Sodhi were unbeaten on 105 and one, respectively, at the close of play.

Abrar Ahmed was the pick of the bowlers for Pakistan, claiming three wickets, meanwhile Nauman Ali bagged two. Earlier, the home side claimed two wickets in the second session of the day with spinners Abrar Ahmed and Nauman Ali bagging a scalp each. Henry Nicholls was cleaned up by Nauman after scoring 22 runs, meanwhile Abrar sent Daryl Mitchell, 42 off 47, back to hut. New Zealand

lost two wickets in the morning session after resuming their first innings on 165-0.

Tom Latham was sent back to the hut by Abrar Ahmed but not before scoring a brilliant century. The left-hander notched up 113 runs with the help of 10 fours. Meanwhile, Devon Conway fell eight runs short of his ton after he was trapped before the stumps by Nauman Ali. Latham and Conway added an impressive 183 runs for the first wicket to provide a solid platform to their side. Pakistan were dismissed

for 438 in their first innings of the opening Test against New Zealand in Karachi on Tuesday.

Babar Azam, 161, and Agha Salman, 103, scored centuries for the hosts. Salman was the last Pakistan player to be dismissed but not before scoring his maiden ton in the longest format of the game. He was the star of the show on the second day of the match after skipper Azam was dismissed, without adding to his overnight score, in the first over of the day. Salman's 155-ball 103 included 17 fours.

He added 54 crucial runs for the seventh wicket with Nauman Ali, who played a gritty knock of seven runs in 75 balls.

The visitors were in a position to dismiss Pakistan for less than 400 but Salman added 63 runs for the final two wickets, with the tailenders, to frustrate the Kiwis. Tim Southee claimed three wickets, meanwhile Ish Sodhi, Michael Bracewell and Ajax Patel bagged two scalps each.



PTI ready for parliamentary role: Qureshi

FROM PAGE 01
Addressing the PPP chief's charge against Imran Khan, the PTI leader said, "The establishment is apolitical. How can we contact them?" Responding to Bilawal's statement urging the PTI to rejoin the parliament, Qureshi said that Bilawal could not invite the party to join the parliament as it is the prerogative of the prime minister. Censuring Imran Khan, Bilawal said that it was the final warning to the puppet—a clear reference to the PTI chief—to return to parliament and join the NAB and elections reforms. The PPP chairman said that he does not want the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to be used against Imran Khan. "Therefore, you [Imran] should come back to parliament. Otherwise, we will not be in a position to prevent them from doing what they do," he warned. Reacting to Bilawal's remarks against PTI and Imran Khan, senior leader Fawad Chaudhry called the PPP leaders "the puppets of the establishment". Taking to Twitter, the PTI leader said, "The puppets of the establishment set up a farce at the mausoleum of Benazir Bhutto today."

Army top brass resolves...

FROM PAGE 01
CCC in Rawalpindi, the first chaired by Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir, who took up the charge as the military's head last month. At the conference, which took place from December 27-28, a comprehensive review of professional and organisational matters of the army was undertaken, according to a statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). "It was resolved to fight against terrorists without any distinction and eliminate this menace as per the aspirations of the people of Pakistan," the military's media wing added. The development comes after several terror attacks took place across Pakistan, with most of them in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, worrying the nation of a rise in terrorism. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also recently reiterated his resolve to uproot the menace of terrorism by using all resources available in Pakistan. "We are working hard to prevent them. We will employ all resources to uproot terrorism to bring peace in Pakistan," the premier added. Recently, the Islamabad Police came up with a "special security plan" after a suicide attack left a cop martyred and injured several others.

Imran's narrative reflects...

FROM PAGE 01
prime minister through backdoor. "Khan Sahib's first obstinacy and conspiracy was to hold elections in the presence of his facilitators sitting in the Establishment and he came out successful," he added. The foreign minister said the PTI chairman had no more facilitators in the Establishment, adding that he might have facilitators in any other institution. On Tuesday, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman said some people were trying to tear the country apart through baseless political narratives. "Bilawal House, not White House ousted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan from power," he said. Addressing the party's power show at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh to mark the 15th death anniversary of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, he said those behind her mother's assassination wanted to halt PPP's journey for supremacy of the democracy, adding that he would take his mother's mission forward. Praising "jijalas", he said the losses loyalty to Benazir proved that they had not forgotten her political ideas. "My mother was a patriotic Pakistani and her name was carved not only in country's history but across the world. She was the voice of the poor, an ambassador for the destitute, a true supporter of democracy, and a strong answer to terrorists," said Bilawal. "It is our responsibility to follow Bibi's vision and achieve the mission she had set out on," the PPP chairman stressed.

ICC Awards 2022 set to launch with announcements of nominees

ISLAMABAD: The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday announced the upcoming program for the ICC Awards 2022, which seeks to celebrate the outstanding cricketers who excelled on the world stage during the calendar year. The year saw many memorable moments and performances across the global game, including the thrilling action which characterised the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in New Zealand, and the incredible drama of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Australia, the ICC said in a press release. The ICC Awards 2022 will comprise a total of 13 categories, with awards honouring individuals who shone in specific formats, and also across multiple formats in the overall categories—the coveted Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year, and the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year.



International Cricket Council

Shortlist Announcements:

Shortlists for nine of the 13 categories will be revealed between 28 – 30 December on ICC official channels. Each shortlists will feature four names. 28 December sees the shortlists for ICC Emerging Men's and Women's Cricketers of the Year revealed. 29 December sees nominees announced for the Men's and Women's ODI Cricketers of the Year, and the Men's and Women's T20I Cricketers of the Year. 30 December will see the final shortlist revealed, the ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year, the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year, and the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year. Shortlists for these categories have been determined by a specialist panel of cricket writers and broadcasters, who identified the star performers based on statistics and overall achievements in international cricket throughout the calendar year.

Voting: Voting in the ICC Awards 2022 will then commence in early January 2023, where a wider selection of global media representatives, the ICC Voting Academy, will submit their selections alongside global cricket fans, who will once again be

encouraged to vote at icc-cricket.com for their winners. Results of the ICC Voting Academy selections and the fans' votes will be combined to determine the winner in each of these nine categories. ICC Men's and Women's Associate Cricketers of the Year will also be announced from the action in 2022. These categories will not feature shortlists and will be determined solely by the ICC Voting Academy. Also announced as part of the ICC Awards is the ICC Spirit of Cricket Award. This accolade honours an action, moment, gesture, or decision on the field of play in international cricket during the year which best reflects the Spirit of Cricket, with the winning entry selected by the ICC. Finally, the ICC Umpire of the Year Award will celebrate the outstanding umpire from the calendar year. This award is determined by votes collected from the Emirates Elite Panel of Match Referees, as well as playing captains from ICC Full Member nations. In addition to the individual awards, five ICC Teams of the Year will be also decided by the ICC Voting Academy, identifying the standout XIs from the international stage in men's and women's cricket. Following the conclusion of the voting period, winners of the ICC Awards 2022 will be announced later in January 2023.

PCB rejects Raja's claims about Sethi's expenses



LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has hit back at former chairman Ramiz Raja after the latter's comparison about his and the current chairman Najam Sethi's expenses. The PCB believes that comparison "is misleading and inaccurate as the circumstances are incomparable". Pakistan Super League 2016 to 2018 were held offshore, implying many visits to the UAE to organise the marquee tournament. However, no PSL allowances have ever been paid to Sethi and this information has been merely presented as a potential payable. In contrast, PSL 2022 was held under former Chairman Raja and was staged only in Karachi and Lahore. Foreign tour expenses are high for Sethi as during his previous tenure, PSL and Pakistan's home international matches was played outside Pakistan. Therefore, the current Chairman was required to make frequent visits to the UAE for PSL and bilateral series and for related meetings. All travel expenses were approved by the appropriate authorities and were duly audited (internally and externally). Car allowance was paid to Sethi as per the Board of Governor's approval as he had used his personal armoured vehicle due to security threats. On the contrary, the PCB provided Raja a brand new armoured vehicle costing Rs16.5 million. Security expense of Sethi was high owing to additional security that needed to be provided to him as he was a former CM of the Punjab province and the IB and Special Branch Punjab had issued advised of threats to him. It is pertinent to remember that Sethi had sent a legal notice to the PCB regarding the table of expenses as soon as these were made public through the PCB corporate website. The above five points clearly establish there were absolutely no improprieties in Sethi's expenses during his previous tenure. Complete list of Sethi's achievements during his previous tenure will be shared in due course. The PCB expects following above explanations, former Chairman Raja will refrain from leveling unsubstantiated and baseless allegations against Sethi, which can potentially damage cricket brand, the organisation as well as its figurehead. — DNA

Andy Murray astonished by British-Iranian hostage's support

LONDON: Andy Murray revealed his amazement Wednesday at how a British-Iranian citizen watched his 2016 Wimbledon singles triumph while in solitary confinement in a Tehran prison. Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe spent six years in jail before being freed in March after Britain agreed to pay a longstanding debt to Iran. She was imprisoned for allegedly plotting to overthrow the Iranian government and for propaganda against Iran, charges she has always denied. Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 44, was asked to be one of the guest editors of the Today programme on BBC Radio Four during the Christmas and New Year period and in that capacity interviewed British tennis great Murray in an edition broadcast Wednesday. — APP

Australia eye victory after Carey century in 2nd South Africa Test

MELBOURNE: Australia closed in on winning the second Test and the series against South Africa on Wednesday after Alex Carey struck a maiden century to leave them in a commanding position. The hosts declared at tea on 575-8 on day three with an ominous lead of 386 after South Africa were bowled out in their first innings for 189. In reply, the Proteas were 15-1 when play was abandoned early at the Melbourne Cricket Ground due to persistent drizzle. Their bid to save the Test, and the three-match series after losing the opener in Brisbane, got off to a horror start with under-pressure skipper Dean Elgar caught by Carey off Pat Cummins without scoring in the second over. Theunis de Bruyn, who was dropped by David Warner on three, was not out six alongside Sarel Erwee on seven. Wicketkeeper Carey, playing in his 14th Test, was superb in reaching three figures for the first time before he was caught and bowled by Marco Jansen for 111. At the declaration, a battling Cameron Green was not out 51 despite a fractured finger, alongside Mitchell Starc on 10. "It was nice to be able to consolidate from our start from yesterday," Carey, only the second wicketkeeper to make a Test century at the MCG after Rod Marsh, told reporters. "This one's really special, obviously it's a big moment. But it's also great to help the Australian cricket team be in a strong position. That's what we play for, to win games." Carey and Green piled on the misery in a 117-run partnership after South Africa gave themselves a glimmer of hope with early wickets, including Warner first ball after he resumed on 200. Australia began on 386-3 with Travis Head on 48 and Carey on nine after a herculean unbeaten double century from Warner in his 100th Test in gruelling heat on day two. — APP

26th CNS Open Golf Championship kicks off

DNA

KARACHI: The Opening Ceremony and Media Brief of 26th Chief of the Naval Staff Open Golf Championship held today at picturesque Karachi Golf Club (KGC). Commander Karachi Rear Admiral Mian Zakirullah Jan graced the occasion as Guest of Honour and inaugurated the championship. During the media brief, the Patron Pakistan Navy Golf (South), Cdre Muhammad Irfan Taj apprised on salient of championship scheduled from 29 Dec 22 to 01 Jan 23 and its conduct in various categories. The Golf Championship will be played in professionals, amateurs, veterans, ladies and junior categories. For Professional and amateurs categories, the tournament will be contested for 72 holes matches. 36 holes by senior professionals and 18



holes matches for juniors and ladies whereas, 9 holes matches will be contested among veterans. In 1995, Pakistan Navy instituted Chief of the Naval Staff Open Golf Championship at Karachi Golf Club (KGC), to add a national level Golf event in the calendar of Pakistan Golf Federation. Ever since, it has become a regular and major event of national golf circuit. Such events provide a unique opportunity to showcase Pakistan's positive image to the world as a peace and sports loving nation. This also helps in generating healthy activities in the society. The regular conduct of this event is the manifestation of PN's commitment towards the promotion of golf at national and international level. The Opening Ceremony was attended by civil & military dignitaries, sponsors, golf players and media representatives.

Briefs

Philippine rain, flooding caused 25 deaths

MANILA: The death toll from heavy rains and floods that devastated parts of the Philippines over the Christmas weekend has risen to 25, with 26 others still missing, the national disaster response agency said Wednesday. Nearly 400,000 people were affected, with over 81,000 still in shelters and nine others injured, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said. Sixteen of the 25 deaths were reported in Northern Mindanao region in the south, while 12 of the 26 missing are from the eastern Bicol region, the council added. A shear line — the point where warm and cold air meet — triggered rains in parts of eastern, central and southern Philippines, the state weather bureau PAGASA said. The weather disturbance disrupted Christmas celebration in affected provinces, with photos from the southern province of Misamis Occidental showing rescuers carrying an elderly woman on a plastic chair as they waded through a flooded street. Some residents in the province were seen hanging on to floaters as coast guard rescuers pulled them across chest-deep flood using a rope. The disaster management council said 1,196 houses were damaged by the floods, while sections of 123 roads and 12 bridges were affected. Some areas remain without power or water supply. While the effect of the shear line has weakened, a new low pressure area may bring moderate to heavy rains within the next 24 hours to the same areas affected by the Christmas weekend floods. The weather bureau said Wednesday that flooding and landslides are likely, especially in areas with significant prior rainfall. Each year about 20 typhoons and storms batter the Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries. The archipelago is located on the "Ring of Fire" along the Pacific Ocean's rim, where many volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur.—DNA

Taiwan extends compulsory military service

TAIPEI: Taiwan will extend its compulsory military service from four months to a year starting in 2024, President Tsai Ing-wen said Tuesday, as the self-ruled island faces China's military, diplomatic and trade pressure. Taiwan, which split from the mainland in 1949 during a civil war, is claimed by China. The decades-old threat of invasion by China has sharpened since Beijing cut off communications with Taiwan's government after the 2016 election of Tsai, who is seen as pro-independence. China's People's Liberation Army in particular has stepped up its military harassment, sending fighter planes and navy vessels toward Taiwan on a near-daily basis in recent years. In response, the island's military actively tracks those movements, which often serves as training for its own military personnel. The longer military service applies to men born after 2005, and will start Jan. 1, 2024. Those born before 2005 will continue to serve four months, but under a revamped training curriculum aimed at strengthening the island's reserves forces. "No one wants war," Tsai said. "This is true of Taiwan's government and people, and the global community, but peace does not come from the sky, and Taiwan is at the front lines of the expansion of authoritarianism." The White House welcomed the announcement on conscription reform, saying it underscores Taiwan's commitment to self-defense and strengthens deterrence. "We will continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability in line with our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act and our one-China policy," the White House said, adding it continues to oppose any unilateral changes in the status quo by either China or Taiwan. Beijing has often used military exercises to respond to moves it views as challenging its claims to sovereignty.—DNA

Peace talks with Armenia made 'little progress' in 2022

This was the provocation of people describing themselves as Armenian leaders because we had an agreement on this matter and the Russian peacekeeping contingent was also informed in advance," Bayramov explained

NEWS DESK

BAKU: The peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia made very "little progress" this year because of Armenia's unconstructive attitude, according to Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov. Speaking at a press conference in Baku Tuesday, Bayramov looked back on 2022 and emphasized his country has "successfully" maintained an "independent, open, pragmatic foreign policy based on national interests" and further improved its relations with neighboring countries throughout the year. "There were various platforms set up in 2022 for peace talks," Bayramov said in response to a question about France's attempts to act as a mediator between Azerbaijan and Armenia. "Achieving results is what's important for us. Negotiations must be focused on results. It's not a priority for us to focus on a singular platform but we also cannot accept platforms that in-

clude unobjective and unfair states," Bayramov noted. The Azerbaijani diplomat also remarked on the latest flareup in tensions between the rival nations involving the blockade of the Lachin corridor in Karabakh, a region that has locked the South Caucasus neighbors in a decades-old conflict over its control. Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan but was illegally occupied by Armenia for three decades until 2020. Baku and Yerevan fought two wars over the territory in the 1990s and again in the autumn of 2020 when six weeks of particularly intense clashes claimed over 6,500 lives before a Russian-brokered truce ended the hostilities. Under the 2020 deal, Armenia ceded swathes of territory it had illegally occupied for decades and Russia stationed a force of 2,000 peacekeepers in the region to oversee a fragile truce. Since mid-December, a group of Azerbaijani activists has been protesting



illegal mining that has been causing environmental damage in the region. Baku has said it struck a deal with the Russian peacekeeping contingent earlier in December for its experts to probe the K z blubak gold mine and the Demirli copper mine on Azerbaijani lands housing Armenians on grounds that looting and illegal exploitation were observed but both the activists and the experts were barred access to the area. "It was the Armenians preventing Azerbaijani experts from entering the region. This was

the provocation of people describing themselves as Armenian leaders because we had an agreement on this matter and the Russian peacekeeping contingent was also informed in advance," Bayramov explained. "Since nothing yielded results, Azerbaijani environmentalists began protesting. They are expressing their objections for entirely justified reasons," he said. He further pointed out the presence of armed Armenian groups on lands liberated from Armenia. "According to the trilateral memorandum

(of January 2021), Armenia must remove those groups from the region. Yerevan is violating its obligations under the deal and raising tensions in the area. One of the reasons why tensions climbed in Karabakh is the activities of illegal armed groups there," Bayramov said. The minister also shut down Russia's suggestion to "leave the issue of Karabakh's status to the upcoming years" as "unacceptable" for Azerbaijan. He assured Baku would facilitate "all rights" granted to other citizens to the Armenian population in Karabakh, as well. "We will not accept in any way Ruben Vardanyan, who calls himself the new leader of Karabakh Armenia but having no connection to the region, as an interlocutor," he stressed. Bayramov praised the "comprehensive allyship" between his country and Türkiye saying relations were maintained "successfully" throughout 2022. "In all prominent fields concerning the Shusha Declaration, joint works were conducted and new documents were crafted with Türkiye," he noted. Under the Shusha Declaration

signed after the Second Karabakh War, Ankara and Baku pledged that if one party was attacked, the other would assist. Indeed, the two countries held over 20 joint military exercises in 2022, as recently as on Dec. 5 to ensure coordination of units and exchange experience. Furthermore, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev paid three visits to Türkiye while President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made the journey to Azerbaijan twice this year, Bayramov noted. "Azerbaijan is developing its cooperation with Russia, Georgia and Central Asian nations as we continue efforts to advance ties with Iran," he said, adding that their contacts with European countries, the U.S. and China also continued throughout 2022. When asked about Armenia's blocking of the proposed Zangezur Corridor which envisages connecting the western Azerbaijani cities with Nakhchivan, Bayramov said, "As per a deal with Iran, a bridge is being constructed on the Aras River and it will be a short alternative path from Zangilan to Nakhchivan.

Italian PM invites Zelensky to Rome

ROME: Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni invited Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Rome and confirmed her intention to visit Kyiv, an official statement said on Tuesday. In a phone call with the Ukrainian leader, Meloni "renewed the Italian Government's full support for Kyiv in political, military, economic and humanitarian terms and with regard to restoring energy infrastructure and the future reconstruction of Ukraine," said the statement from her office. Meloni also reiterated "Italy's utmost commitment to all actions to help achieve a just peace for the Ukrainian nation." The invitation came after Zelenskyy's visit to the US last week, his first overseas trip since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine in February.—DNA

7 dead as car smashes into Nigerian carnival

PORT HARCOURT: Seven people were killed and more than two dozen injured when a car ploughed into a popular carnival at Calabar in southeast Nigeria, the local head of highway security said. "The incident occurred when a Toyota Camry car lost control and ramed into (a) crowd of onlookers," Maikano Hassan, the local commander of the Federal Road Safety Corps, said in a statement. Seven people died and 29 were injured on Tuesday, some of them critically, according to the statement. The injured included three girls and two boys. The incident happened as the crowd were watching a motorcyclists' parade in front of a mosque in the district of Bogobiri. Calabar, the capital of Cross River state, hosts one of West Africa's most prestigious carnivals each December. The official site says that the event draws nearly two million revellers annually. The governor of Cross River, Ben Ayade, urged police to apprehend the driver, who he said sped off after "the accident." He also ordered them to investigate how the driver was able to enter an area that was supposed to have been closed off for the carnival.—APP

Europe stocks climb as London plays catch-up

LONDON: European stocks rose Wednesday, as London played catch-up with Frankfurt and Paris after a long Christmas break. The British market firmed one percent higher, compared with the closing level on Friday. In the eurozone, Paris won 0.2 percent and Frankfurt added 0.1 percent to extend solid gains on Tuesday. "UK markets have reopened higher, playing catch up," said Victoria Scholar, investment head at Interactive Investor. AvaTrade analyst Naem Aslam cautioned however that "trading volume continues to remain on the low side" with many investors away for an extended holiday. Oil prices fell one day after China's moves to reopen had sparked hopes for renewed demand from the world's biggest importer of crude, while traders remain on edge over Russian supplies. Elsewhere, Asian markets mostly fell Wednesday after a mixed Wall Street session, as China's move to reopen also revived inflation worries. China has abruptly reversed tight pandemic curbs that kept the world's second-largest economy isolated for three years. On Monday, Beijing announced it was ending quarantine measures for overseas arrivals from January 8, the latest move to loosen its zero-Covid regime, after it dropped mandatory testing and lockdowns earlier this month. China's scrapping of curbs has spurred hopes for its economic revival. "The good news is that inflation subsides as China reprises its role as a supplier of low-cost goods globally and supply chain bottlenecks ease," said analyst Stephen Innes of SPI Asset Management. However, he also warned that China's accelerating demand would push up prices for commodities, in turn further fuelling global inflation.—APP

China to resume issuing visas as virus curbs ease

NEWS DESK

BEIJING: China says it will resume issuing passports for tourism in another big step away from anti-virus controls that isolated the country for almost three years, setting up a potential flood of Chinese going abroad for next month's Lunar New Year holiday. The announcement Tuesday adds to abrupt changes that are rolling back some of the world's strictest anti-virus controls as President Xi Jinping's government tries to reverse an economic slump. Rules that confined millions of people to their homes kept China's infection rate low but fueled public frustration and crushed economic growth. The latest decision could send free-spending Chinese tourists to revenue-starved destinations

in Asia and Europe for Lunar New Year, which begins Jan. 22 and usually is the country's busiest travel season. But it also presents a danger they might spread COVID-19 as infections surge in China. Travel services companies Trip.com and Qunar said international ticket bookings and searches for visa information on their websites rose five to eight times after Tuesday's announcement. Top destinations included Japan, Thailand, South Korea, the United States, Britain and Australia. Japan, India, South Korea and Taiwan have responded to the Chinese wave of infections by requiring virus tests for visitors from China. China stopped issuing visas to foreigners and passports to its own people at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early

2020. The National Immigration Administration of China said it will start taking applications Jan. 8 for passports for tourists to go abroad. The agency said it will take applications to extend, renew or reissue visas but gave no indication when they might be issued to first-time applicants. China will "gradually resume" admitting foreign visitors, the agency said. It gave no indication when tourist travel from abroad might resume. The changes will "create better conditions for orderly cross-border travel" and "bring more benefits to global economic development," said a Foreign Ministry spokesman, Wang Wenbin. China will "work with all countries" to "restore safety and stability to global industrial and supply chains and promote world economic recovery," Wang

said. Health experts and economists expect the ruling Communist Party to keep limits on travel into China until at least mid-2023 while it carries out a campaign to vaccinate millions of elderly people. Experts say that is necessary to prevent a public health crisis. During the pandemic, Chinese with family emergencies or work travel deemed important could obtain passports, but some students and businesspeople with visas to go to foreign countries were blocked by border guards from leaving. The handful of foreign businesspeople and others who were allowed into China were quarantined for up to one week. Before the pandemic, China was the biggest source of foreign tourists for most of its Asian neighbors and an important market for Europe and the United States

Kosovo shuts border crossing with Serbia

BELGRADE: Kosovo has closed its biggest border crossing after protesters blocked it on the Serbian side to support their ethnic kin in Kosovo in refusing to recognise the country's independence. Wednesday's move has left only three entry points between the two countries open, with two other crossings on the Serbian border closed by similar protests on their Kosovar sides since December 10. The latest protest came hours after Serbia said it had put its army on the highest possible level of alert following weeks of escalating tensions between Belgrade and Pristina. Serbs in Serbia used a truck and tractors on Tuesday to create the latest roadblock, close to the Merdare crossing on Kosovo's eastern border, Belgrade-based media reported. The obstruction is preventing thousands of Kosovars who work elsewhere in Europe from returning home for holidays. About 50,000 Serbs living in ethnically divided northern Kosovo refuse to recognise the government in Pristina or the status of Kosovo as a country separate from Serbia. They have the support of many Serbs in Serbia and its government. "If you have already entered Serbia then you have to use other border crossings ... or go through North Macedonia," Kosovo's foreign ministry said on its Facebook page, announcing the closure of the Merdare crossing. The closure took effect at midnight, though the crossing was apparently already unusable. The Merdare entry point is Kosovo's most important for road freight. The country has international rail links. Since December 10, Serbs in northern Kosovo have exchanged fire with police and erected more than 10 roadblocks in and around Mitrovica.—Agencies

French minister in Ukraine to boost support

KYIV, Ukraine: France's defense minister arrived in Kyiv on Wednesday to discuss further military support for Ukraine, insisting the French government's backing is unflagging while efforts are made to reach an eventual negotiated end to Russia's invasion. French Minister for the Armed Forces Sebastien Lecornu traveled to Ukraine's capital after a trip to Poland, where he announced a deal Tuesday to sell Poland two French-made military satellites. In Kyiv, Lecornu laid a wreath at a heroes' monument to pay homage to Ukrainians who have died defending their country against Russia's invasion. He was scheduled to meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and army officials. While France has been less vocal about its military support for Ukraine than the United States and Britain, the country has sent a steady supply of weapons to Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24. France also hosted two aid conferences for Ukraine this month. But many in Ukraine remain critical of the French government's response to the war because of President Emmanuel Macron's efforts to maintain contact with Russian President Vladimir Putin and seek a negotiated solution. "Our support for Ukraine has been constant," Lecornu tweeted ahead of his trip. It was not immediately clear what concrete deals Lecornu's talks in Kyiv might produce. He came to Ukraine a week after Zelenskyy visited the U.S., Ukraine's chief ally, and with the fighting focused mostly in the country's east but neither Moscow nor Kyiv reporting major gains in recent weeks.—APP



MINSK: Pakistan ambassador to Belarus Sajjad Haider meets Al na Grishkevich, journalist from BelTA (Belarusian state owned news agency). Ambassador presented Russian translation of poetry of "Faiz Ahmed Faiz" laureate of Lenin Peace Prize in 1962.—DNA

US Supreme Court keeps asylum limits in place

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: The Supreme Court is keeping pandemic-era limits on asylum in place for now, dashing hopes of migrants who have been fleeing violence and inequality in Latin America and elsewhere to reach the United States. Tuesday's ruling preserves a major Trump-era policy that was scheduled to expire under a judge's order on Dec. 21. The case will be argued in February and a stay imposed last week by Chief Justice John Roberts will remain in place until the justices make a decision. The limits, often known as Title 42 in reference to a 1944 public health law, were put in place under then-President Donald Trump at the beginning of the pandemic, but unwinding it has taken a torturous route through the courts. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention attempted to end the policy in April 2022, but a federal judge in Louisiana sided with 19 Republican-led states in

May to order it kept in place. Another federal judge in Washington said in November that Title 42 must end, sending the dispute to the Supreme Court. Officials have expelled asylum-seekers inside the United States 2.5 million times on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19. Immigration advocates sued to end the policy, saying it goes against American and international obligations to people fleeing to the U.S. to escape persecution. They've also argued that the policy is outdated as coronavirus treatments improve. The Supreme Court's 5-4 decision comes as thousands of migrants have gathered on the Mexican side of the border, filling shelters and worrying advocates who are scrambling to figure out how to care for them. "We are deeply disappointed for all the desperate asylum seekers who will continue to suffer because of Title 42, but we will continue fighting to eventually end the policy," said Lee Gelernt, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union, which had been arguing to end Title 42's

use. Andrea Rudnik, co-founder of non-profit immigration aid organization Team Brownsville in South Texas, said the situation at the border is a humanitarian crisis. She said there are thousands of migrants camped on cardboard boxes and in makeshift tents near the entrance of the Gateway International Bridge in Matamoros, Mexico, opposite Brownsville, without food, water, clothing or bathrooms. "It is very readily becoming a dangerous situation because there's no toilets," Rudnik said. "Get that many people together with no bathrooms and you know what you have got." States that wanted Title 42 kept in place hailed the outcome. In a press release Tuesday, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds praised the court's decision while saying it's not a permanent solution to the country's immigration woes. "I'm grateful that Title 42 remains in place to help deter illegal entry at the US southern border. But make no mistake — this is only a temporary fix to a crisis that President Biden and his administration

have ignored for two years," she said. The Supreme Court's decision said that the court will review the issue of whether the states have the right to intervene in the legal fight over Title 42. Both the federal government and immigration advocates have argued that the states waited too long to intervene and — even if they hadn't waited so long — that they don't have sufficient standing to intervene. In the dissent, Justices Neil Gorsuch and Ketanji Brown Jackson wrote that even if the court were to find the states have the right to intervene and Title 42 was lawfully adopted "... the emergency on which those orders were premised has long since lapsed." The justices said the "current border crisis is not a COVID crisis." "And courts should not be in the business of perpetuating administrative edicts designed for one emergency only because elected officials have failed to address a different emergency. We are a court of law, not policymakers of last resort," the justices wrote. Justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor also voted to

deny the stay but did not sign a dissent. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Tuesday that President Joe Biden's administration "will, of course, comply with the order and prepare for the Court's review." "At the same time, we are advancing our preparations to manage the border in a secure, orderly, and humane way when Title 42 eventually lifts and will continue expanding legal pathways for immigration," Jean-Pierre added. "Title 42 is a public health measure, not an immigration enforcement measure, and it should not be extended indefinitely." In November, a federal judge sided with advocates and set a Dec. 21 deadline to end the policy. Conservative-leaning states appealed to the Supreme Court, warning that an increase in migration would take a toll on public services and cause an "unprecedented calamity" that they said the federal government had no plan to deal with. Roberts, who handles emergency matters that come from federal courts in the nation's capital.

Briefs

China Covid pivot sparks jitters worldwide

BEIJING: Beijing's sudden pivot away from containing Covid-19 has caused jitters around the world, with the United States saying it may restrict travel from China following its decision to end mandatory quarantine for overseas arrivals. China late Monday scrapped quarantine for inbound travellers from January 8 onwards, dismantling the last remaining piece of its stringent zero-Covid policy and ending some of the world's harshest border restrictions. The move was greeted with jubilation by Chinese citizens, who rushed to book international flights, triggering a surge in ticket prices. Hospitals and crematoriums across China continue to be overwhelmed by an influx of mostly elderly people. AFP reporters saw dozens of mostly elderly Covid patients lying on gurneys in overflowing hospital emergency wards in Tianjin, 140 kilometres (87 miles) south-west of the capital Beijing Wednesday. Medical staff are "pretty much all" expected to continue working despite testing positive for the virus, one doctor said. Other countries have expressed concerns about the potential for new variants to emerge as China battles the world's biggest surge in infections. US officials said late Tuesday they were considering Covid entry restrictions on travellers from China, after countries including Japan and India introduced PCR testing on arrival for Chinese passengers. - APP

Four illegal Chinese gold miners arrested Mali

DOUALA: Four illegal Chinese gold miners have been arrested in southern Mali, an official said on Tuesday. The men were arrested by forest officials of the Environment Ministry on the night of Dec. 21-22 in a forest in Kekoro. Diakaridia Yossi, the ministry spokesman, told Anadolu Agency that the operation was held as part of a fight against illegal gold miners in the classified forests. Yossi said that the arrested persons had been operating for months during which they "savagely destroyed" several parts of the classified forest of Kekoro, located about 200 kilometers (124 miles) from Bougouni. He said that bulldozers, pickup vehicles and shotguns found at the site were also seized. This is "a real environmental scandal," he said. More than 100 foreign nationals have been arrested for illegal mining in Mali for several years, according to the ministry in charge of mines. - APP

Minister: Ukraine aims to develop air-to-air combat drones

KYIV: Ukraine has bought some 1,400 drones, mostly for reconnaissance, and plans to develop combat models that can attack the exploding drones Russia has used during its invasion of the country, according to the Ukrainian government minister in charge of technology. In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov described Russia's war in Ukraine as the first major war of the internet age. He credited drones and satellite internet systems like Elon Musk's Starlink with having transformed the conflict. Ukraine has purchased drones like the Fly Eye, a small unmanned aerial vehicle used for intelligence, battlefield surveillance and reconnaissance. "And the next stage, now that we are more or less equipped with reconnaissance drones, is strike drones," Fedorov said. "These are both exploding drones and drones that fly up to three to 10 kilometers and hit targets." He predicted "more missions with strike drones" in the future, but would not elaborate. "We are talking there about drones, UAVs, UAVs that we are developing in Ukraine. - APP

N. Korea's Kim lays out key goals to boost military power

The military apologized for failing to shoot down the drones and President Yoon Suk Yeol called for stronger air defenses and high-tech stealth drones to better monitor North Korea

NEWS DESK

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un presented new plans to further bolster his military power next year at a meeting of top political officials, state media reported Wednesday, in an indication he'll continue his provocative run of weapons displays. Kim's statement came as animosities with rival South Korea rose sharply this week with the South accusing the North of flying drones across the border for the first time in five years. This year, North Korea already performed a record number of missile tests in what experts call an attempt to modernize its arsenal and increase its leverage in future dealings with the United States. During the Tuesday session at the ongoing plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party, Kim analyzed new security challenges in international politics and on the Korean Peninsula and clarified principles and directions to take in external relations and fights against enemies to protect national interests and sovereignty, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. Kim "set forth new key goals for bolstering the self-reliant defense capability to be pushed ahead in 2023 under the multi-laterally changing situation," KCNA said, without elaborating. Some observers say the new goals could be related to Kim's drive to expand his nuclear arsenal and acquire high-tech weapons systems such as multi-warhead missiles, a more agile long-



range weapon, a spy satellite and advanced drones. They say Kim would eventually aim to use his boosted nuclear power to force his rivals to accept the North as a legitimate nuclear state, a status he thinks is essential in getting international sanctions lifted. On Monday, South Korea's military fired warning shots and launched fighter jets and helicopters, after detecting what it called five North Korean drones that violated the South's airspace. South Korea also flew three drones across the border in response, Defense Minister Lee Jong-

Sup told lawmakers Wednesday. The military apologized for failing to shoot down the drones and President Yoon Suk Yeol called for stronger air defenses and high-tech stealth drones to better monitor North Korea. In a meeting with his advisers Wednesday, Yoon said South Korea must resolutely retaliate against any provocation by North Korea, saying that will be the most powerful means to deter the North. Yoon also said South Korea must not be intimidated by North Korea's nuclear weapons, according

to his spokesperson, Kim Eun-hye. Some experts say the North Korean drone flights might have been designed to test South Korea and U.S. readiness and nullify a previous inter-Korean agreement to reduce tensions at front-line areas. They say North Korea likely assessed its drones as a cheap yet effective method to cause security jitters and a domestic divide in South Korea. Yoon, a conservative who took office in May, said Tuesday that South Korea has had little anti-drone training since 2017, a year when his liberal predecessor Moon Jae-in was inaugurated. In an apparent effort to blame the allegedly lax air defenses on Moon's engagement policy toward North Korea, Yoon said, "I think our people must have seen well how dangerous a policy relying on the North's good faith and (peace) agreements would be." Moon's liberal opposition Democratic Party accused the president of trying to shift blame. Under a five-year arms buildup plan announced Wednesday, South Korea's Defense Ministry said it'll push to bolster its so-called three-axis system - preemptive strike, missile defense and retaliatory attack capabilities - to cope with North Korean nuclear threats. To do so, it said it'll procure more stealth fighter jets and submarines capable of firing ballistic missiles, operate additional interceptor missiles and radars, and develop more powerful, precision-guided weapons. It said South Korea will also procure diverse types of drones to strengthen its surveillance capacities.

No one can challenge Army's capabilities, says Ashrafi

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Special Representative for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Wednesday said no one could challenge the defensive capabilities of the Pakistan Army. He, talking to APP, commended the effective operation against terrorists at the Counter Terrorist Department Complex in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and asserted that the Pakistan Army was fully capable of thwarting and giving befitting response to the enemy's evil plans. He said Pakistan Army was leaving no stone unturned to deal with terrorists with iron hands. He termed the Pakistan Army the best military in the world, adding that Pakistan and its citizens were in safe hands. Ashrafi, who is also the chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council, said the nation was standing by Pakistan Army through thick and thin. He also assured the unwavering support of Ulema and Mashaykh to counter the anti-state propaganda at every nook and cranny of the country. Besides paying homage to personnel martyred during the operation in Bannu, he prayed to Allah Almighty to award them high ranks in Jannah and speedy recovery of the injured ones. - APP

Hong Kong scraps vaccine pass for travelers

HONG KONG: Hong Kong will scrap some of its COVID-19 restrictions, including PCR tests for inbound travelers and vaccination requirements to enter certain venues, the city's leader said Wednesday. For most of the pandemic, Hong Kong has aligned itself with China's "zero-COVID" strategy, requiring stringent COVID-19 tests and isolation for close contacts of infected cases as well as for incoming travelers. But the mainland has relaxed measures in recent weeks, and Hong Kong is preparing for the January reopening of its border with China, which had previously imposed harsh restrictions and snap lockdowns to stamp out the virus. "Our society as a whole has built an extensive and high-level barrier of immunity (to COVID-19)," said Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee at a news conference. Over 80% of the city has at least three doses of COVID-19 vaccine. Close contacts of those who test positive for COVID-19 will also no longer need to isolate in Hong Kong, he said, and there will no longer be a limit on the number of diners per table at restaurants. The relaxed measures will take effect from Thursday. Masks, however, will still need to be worn in public unless residents are exercising, as doing away with masks may lead to a surge in respiratory diseases like influenza just as Hong Kong faces a seasonal surge of flu cases, said Secretary of Health Lo Chung-mau at the news conference. - APP

Netanyahu finalises coalition deals

TEL AVIV: Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu has finalised coalition deals with allied parties, their spokespeople said, in final steps toward his political comeback at the head of one of the most right-wing governments in Israel's history. Netanyahu, whose bloc of nationalist and religious parties won a clear election victory last month, is expected to swear his new government in after his Likud party finalises two remaining deals. But even before starting his record sixth term in office, Netanyahu has sought to quell fears at home and abroad his emerging government will endanger minority rights, harm the judiciary and exacerbate the conflict with Palestinians. The coalition deals with pro-settler Religious Zionism and ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism have yet to be formally published, but leaked clauses, recent legislation and statements by future coalition members over the past few weeks have drawn wide criticism. - Agencies

Jordan king warns of 'red lines' in Jerusalem

FOREIGN DESK

AMMAN: Jordan's king says he is prepared for conflict should the status of Jerusalem's holy sites change as Israel prepares to swear in what is likely to be the most right-wing government in its history. King Abdullah II told US media in an exclusive interview that there is "concern" in his country about those in Israel trying to push for changes to his custodianship of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem, warning that he has "red lines." "If people want to get into a conflict with us, we're quite prepared," he said. "I always like to believe that, let's look at the glass half full, but we have certain red lines... And if people want to push those red lines, then we will deal with that." Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu's incoming government is expected to be the most right-wing in Israel's history and it includes controversial figures who were once considered to be on the extreme fringe of Israeli politics. This has caused concerns about the potential for an escalation in Israeli-Palestinian violence and for the future of Israel's relations with its Arab neighbors and Western allies. This year was already the deadliest for Palestinians and Israelis in nearly two decades, raising the specter of a new Palestinian uprising against Israel. "We have to be concerned about a next intifada (uprising)," said the king. "And if that happens, that's a complete breakdown of law and order and one that neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians will benefit from. I think there is a lot of concern from all of us in the region, including those in Israel that are on our side on this issue, to make sure that doesn't happen."

Israeli captured East Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 war but signed a peace treaty with it in 1994 under which it formally recognized Amman's special role at the city's holy sites. But the two have since had an uneasy relationship, with Jordan regularly accusing Israel of violating the agreement that gave it control of the sites and barred non-Muslims from praying there. Jordan's Hashemite monarchy has been the custodian of Jerusalem's holy sites since 1924 and sees itself as the guarantor of the religious rights of Muslims and Christians in the city. Tensions are highest over the compound known to Muslims as the Haram Al Sharif, which is called the Temple Mount by Jews. The site includes the Al Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam. The area is also the holiest site in Judaism. Politicians on the Israeli right often argue that Jews should also have a right to pray there. One of the most controversial figures in Israel's incoming government is Itamar Ben Gvir, who is set to become the national security minister and assume control over the police, including law enforcement at Jerusalem's holy sites. Ben Gvir has a long history of inciting violence against Palestinians and Arabs. He has been convicted of inciting anti-Arab racism and supporting terrorism and has openly called for changing the status quo at the holy sites. "I don't think those individuals are under just a Jordanian microscope," the king said, responding to a question about Ben Gvir's views. "I have to believe that there's a lot of people in Israel also that are concerned as much as we are." He refused to say how Jordan would respond to changes in the status of the holy sites.

Berlin pledges to ramp up sanctions against Moscow

BERLIN: Any business as usual with Russia is impossible in the near future due to the Ukraine conflict, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on Tuesday. She also vowed that Berlin and its allies would intensify sanctions pressure on Moscow. Speaking to Romania's Digi 24 TV Channel, the minister emphasized that "there can be no normal relations with this Russia" amid the fighting between Moscow and Kiev's forces and the stand-off with the West. EU would prefer "a peaceful and democratic Russia that does not pose a threat to its neighbors," Baerbock stated, adding that she harbors "no illusions" on the matter. "We are living in a different reality right now." Against this backdrop, the minister noted that the West should be engaged in the "permanent strengthening of our common security in the face of Russia." According to Baerbock, as long as Moscow wages "the brutal war of aggression," the West will gradually tighten its sanctions policy. However, she did not clarify what additional restrictions could be in the offing. She went on to add that Western capitals would support Ukraine "as long as necessary," providing it with arms, as well as humanitarian and financial aid, because the nation "defends the freedom of Europe." However, she struck a more cautious tone about Kiev's aspirations to join the EU. While hailing the bloc's decision



to grant Ukraine candidate status in June as a "historic moment," Baerbock admitted that "the road there will still be long and certainly sometimes difficult." To pave the way for Kiev's accession, Western countries are doing their best to help the nation harmonize its legal system with EU standards, she said. Following the start of Russia's military operation against Ukraine in late February, Germany has provided Ukraine with large amounts of weaponry and joined Western sanctions against Moscow. The restrictions targeted entire sectors of the Russian economy, particularly energy exports, while hundreds of senior officials were blacklisted, and about half of the nation's foreign exchange reserves were frozen, a move that was denounced by Moscow as essentially "theft." On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated that the EU is waging a "hybrid war" against Moscow, arguing that Brussels' policies have only hurt the interests of the bloc's citizens while bringing its relations with Russia to their "lowest point." - Agencies

We are taking away a bit of Pakistan within us

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD, United Nations Development Program UNDP-Pakistan and UNDP-Somalia organized a first-ever Somalia-Pakistan Ministerial Study Tour on Federalism, Devolution, and State-Building from December 20 to 27, 2022. The team attended seminars and learning sessions and visited various institutions such as NADRA, PIPS, the National Assembly of Pakistan, and others. The Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation (MOIFAR) of Somalia led the tour of honorable ministers representing both the Federal Government and Federal Member States including representatives of Banadir Regional Administration (BRA), His Excellency, Mr. Ahmed Moallim Fiqi Federal Minister, Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation, Federal Republic of Somalia was the lead focal person of the study tour. During the meeting on the last day of the study tour, the delegation met with Ms. Aliona Niculita, Resident Representative of

UNDP, Pakistan, and the UNDP team and briefed them about the activities and lessons learned during the extensive exercise with Pakistani experts and state institutions. Talking about the lessons learned, the Honorable Mr. Fiqi told the UNDP representatives that "we learned that federalism is an ongoing process, it never ends, and we keep on improving it." He also mentioned that the delegates learned practical things about the constitution review process and liked the ideas of "the Council of Common Interest, National Finance Commission, federal legislative lists which we will discuss with stakeholders in Somalia along with NADRA's role in developing our civil registry system". On the local government issues, the delegates mentioned that they learned a great deal about it in Pakistan and want to pursue it right from the start so that the federal structure does not become lopsided. H.E. Mr. Fiqi emphasized on the importance of bilateral enhancement of cultural, diplomatic, and development cooperation to strengthen relations between Pakistan. He

said: "I have visited many countries in Asia, but I liked Pakistan the most and we were treated with the utmost respect". From the Pakistan side, Mr. Zafarullah Khan and Dr. Kaiser Bengali mentioned that during their long career they never found such officials who take interest in the processes and ask thought-provoking questions. Ahmed Osman Aden, Deputy Minister of Interior Galmudug State, said that there is great potential for Pakistan to develop business-to-business relationships with Somalia since we are interested in textile and clothing and also in rice imports from Pakistan. Ms. Aliona Niculita, Resident Representative of UNDP, Pakistan thanked the delegates for their visit and assured them that UNDP Pakistan will continue to support such technical cooperation and knowledge-sharing arrangements as part of South-South cooperation modalities. The most important and pertinent point came from a delegate when it was said that they were taking away every bit of sweet memories from Pakistan and that they owed Pakistan a lot. In the end, Chairman

NADRA, Mr. Tariq Malik met with the Somali delegates at the Somali Embassy. He reviewed the progress on the civil registry assistance project of NADRA and assured the delegates that Pakistan will not only help Somalia in technical capacity building to develop and manage the civil registry but also in public policy development and deployment. "We look forward to working with federal member states of Somalia as well to assist in problem-solving at the sub-national levels", Tariq Malik added. H.E. Mr. Fiqi thanked NADRA for helping Somalia in developing state-of-the-art IT infrastructure and also for understanding the scope and scale of the national databases which can help rebuild state capacities for social protection mechanisms. Honorable Mr. Fiqi and other ministers vehemently thanked the experts such as Mian Raza Rabbani, Dr. Kaiser Bengali, Mr. Zafarullah Khan, Amjad Bhatti, and others who shared their intellectual resources and time with the delegates and helped delegation members know about Pakistan's experience of federalism.

100 Starlink satellites provide internet to Iran: Musk

NEW YORK: Elon Musk, the CEO of SpaceX and Twitter, said that about 100 Starlink satellites provide internet support in Iran. "Approaching 100 Starlinks active in Iran," the 51-year-old business magnate tweeted on Monday in response to images showing Iranian women walking outside with their hair uncovered, which is legally banned in the country. Earlier, Musk said he would deploy Starlink satellites to allow demonstrators to communicate in Iran, amid continuing protests that erupted after the death of a young woman who was in the custody of morality police after allegedly violating the Islamic dress code. Starlink, a satellite constellation operated by SpaceX, provides internet access with more than 3,300 mass-produced small satellites in low Earth orbit to 45 countries. Months-long protests hit Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini while in the custody of morality police this September. - APP