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FM talks to Afghan counterpart

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ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has held a telephone conversation with Acting

Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to offer condolences on the dastardly terrorist attack outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul, on Wednesday. Condemning the terrorist act in the strongest possible terms, the Foreign Minister underscored that terrorism posed a common threat to both Pakistan and Afghanistan and required a collective response. Reaffirming complete solidarity with the Afghan people in countering this menace, the Foreign Minister underlined Pakistan's commitment to work with Afghanistan towards promoting regional peace and stability.

FO reaction to Indian reports

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: In response to media queries regarding reports in sections of Indian media, the following is attributable to Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "We attach high importance to proper etiquette and behavior towards all visa and consular applicants. All our diplomatic staff is under strict instructions to conduct themselves professionally. While we are looking into this case, we are surprised at its timing and the manner in which it has been raised. There are robust mechanisms in place for redressal of all public grievances. There is zero tolerance for misbehaviour and mistreatment of individuals visiting our Missions".

Fawad seeks action against Rana, Tarar

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry sought action against Rana Sanaulah and Attaullah Tarar for confessing proudly that they were using geo-fencing to track of PTI's MPAs' locations in sheer violation of the constitution that gave citizens the rights of protection of dignity of privacy.

KP Assembly dissolution on Saturday

Punjab Assembly dissolved

The decision was taken during a meeting between the chief minister and PTI Chairman

ALI HAMZA / DNA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Parvez Elahi signed the summary for the dissolution of the provincial assembly, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry announced Thursday, calling on the centre to hold snap polls across the country. "Elahi has signed the summary and the advice has been sent to Punjab Governor [Baligh-Ur-Rehman] and if he does not sign on it in the next 48 hours, then in line with the Constitution, then the assembly will stand dissolved in the next 48 hours," the PTI leader told journalists in Lahore. The decision to dissolve the assembly was taken during a meeting between the chief minister and PTI Chairman Imran Khan at the latter's Zaman Park residence, with senior party leaders in presence. The assembly wasn't dissolved earlier apparently due to a restriction from the Lahore High Court (LHC), but since Elahi won the legislative's confidence once again, the bar was removed as the case was withdrawn. The PTI leader also announced that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly would also be dissolved in line with the party's "promise" to the people of leaving the legislative. "The KP Assembly will also be dissolved on a similar format a day after tomorrow and we have fulfilled our promise of going back to the people [for seeking support]," he said. Fawad said the PTI and its allies have proven that despite all the pressure, they were not "afraid" of

PML-N given two months for intra-party polls

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan on Thursday directed the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz — a major partner of the ruling coalition — to hold intra-party elections by March 14. A five-member ECP bench, headed by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikander Sultan Raja, heard a case regarding the intra-party elections of political parties. According to Section 208 of the Elections Act, all political parties are required to elect office-bearers at the federal, provincial and local levels, wherever applicable, periodically in accordance with the Constitution of the respective political party. "Provided that a period, not exceeding five years, shall intervene between any two elections," a proviso to section 208(1) of the act reads.

going back to the people for seeking votes as they had proven it by stepping down from government in both provinces.

CHINESE ENVOY'S FAREWELL CALL



ISLAMABAD: Outgoing Chinese Ambassador Nong Rong paid farewell call on the Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. The DHM of the Embassy Ms. Pang is also present on the occasion. — DNA

What next after the dissolution advice?

The KP government has not been dissolved. The PTI perhaps wants to make sure that first the Punjab dissolution should take place

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Chief Minister Punjab Ch. Parvez Elahi finally signed the advice seeking dissolution of the Provincial Assembly. He has forwarded the advice to the Governor. The Governor is bound to accept the advice. In case he does not do so, the Punjab Assembly then shall be dissolved automatically in next 48 hours. After the dissolution, the incumbent chief minister shall write a letter to the leader of the opposition Hamza Shehbaz for choosing the caretaker set up and if they fail to agree on a set up then the matter will go to the parliamentary committee nominated by the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly. If the parliamentary committee does not reach a consensus in two days then the Speaker will forward the case to the election commission, which will decide the caretaker government. Experts say the election commission shall choose the caretaker chief minister from the names presented by the government and the opposition parties. The caretaker government then shall be responsible to ensure free and fair elections in 90 days. This is the ideal scenario if

everything goes well. The government will try its best to prolong the caretaker government on the pretext of an ongoing census. The matter will certainly go to the courts once again. There is also a possibility of enforcement of economic emergencies in the country. Legal experts are of the view under this pretext the government may delay the elections for six months. But in order to impose economic emergency the government will have to come up with some solid reasons. The KP government has not been dissolved. The PTI perhaps wants to make sure that first the Punjab dissolution should take place then it will go for the KP assembly dissolution. The PTI probably still has some doubts that is why it wants to wait for the next 48 when the Punjab assembly dissolution shall come into effect. Perhaps, that is why PTI Chairman Imran Khan delayed his address to the nation. Meanwhile, the PML N supreme Nawaz Sharif has come down heavily on the PML N leadership for what he thinks is a failure to contain PTI in the Punjab. He is unhappy with the way the leadership had handled the Punjab situation. Some senior leaders have advised him to go for elections instead of continuing at the federal level. However the Shehbaz Sharif camp is strongly opposed to this preposition.



ABU DHABI: ABU DHABI: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif meets the President of the United Arab Emirates His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. — DNA

President offers to mediate between govt, PTI

Says he does know who is hindering this patch-up

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: President Arif Alvi has offered to mediate between the Shehbaz Sharif-led government and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) to lower the rising political temperature in the country. Alvi, a close aide of PTI Chairman Imran Khan, in an interview with BBC Urdu on Thursday, said that it is now inevitable to cool down the simmering tension and advised the political leadership to hold talks. "It is my offer to them [political parties] to sit together and then senior leadership can hold talks," said Dr Alvi. The president, who had held multiple rounds of talks with federal ministers in the past, alleged that the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government is using delaying tactics with regards to PTI, adding that "there's no communication between the two parties in the past one month". Dr Alvi added that the government has indicated its willingness to hold talks with the PTI but no results were coming out of it. Talking about the economy, the president said that there was a chance of improvement and dismissed reports of Pakistan defaulting on its international obligations. "I am telling everyone not to go in that direction rather, come together and work," he said.

UAE agrees to roll over US\$ 2 bn Pakistan's loan

Promises to provide \$1 billion additional loan to Pakistan

NEWS DESK / DNA

ABU DHABI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday met UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan wherein the latter agreed to roll over the existing loan of US\$ 2 billion and provide US\$ 1 billion additional loan. In the meeting took place in Abu Dhabi during prime minister's two-day visit, both sides agreed to deepen the investment cooperation, stimulate partnerships and enable investment integration opportunities between the two countries. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed welcomed Prime Minister Sharif to Abu Dhabi and wished progress and prosperity for Pakistan. He praised the historical relations between the two nations and the valuable contributions made by the Pakistani community in the UAE. The prime minister thanked the UAE president for inviting him to the brotherly country.

'Saudi Arabia always helped Pakistan'

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said Saudi Arabia has always supported Pakistan in difficult times. "Pakistan is grateful for the announcement of \$1 billion made by Saudi Arabia's Prime Minister and Crown Prince of Mohammed bin Salman for the rehabilitation of Pakistan's flood victims," the prime minister said. Shehbaz Sharif expressed these views in a meeting with

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WINTER ESCAPE

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MQM factions reunite ahead of LB elections — Page 08

Private sector invited to invest in ITZs to boost tourism

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Experts have invited the private sector to invest in integrated tourism zones (ITZs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to boost up tourism and strengthen the provincial economy. Immense investment prospects are available in the integrated Tourism Zones (ITZs) that have been approved by the provincial government, says a senior official of KP Tourism and Culture Authority (KP&CA) during speaking at an awareness seminar held in a hall of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) on Thursday. The sensitization seminar, which was organized by SCCI in joint collaboration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) and Planning and Development Department (P&D), Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Shahid Hussain, senior vice president of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry who chaired the session said in his opening remarks that the role of the tourism sector in economic development is vital across the world. Senior office bearers said incalculable investment opportunities

in the tourism sector, generally in the country and particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa available, which needed to be tapped efficiently to boost up the provincial economy. Mr Hussain emphasized the need for pragmatic steps for infrastructure improvement at tourists' attraction sites, besides provision of better facilities to tourists and arrangements to attract more investors and tourists toward the tourism sector. He assured the officials that SCCI will play its due role to attract private investment in ITZs. Apart from participation of Director General KP&CA Bakhtiyar Khan, General Manager Umer Khan Khattak, Public Private Partnership Analyst, P&D Deptt Shehryar Khan, the SCCI vice president Ejaz Khan Afridi, former president Faiz Muhammad, former vice presidents Abdullah Yousafzai, Faiz Rasool, executive members Haji Ghulam Hussain, Laal Badshah, Ms Qurtul Ain, Naeem Qasmi, Zahoor Khan, Fazl e Wahid, Malik Tariq Awan, a large number of traders, investors and representatives of relevant department were present in the seminar. DG KPC&TA Bakhtiyar Khan during the session enlightened the participants about initiatives tak-

en by his department for uplift of the tourism sector, especially Integrated Tourism Zones and urged the SCCI members and private investors to make investment in the ITZs. He also invited the business community to ensure their participation in the upcoming roadshow organized by KPCTA in Islamabad, which is scheduled to be held on Jan 19. On the occasion, Umer Khattak, a senior official briefed the participants about ITZs in detail through his multimedia presentation and stated that initiatives have been taken for promotion of eco-tourism in KP where vast opportunities were available to promote digital tourism in the country. Tourism sector contributes 3 percent to Pakistan's GDP, which is growing gradually, the senior official said, adding that the sector has generated 3.6 million jobs. Essentially, he said the KP government has prioritized the tourism sector and made an increase by 600 per cent in the budget for uplift of the sector. He said the country's future highly dependent on public private partnerships (PPP), saying that KP portfolio in PPP is the second number with a ratio of 100 per cent after Sindh portfolio at first with 102 per cent followed by Punjab with 86 per cent.



ISLAMABAD: Asiya Azeem, MNA/Convener Pakistan-Belgium Friendship Group meets Charles Delogne, ambassador of Belgium in Pakistan at Parliament House. —DNA

VC UoS calls on Chinese ambassador

SARGODHA :Vice Chancellor of the University of Sargodha Prof Dr Qaisar Abbas called on Chinese Ambassador Nong Rong here on Thursday. He briefed the ambassador about the University of Sargodha (UoS) since its inception in 2002 and activities of the Pakistan Institute of China Studies and the Confucius Institute in the university. Vice Chancellor Dr Qaisar Abbas shared his future plans for introducing skills-based education in the university through collaborating with Chinese organizations like Tang International Chinese Education. Ambassador Nong Rong appreciated the China Studies Programme of the university and assured of full support in future endeavors of the UoS. Dr Fazalur Rahman, Director of Pakistan Institute of China Studies, Dr Gu, Agriculture Commissioner at the Chinese Embassy, and Ms Wang Yiqi also attended the meeting. —APP

PPP Attock felicitates Bilawal over successful Geneva moot

QAZI SHOAB KHAN

ATTOCK: The District office bearers of Pakistan Peoples Party Attock have expressed their profound felicitation to the Foreign Minister Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari for portraying the real picture of Pakistan in Geneva Conference Paris to succeed financial assistance of more than 10 billion dollars which will minimize the prevailing economic crunch of the country arisen due to mismanagement of previous regime of PTI. While replying various questions of the media persons here in Attock, the district leaders of PPP former Naib Nazim Zila Council Attock Malik Sameen Khan, Malik Mohammad Umer Khan, Haji Malik Akhter, Malik Faisal Munir and PPP Attock City President Malik Adnan Sadiq, Advocate said the young Foreign Minister Pakistan Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has the potential to present the issues of the country at the international forums more effectively during his recent official tours of different coun-

tries within his short span of time.

They said the Mr. Bilawal Bhutto has also convinced the foreign delegates due to his political wisdom to rehabilitate the more than 3.5 million people confronted with the miseries during the disastrous flood hit situation of his country, they added.

Attock police arrest 6 anti-state elements

Attock police arrested six anti state elements along with recovery of huge quantity of narcotics from their possession during a crack down launched against the recent wave of street crimes within the territorial jurisdiction of inter provincial bordering district here on Thursday. Police said, a drug peddlers identified as Sakhi Badshah resident of Chhab was taken in to custody by Jand police on charge of possessing heroin powder of 1200 grams, Dilawar Khan, mohala Ziarat with hashish of 1500 grams and drugs pusher Sumair Khan with hashish of 550 grams. Meanwhile, one Zubair Ahmed was arrested by

Hassanabdal police on the charge of having 600 grams hashish and Amjad Khan with hashish of 625 grams while Shahzad Ahmed was booked by Injra Police for holding illegal pistol 30 bore with bullets. Later on, cases were registered against the culprits and further investigations are under way, police added.

Police traced unknown killer

Attock Police traced the unknown killer involved in the murder of a teenaged girl over marriage dispute at the outskirts in Dhoke Jahmraaf police station Hazrohere on Thursday. According to police spokesman, the alleged killer Murtaza Iqbal went to his uncle Haq Nawaz house at Dhoke Jahmraaf on January 06, 2023 and riddled his teenaged cousin with bullet soon as she refused to contract his marriage proposal. The girl died of bullets injuries while shifting to the local hospital whereas the killer managed to escape from the scene. The police traced the nominated accused through mobile phone data and sent him behind the bars.



PDF announces cabinets for five KP districts

PESHAWAR: On the directives of the provincial President, PPP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Najmuddin Khan, the provincial President of People's Doctor Forum (PDF), Dr Nisar Khan has announced cabinets for five districts here Thursday. According to a press release issued here on Thursday, Dr Hussain has been nominated as President for district Kohat while Nigar, Dr Farid, Dr Murtaza Ali, Dr Muhsib Afridi and Dr Ijad Ali as Senior Vice President, Vice President, General Secretary, Information and Finance Secretary respectively. For Bannu district, Dr Safdar Zaman, Dr Ahmad Faraz, Dr Naveed Pervez, Dr Mohammad Zubair, Dr Zeeshan, Dr Fawad Khattak and Dr Azmat Wazir as President, Senior Vice President, Vice president, General Secretary, Press & Information Secretary, Coordination Secretary and Joint Secretary, respectively. Similarly, Dr Bar and Dr Safdar have been nominated as President and General Secretary for district Karak while Zuhairullah, Dr Mashkatullah and Dr Faisal Masroor have been nominated as Vice President, Deputy General Secretary and Press and Information Secretary for the district. For tribal District Khyber, Dr Fahimullah and Dr Rehman Shah have been nominated as President and General Secretary while Dr Noor Faraz, Dr Naveed Afridi, Dr Mirwais, Dr Imran Afridi and Awais Wali as Vice President, Deputy General, Finance and Coordination Secretaries, respectively. —Agencies

KSA, UAE all-weather friends of Pakistan: Ashrafi

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Special Representative (PMSR) for Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi on Thursday termed Saudi Arabia (SA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) all-weather friends of Pakistan. Expressing gratitude to UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Hafiz Ashrafi told media that the UAE had helped Pakistan in the trying time by not only rolling over the existing loan of \$2 billion, but providing additional \$1 billion. Ashrafi, who is also the Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council, said the generous support would further cement the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries. He said the recent visit of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to the UAE would open new avenues of

cooperation in the fields of trade, investment and energy. He also lauded Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman for coming to Pakistan's help in the critical economic situation. Citing the statement of Saudi Crown Prince for increasing the Kingdom's assistance and investment in Pakistan, he said it was explicit evidence of exclusive diplomatic and religious affinity between Pakistan and the KSA. The special assistant said as per reports the Saudi Fund for Development would conduct a study on increasing the deposit amount with State Bank of Pakistan to \$5 billion from \$3 billion and it would also assess the options to enhance its investments in Pakistan to \$10 billion. He also thanked the international donors, including the KSA and the UAE, for committing over \$9 billion to help Pakistan

recover from the ravages of massive floods and exceeding its external financing goals at a Geneva meeting co-hosted by the United Nations and the Government of Pakistan. This generous aid for rehabilitation and reconstruction and other climate change-related damages would help flood-affected populations recover and rebuild infrastructure, he maintained. Ashrafi also appreciated the efforts of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari for drawing the world's attention towards the massive loss of life and property caused by the recent floods in Pakistan. On the recent visit of Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir, he said it was a good omen that the new army chief paid his first visit to the holy land where he was accorded a warm welcome. —DNA

Speakers pay homage for veteran journalists Masood Malik

ISLAMABAD: The speakers at a condolence reference held on the third death anniversary of veteran journalist Masood Ahmed Malik here Thursday, demanded that the journalist fraternity needed to celebrate the achievements and sacrifices of senior journalists to make the younger generation acquainted with the legacy of professional media men. The condolence reference was organized by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ)-Dastoor and Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalist (RIUJ)-Dastoor under the patronage of President PFUJ Dastoor Haji Muhammad Nawaz Raza to pay homage and respects to the late veteran journalist and former Managing Director Associated Press of Pakistan Corporation Masood Ahmed Malik. Addressing the reference, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader, Siddique Ul Farooq shared that he had a very close association with the deceased. He said, "I and Masood worked together for some time in PPI. I found him a thorough gentleman and professional who loved his profession like his passion." —APP

Gwadar receives bulk cargoes

ISLAMABAD: The Gwadar port has started receiving government imports of bulk cargoes as three consecutive vessels carrying 90,000 MT urea have already been arrived at the port and clocked the fastest discharge rate. This represents the efforts of Ministry of Maritime Affairs, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority, Gwadar Port Authority (GPA), Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) and Pakistan Customs, according to a press release issued here on Thursday. These bulk cargoes were discharged and after bagging at the port

are transported from Gwadar to other destinations in Pakistan. Next month Gwadar Port will start handling of 450,000 MT of TCP wheat. Trading Corporation of Pakistan (TCP) on behalf of government decided to handle import of urea and wheat through Gwadar Port. This movement will ease the huge congestion at other ports of Pakistan due to high traffic of vessels carrying bulk cargoes, which results in delaying the operation and transportation of shipments; thus, disturbing the entire supply chain mechanism. Import of these govern-

ment cargoes offers substantial benefits to locals and will generate various economic activities and employment opportunities for locals in terms of 100% shipping agencies services by locals, top priority for local transporters etc. Gwadar Port being industrial nerve center of Gwadar Free Zone offers substantial economic benefits to importers in terms of highly efficient operations, advance cargo handling, vast storage areas for all types of cargo, extensive ancillary facilities, and faster turnaround time & delivery. Gwadar Port due to its unique geographical position makes it a fast-economical link between land-

locked central Asian states and to the rest of the country. Gwadar port and Freezone is all set to become the hub of international trade which will help the country in earning much needed foreign exchange in near future which also is in line with the vision of Prime Minister of Pakistan to promote regional economic integration. Sizable share to import of wheat and urea at Gwadar Port will play a vital role in the operationalization and also generating business opportunities both in Gwadar and along CPEC highways which is very essential for the uplift of Balochistan. —DNA

PESCO notifies power suspension on Peshawar, Rampura grids

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) on Thursday notified that due to maintenance work power supply would remain suspended from 132 KV Jamrud Grid Station on 14th, 21st, 24th, 28th and 31st January from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. resultantly consumers of 11 KV Hayatabad 1,2,3,4,5, New Hayatabad, Health Care Hospital, Health Excellence North West Hospital, Kidney Center, RMI, Gulabad, PITC, Mohmand Steel, Northern Bottling, Hayatabad Surgical Hospital, Peshawar General Health Net Hospital, Shakas 1 feeders will face inconvenience. It said that the power supply would remain suspended from 132 KV Peshawar University Grid Station on 13th, 17th, 20th, 24th, 27th and 31st January from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. resultantly consumers of 11 KV Commercial Building Abdul Razak, Ring Road, University Campus, Canal Town, Malakandher, Engineering, Regi, Gulabad, Taj Abad, Agriculture, Mera Achini, HMC, Ring Road, Danish Abad, Rahat Abad 1, CMB, Abdara Road, AchiniMera 1,2, Rahat Abad 2, SufaidDheri, Old Bara Road, JAF, Academy Town, Circular Road, DHA, HBK, ASKri 6, AchiniMera feeders will face inconvenience. —APP

Women wing of UBG stands united: Samina

KARACHI: First meeting of the Women wing of United Business Group (UBG) held on Thursday through video link which was chaired by Samina Fazil, Chairperson and attended by a large number of members women wing, across Pakistan, including Ms. Saeeda Bano, Vice Chairperson Women wing, Ms. Robina Amjad, Chairperson Punjab, Ms. Amreen Hoti, Chairperson KPK, Ms. Maryam Chaud-

hary, Chairperson Baluchistan, Ms. Rizwana Shahid, Chairperson Sindh, Ms. Naheed Masood, EC Member FPCCI, Ms. Shabnam Zafar, EC Member FPCCI, Ms. Farzana Birni, Ms. Rukhsana Nadir, EC Member FPCCI, Ms. Naima Ansari, Past Vice President - FPCCI Ms. Rizwana Asif President IWCCI, Ms. Qirat-ul-Aine GB member FPCCI. In her welcome address Samina Fazil

paid rich tributes to Late S M Muneer patron in-chief of UBG and reiterated that the members of women wing would follow his path. She said that women wing stands united under the leadership of UBG and determined to leave no stone unturned in uplifting the image of women entrepreneurs. She said that women entrepreneurs was considered as a leading building block of economy as it played an important role in job creation, self-development and paid back as economic progress of country. —DNA

Snowfall, rain in AJK and KP disrupt normalcy of life

DNA

MUZAFFARABAD: Rain and snowfall continued in the upper regions of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), causing the normalcy of life to be affected badly. In Poonch division, intermittent rain and snowfall continued, causing the intensity of cold to increase. Several roads and highways in the district were closed due to the snowfall. The people were asked to avoid unnecessary travel in the

Rawalakot for traffic due to the snowfall. Police, rescue teams and other departments concerned were put on high alert to deal with any emergency situation. The tourists were advised to avoid unnecessary travel. In Haveli (Kahutta), intermittent rain and snowfall continued, causing the intensity of cold to increase. Several roads and highways in the district were closed due to the snowfall. The people were asked to avoid unnecessary travel in the

snowfall. In Shangla, rain and snowfall continued in the upper areas, causing the normalcy of life to be affected badly. The power supply system was disrupted in several areas of the district due to the heavy snowfall. The locals were confined to their houses due to the severe cold. The traffic flow was also affected due to the heavy snowfall. The link roads in various areas of Shangla were closed. —DNA

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Briefs

President summons NA session on Monday

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has summoned the session of the National Assembly on January 16 (Monday) at 5 pm, the President-House said on Thursday. The president has convened the session of the lower house of the parliament under Article 54(1) of the Constitution. —DNA

PML-N given two months' time to hold intra-party elections

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Thursday granted reprieve for two months to Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for holding intra-party elections.

A five-member Commission, headed by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja, resumed the hearing of the case regarding the intra-party elections of the political parties and directed the PML-N leadership to hold intra party elections by March 14 after hearing arguments from the lawyer of the political party. The ECP then adjourned the hearing of the case until March 14. The PML-N counsel said the intra-party polls were delayed due to some unavoidable circumstances as elections could not be held as the PML-N President and Secretary General had gone abroad. PML-N Secretary General Ahsan Iqbal would return to Pakistan from Geneva by Jan 14, adding that the Party was planning to hold elections on January 31. ECP Punjab Member Babar Bharwana remarked the electoral symbol of the Party would be withdrawn if elections were not held by Jan 31. The CEC remarked that the electoral body could grant more time, if valid reasons were submitted. He also remarked that PML-N should hold intra-party polls. The ECP on January 5, had given the PML-N a week to hold intra-party elections with the warning that the election symbol allotted to the Party would be withdrawn. As per the record, the intra-party election in the PML-N was due by March 22 last year. The Section 209 of the Elections Act, 2017 says, "Certification by the political party; (1) A political party shall, within seven days from completion of the intra-party elections, submit a certificate signed by an officer-authorised by the Party head, to the commission to the effect that the elections were held in accordance with the constitution of the political party and this act to elect the office-bearers at the federal, provincial and local levels, wherever applicable." Whereas, Sections 215 (4) of the Act state, "Where a political party or combination of political parties, severally or collectively, fails to comply with the provision of Section 209 or Section 210, the commission shall issue to such political party or parties a notice to show cause as to why it or they may not be declared ineligible to obtain an election symbol." —DNA

DC Rawalpindi holds 'Khuli Kutcheri'

RAWALPINDI : Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rawalpindi Shoaib Ali held a 'Khuli Kutcheri' here at his office under Punjab Government's open door policy to resolve the problems of the people on priority. The 'Khuli Kutcheri' was attended by a large number of citizens. People lodged their complaints regarding different problems including the issuance of domicile, fard, registry, land transfer cases and other revenue matters. The DC also listened to the complaints of the citizens and issued on the spot orders to the officers concerned. He said the purpose for holding such meetings under the open door policy of the government was to resolve the grievances of the people at the earliest and ensure speedy justice. He said, negligence on part of the officials concerned would not be tolerated. 'Khuli Kutcheries' were being held regularly aimed at resolving peoples' problems at their doorsteps, the DC added. —DNA



ISLAMABAD: Faisal Karim Kundi, SAPM/MoS for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety PA&SS addressing a Seminar to Scale up Family Planning organized by Population Council is Islamabad. —DNA

China-Pak agree to take ocean science forward

DNA

BEIJING: China's National Ocean Technology Center (NOTC) and Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences (LUAWMS) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to cooperate on ocean space planning. According to China Economic Net (CEN) on Thursday, this new relationship was formalized in a virtual signing ceremony. Chen Wujun, Secretary General of NOTC, said that the MoU would be the key to opening cooperation between the Center and Lasbela University in the marine field. "We hope that in the future, both sides will take ocean space planning cooperation as the starting point, carry out extensive mutual visits and exchanges, and jointly hold training courses," said Chen. "We will also work together to develop relevant information systems and observatory, and promote the construction of a joint research center on marine space planning between China and Pa-



kistan." Dr. Dost Muhammad Baloch, Vice Chancellor of LUAWMS, expressed his hope that the signing of the MoU will play an important role in the sustainable use of marine resources and improve the lives of the people of Pakistan, especially in Baluch-

istan. "The MOU will help develop regional cooperation among Maritime Silk Road countries and establish a future communication and cooperation mechanism between China and Pakistan in the field of marine space planning," said Dr. Dost. According to the Pakistani side, Pakistan has a coast of about 1,050 kilometers long

and an exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of 290,000 square kilometers. "The study of Marine Sciences has increased more than ever due to increase of exclusive economic zone of Pakistan from 200 to 350 nautical miles. In the face of the challenges and opportunities that may arise

in the future, we need scientific research to improve our capacity to manage new issues in the oceans," Dr. Dost said. Dr. Dost described the MoU as a natural alliance between the two universities that have mutual interests. Located in Baluchistan, which has the longest coastline in the country, LUAWMS is the only maritime university in Pakistan. The university is located about 500 km east of Gwadar port, the gateway to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. In 2018, China Oceanic Development Foundation and LUAWMS signed an MoU on cooperation in marine space planning. In the past five years, China and Pakistan have continuously enhanced exchanges and interactions, deepened friendship and mutual trust, and reached a series of cooperation consensus. Under the new MoU, the two sides will carry out practical cooperation in more areas to enhance the capacity of Pakistan's integrated marine and coastal zone management, improve the well-being of coastal people, support the construction of China-Pakistan Blue Partnership, and promote the high-quality construction of the Belt and Road Initiative.

HEC 3-day workshop ends

ISLAMABAD: Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan held a three-day International Workshop as part of the TEIN Asi@Connect project, "IBN@TEIN: An AI-driven Intent-based Networking Platform for Service Deployment with QoS Assurance". The representatives of institutions, including the University of Malaya, Malaysia; ITC Cambodia; Pakistan Education & Research Network (PERN), National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST), COMSATS, Sarhad University, FAST University, UET Taxila, UET Peshawar, and Air University, took part in the workshop.

Executive Director HEC Dr. Shaista Sohail chaired the concluding session and awarded certificates to the participants. The HEC, under the umbrella of Pakistan Education & Research Network (PERN), has interlinked universities and provided services to the researchers to get ac-

cess to a fully integrated communication system. PERN is a member of the Trans Eurasia Information Network (TEIN) and is participating in the latest phase of the TEIN, i.e., the Asi@Connect project. The TEIN network through a dedicated link helps PERN to connect with the NREN consortiums across the globe including, GEANT (Europe), APAN (Asia-Pacific), EUMEDCONNECT (Eastern Mediterranean), RedCLARA (Latin America), CAREN (Central Asia), AfricaConnect2(Africa), ASREN (Middle East), Internet2 (US) and others. Asi@Connect provides dedicated high-capacity internet connectivity for research and education communities across Asia-Pacific. It interconnects universities and research centers in 21 countries/economies across the region including PERN. Each year, Asi@Connect call for proposals is launched and engages the researchers of

the Asia Pacific Region in a competitive manner to award grants to proposals on different technologies and applications. The HEC PERN team, as well as researchers from Pakistani universities also participated and competed in the call for proposals. Under the Asi@Connect, 4th call for proposals, IBN@TEIN: An AI-driven Intent-based Networking Platform for Service Deployment with QoS Assurance" project funding was approved by TEIN. The project was led by Korean University, whereas HEC and universities from Pakistan, Malaysia, and Cambodia were part of the project. Prof. Dr. Wang-Cheol Song, project PI, expressed this training workshop as a commendable event. He said, "the experience was a great opportunity for me as well as it was more than his expectations. It was a great opportunity, and I expect further collaborations to share the dynamics of technology in the 21st century." Speaking at the cer-

emony, Executive Director Dr. Shaista Sohail admired all the trainers and attendees of the workshop. She said that technology is part and parcel of economic development. HEC and the Government of Pakistan in collaboration with the World Trade Organization have a number of agreements in the IT sector to make it the leading sector of Pakistan. The latest technological developments in developed countries can only be learned through such training workshops. She said that HEC believes in creating knowledge and passing it on and one of the best ways is conducting such workshops in which the latest technological developments are shared which are not part of the textbooks. "We hope that we will be able to utilize gains from the IT & for that purpose University platforms are very important as they are the hubs for technology and our students are already providing excellent IT services worldwide," she concluded. —DNA

WEF issues 'markets of tomorrow report 2023,

ISLAMABAD: The World Economic Forum has issued the "Markets of Tomorrow Report 2023". The Markets of Tomorrow Report 2023 identifies the technologies of strategic importance across countries and explores the opportunities and obstacles to creating new markets. The Report discusses the key findings on the top technologies, the most important enabling sectors, and the key bottlenecks to market creation. The Report also provides a wider overview of the markets of tomorrow data, with profiles covering the top ten technologies, sectors. The Research for the Report was conducted by Mishaal Pakistan, the Country Partner Institute of the New Economy and Societies Platforms, World Economic Forum. Amir Jahangir, Chief Executive Officer, Mishaal Pakistan, said, "the data on Pakistan shows that the technologies with strategic priority and potential to create new markets and opportunities in the country are in the agriculture technologies areas, E-commerce and digital trade, EdTech, Robotics, Digital platforms and apps developments". The data identifies nanotechnology, electric and autonomous vehicles development, augmented and virtuality as the least potential technologies for Pakistan as the future market player in the global sphere. On the top 10 key sectors that can generate new markets in Pakistan have been identified as 1) Information Technology Services, 2) Media and Publishing, 3) Medical and Healthcare Services, 4) Production of Consumer Goods, 5) Employment, Education and Training Services, 6) NGOs, professional bodies, and unions, 7) International bilateral and multilateral organizations, 8) Education 9) Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, and 10) financial services and capital markets. Among the least potential sectors, Engineering and construction, mining and minerals, social work, electronics, automotive and aerospace, energy tech and utilities, Rental, reservation and leasing services, Chemical and advanced materials, Advanced manufacturing, Retail, and wholesale of consumer goods.—DNA

PAJCCI recommends joint efforts for goods clearance

DNA

ISLAMABAD: PAJCCI recommends joint effort to process transit trade documents by Pakistan & Afghanistan customs for smooth clearance of goods and onward movement. Custom authority of both sides must rationalize document requirements and valuation of transit goods destined for Afghanistan from CAR and vice versa using Pakistani seaports to ensure that flow of trade continues especially during current times of recession in world trade. Pakistani seaports are hub for Afghan transit trade and is source of revenue for both countries. In line with international standards, Pakistan Customs require documents for goods clearance with appropriate values and for the purpose of valuation, these documents become base for Afghan Customs to carry out valuation however traders from both sides are facing very high valuation and taxation.—DNA

Gwadar Port Authority brings internship programme

ISLAMABAD: To equip the youth of Balochistan with the skills required in the modern workplace, the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) has announced an internship programme for fresh graduates in the province. Gwadar Pro, quoting an official notification, stated on Thursday that the programme will be run under the National Development Internship Programme. "The internships are a unique experience for the students as well as fresh graduates or diploma holders for their preparation of better jobs and relevant businesses," it reads. In pursuance of the Planning Commission's letter shared with the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, GPA will accommodate young engineers in two projects; they are the 1.2 MGD ROD (reverse osmosis desalination) Plant at Gwadar and Sewerage Treatment Plant, at GPA Housing Complex.—DNA

DRAP fixes prices of various life-saving drugs

ISLAMABAD: The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) has fixed prices of 20 different life-saving drugs. The drugs which prices are fixed are used for treating cancer drugs, AIDS and blood pressure (different mgs). The DRAP has released a formal notification regarding fixation of medicine prices after getting approval from the federal cabinet. According to the notification, the price of drug treating lungs cancer was fixed at Rs172,320. The price of breast cancer medicine was set at Rs199,741. Moreover, Xlatan tablet 50mcg eye drops price was fixed at Rs1,519. Meanwhile Zofran 8mg tablet price was set at Rs3,907. Lastly, the price of Aclasta 100ml solution fixed at 27,514. —DNA

Huge cache of drugs smuggling bid foiled

ATTOCK: The Attock Police on Thursday foiled a bid to smuggle huge cache of drugs worth millions of rupees from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Punjab through a passenger van and arrested two drugs smugglers- stated to be members of inter-provincial racket of drugs smugglers. The drugs include charas, ice powder, and heroin. Police sources said that on specific information the police squad headed by Sub Divisional Police Officer Fatehjang circle DSP Fateh Jang Raja Fayyaz ul Haq Naeem along with station house officer Mazhar Shah intercepted a Rawalpindi bound passenger van coming from Kohat on Khour road. During search, police recovered heroin 16 kilograms, charas 6 kilograms and ice 970 grams from the hidden parts of the vehicle having price of millions of rupees in the international drugs market.—DNA

Around 6.4 MMCFD gas to be saved

ISLAMABAD The Oil and Gas Authority (OGRA) has made the installation of conical baffles mandatory in all kinds of gas-run geysers including existing and new ones by December 2023 aimed at saving the precious and scarce commodity. "Total approximate savings in gas will be 6.4 MMCFD (Metric Million Cubic Feet per Day) with the help of this initiative. The deadline of December 2023 has been set for installation of conical baffles," OGRA spokesman Imran Ghaznavi said in a statement. The decision to conical baffles' installation had been taken to conserve energy and eliminate the gas shortages in the country, he said, adding it would result in a reduction of 20-25% in gas bills charged on account of geyser usage. "This initiative will also greatly help in minimising the ongoing natural gas crisis in the country." Currently, the spokesman said, the total number of gas consumers in the country was 10.65 million, out of which 3.088 million were using geysers. Earlier, he advised consumers to ensure careful use of gas appliances including heaters, geysers and stoves to avoid any untoward incidents. "Gas heaters and stoves pose serious health risks and are the main cause of many fatal incidents, so due care is needed in the use of gas appliances," he said. Imran Ghaznavi said carbon monoxide was colourless and odourless, adding "high levels of carbon monoxide in the air are very dangerous and may cause people to pass out or even die." In the winter season, he said people should consider "safe alternative" ways of keeping themselves warm and remain extra careful, especially while using indoor gas appliances.—APP

Public can make legislators commuted to constitution

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Awareness of Pakistan's Constitution among the electorates can help challenge and pressurize the legislators to pursue public interest and set priorities for lawmaking based on collective welfare, national consensus, and institutional competency in the current political environment marred by legislation based on personal interest. These views emerged during a session titled 'Impacts of Political Environment on Legislation Processes' held at the Institute of Policy Studies with the research associates of Tadeven (legislative drafting

and research clinic at the National Assembly) of Mantaq Center for Research. The session was addressed by Imran Shafique, advocate, high court and former special prosecutor NAB, Khalid Rahman, chairman, IPS, and Farzana Yaqoob, CEO and founding member, Mantaq. Although policymaking in Pakistan is seemingly based on national interest, one cannot find a forum or place where national interest is studied, analyzed, debated, and determined, argued Imran Shafique while highlighting the dichotomy in the system. He maintained that the Constitution of Pakistan is the reflection of the people's will and aspirations, and it does not permit

personal-specific legislation or legislation against the Qur'an and Sunnah and has established institutions like Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) and Federal Shariat Court (FSC) to ensure compliance. Despite that, the legislative process in practice is subverted because the country's political environment undermines the Constitution and its implementation. The lobbying done by politicians, person-specific legislation, the influence of political interest of non-political entities (both national and international), and personal dispositions of legislators are some of the elements of the political environment that undermine the relevance of public in-

terest in lawmaking. Lobbying by politicians, who only focus on attracting popular vote, increasing their vote bank, and preparing for the next election, has become a part of the political legacy in which the ruling elite has to maintain its dominance. In such a situation, the legislation done is person-specific with no regard for collective welfare or public interest. Another significant aspect of the legislative process is that political interests are not just limited to politicians. Even entities, institutions, and actors having no link to politics push their political interest, often bigger than the politicians, and influence lawmaking.

Democracy in Israel: under assault

Almost half of Israelis now believe that their country's democracy is in grave danger. They are right. The assault upon its institutions is not merely the alarming result of a far-right government. It is to a large degree the *raison d'être* for this administration. Benjamin Netanyahu, prime minister once more and still fighting the bribery and corruption case against him, is no great admirer of the judiciary. The intentions are not new. But they have never been pressed so nakedly and aggressively. The plan announced by the justice minister, Yariv Levin, would allow even the slimmest Knesset majority to override supreme court decisions – which would mean that controversial new laws could be pushed through, targeting minorities, civil society and the right to protest against annexation. Politicians would also gain more power to pick the court's members. The timing of Mr Levin's announcement was pointed: the day before a high court of justice hearing on whether Aryeh Deri can serve as interior and health minister, given last year's suspended sentence for tax offences. The right claims that the public demand this change. They do not: 55% oppose it. Avi Himi, head of the Israeli Bar Association, says that the proposals would mean the destruction of Israeli democracy; the former prime minister Yair Lapid, now heading the opposition, describes them as "a unilateral coup". In a country already lacking sufficient checks and balances – with a single parliamentary chamber and a weak constitution – they are particularly dangerous. Many will suffer from the encouragement of authoritarianism, but some far more so: the LGBTQ community, asylum seekers and Palestinians most of all. The government is moving at speed. Mr Netanyahu has often promised the right more than he has delivered, but it is unclear whether he can and will control the extremist bedmates he brought into power. A coalition member has called for the arrest of opposition leaders for "treason". Police have been ordered to turn water cannons on an anti-government demonstration. Itamar Ben-Gvir, once convicted of inciting racism and now national security minister, made a provocative visit to the al-Aqsa mosque compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, within days of taking office. He has ordered police to tear down Palestinian flags, and the government is punishing Palestinians by seizing Palestinian Authority funds in retaliation for it asking the international court of justice in The Hague for an advisory opinion on Israel's occupation of the West Bank. Some in Israel have long warned that occupation was eroding its democracy, and that the effects felt first, and most deeply, by Palestinians would not end with them. Their words have rarely seemed more relevant, or urgent, than now.

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China remains 'magnet' for world business

No matter how far the small number of China-bashing politicians in the United States go in their efforts to besmirch China's optimized COVID-19 prevention and control policies, they are failing to dent global investors' confidence in and zeal for the Chinese market. Many foreign business councils in China have expressed that their member enterprises are arranging the itineraries for senior executives' trips to China and rebooting relevant projects. Likewise, the executives of many of China's export enterprises have itineraries for business trips overseas. The foreign business community has immunity to the China-bashers' lies about the world's second-largest economy. Foreign entrepreneurs recognize the Chinese economy's stability and scale provide a strong foundation for its long-term prospects, while its resilience and recovery capability ensure it has potential to tap in the near term. The government's consistent efforts to improve the domestic business environment and dock the domestic market systems with those of the world market give practical support to consolidate these. In 2020, the amount of foreign investment utilized in China increased by 6.2 percent year-on-year. In 2021, the growth rate reached 14.9 percent, breaking the 1-trillion-yuan (\$148.1 billion) mark for the first time. And in the first 11 months of 2022, it had already exceeded the level of 2021, up 9.9 percent year-on-year. China's foreign trade surged 1.9 percent year-on-year in 2020 – the only major economy in the world that saw positive growth in trade that year – 21.4 percent in 2021, and 8.6 percent, despite the impacts of the pandemic, over the first eleven months of 2022. The many appeals of US enterprises for the US government to stop hindering their business operations highlight the extent to which the US political system has been poisoned by the toxicity of the China-bashers, if not how much the US economy and consumers are paying for that. China's status as a global market, major investment destination and source, manufacturing base, logistics hub and increasingly influential creative center are by no means condescending gifts from the US but a result of its own comparative advantages, that will only be strengthened with its higher-level opening-up and development. The future of the global economic recovery hinges upon the extent to which countries are willing to work together to dismantle trade and institutional barriers, maintain the stability of global supply chains, shorten negative lists, align their development strategies and coordinate their macro-policy-making, all of which China has been promoting.

Contradictions of US foreign policy

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



It is now becoming much more difficult for the US and other countries to justify operational links with the Taliban. If the Taliban's abusive and repressive policies had already dashed hopes that their second round at the top would be different, Varzi's open defiance of their counter-terrorism promises in the February 2020 Doha Accords has now set them back on the path to become a pariah regime. US politicians and counter-terrorism analysts urgently need to revise their assessments

In the last week of July 2022, the United States attended a regional conference on counter-terrorism in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Mutaqi said his government had considered Afghanistan as a base against the international terrorism and honored promises which should not be used as such. Nonetheless, Al-Zawahiri's presence in Kabul appears to undermine Motaqi's statements and the Taliban's pledge to sever ties with groups like al-Qaeda. It also complicates talks between the Taliban and US officials last week over the release of Afghan central bank assets, which could help ease Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis. During the de facto Taliban regime, US policymakers have attempted to walk a fine line: involving the Taliban in humanitarian, legal, and governance issues important to Washington while minimizing and attempting to threaten to minimize that this engagement is still legal. But the US had to accept that even this minimal diplomatic engagement led to some normalization of the Taliban regime. The deal was that the engagement facilitated US support to end the enormous humanitarian and economic crises and opened a channel for the Taliban to push for inclusive governance that respects women and human rights. The al-Zawahiri strike reflecting the Taliban leaders' apparent continued willingness to harbor al-Qaeda brought this trade to the fore. It is now becoming much more difficult for the US and other countries to justify operational links with the Taliban. If the Taliban's abusive and repressive policies had already dashed hopes that their second round at the top would be different, Varzi's open defiance of their counter-terrorism promises in the February 2020 Doha Accords has now set them back on the path to become a pariah regime. US politicians and counter-terrorism analysts urgently need

to revise their assessments of the terrorist threat in Afghanistan. The successful US attack confirms those who have advocated an overarching counter-terrorism strategy in Afghanistan. But al-Zawahiri getting a port in Kabul could also portend a more serious threat than expected. Currently US officials need to explore options to end the suffering of Afghans that do not rely on cooperation with or support for the Taliban regime. The recent US measures to freeze the Afghan central bank's assets, which were intended to help ease Afghanistan's liquidity crisis and restore normal economic activity, now face further uncertainty. The lessons of the 1996-2001 Taliban regimes in relation to the delivery of humanitarian aid should be revisited. The assassination of Zawahiri is timely evidence that the United States, while preoccupied with other foreign policy priorities and plagued by domestic divisions, remains committed to the counter-terrorism mission. But it also demonstrates the bankruptcy of the Biden administration's foreign policy agenda on the other fronts. The killing of Zawahiri in an air-strike in Kabul, where he was holed up in a safe house under the protection of the Pakistan-affiliated branch of the Taliban known as the Haqqani Network. The fact that the al-Qaeda chief was able to find refuge in the Afghan capital proves that the country's Islamist rulers have no intention of severing their long-standing ties to al-Qaeda, despite promising to do so last year. Therefore, the Taliban have not kept their side of the deal, as the White House itself now admits. According to Foreign Minister Antony Blinken, the Taliban "grossly" violated the terms of their deal with the US known as the Doha Accords by harboring Zawahiri on Afghan soil. Blankenship and other government officials remain silent about the practical consequences the US is willing to impose on the Taliban after exposing the group's

double-edged policies. The other stage is Iran. Since Zawahiri is no longer in the picture, the most likely candidate to take over al-Qaeda leadership is Saif al-Adel, a former Egyptian army officer. However, US intelligence and counter-terrorism experts agree that he and other members of the group's leadership have spent most or all of the past two decades in Iran. There, al-Adeel continued to coordinate the terrorist group's global activities and plan its campaigns, despite being under nominal "house arrest". All of this should be of great importance in the context of the Biden administration's favored policy of engagement with Iran. For the past year and a half, the government has pursued a diplomatic strategy aimed at getting the Islamic Republic back on track with the 2015 nuclear deal known as the JCPOA. Even now, despite repeated denials, White House officials remain hopeful that Iran may still be willing to accept some sort of new deal over its nuclear program. But to keep that hope alive, the government must largely ignore the Iranian regime's regional concerns and its widespread support for international terrorism. Such an approach has already become a hard sell in Congress, where skepticism about Team Biden's prevailing Iran strategy is growing, even among members of the president's own party. This will become utterly untenable as more and more contacts between the Iranian government and Al Qaeda's top leadership mount, raising serious questions about whether the United States can support Tehran's terrorism, why should the government be empowered and what might happen if it does? Zawahiri's assassination should be celebrated for what it is: an overwhelming victory for the US counter-terrorism force. However, we must not be blind of the contradictions and risks inherent in the Biden administration's foreign policy.

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Pakistan's energy crisis and delay in TAPI

Gul.i.AyeshaBhatti



Otherwise, Pakistan's independent foreign policy will be impacted by the energy crisis. From a geopolitical standpoint, state sovereignty depends greatly on energy security. Foreign providers' guarantees of consistent energy supply at reasonable prices are always accompanied by a long list of demands that frequently damage a country's reputation. Therefore, as a result of the nation's inability to satisfy

Sustainable energy sources are crucial in today's world, and having access to them may enrich everyone's prospects in life. A vital component of a nation's growth and development is a reliable source of energy. Numerous statistics showed that if cost-effective access to energy is made simple, human progress can reach its pinnacle.

Located at the confluence of the world's energy resources, Pakistan has a strategic advantage. Nevertheless, Pakistan's energy situation is far from ideal because the state relies heavily on imports and does not have enough energy resources to sustain itself. The import expense is steadily rising as a result of the rising energy demand and shifting energy costs. Pakistan has been experiencing a serious energy problem for the past few decades, as seen by its frequent power outages, increased gas load-shedding, rising prices, and disturbed fuel supplies. Given that energy is a crucial component of national security, Pakistan's current situation is best characterized as energy insecurity. Pakistan is trying to explore regional coordination to overcome its energy efficiency. It has also been dependent on energy-rich Gulf states like KSA, Qatar, and Kuwait, for oil, LNG, and other petroleum products. However, it is cost-effective to explore CARs, Russia, and Iran nearby. In this regard, there are already a few projects pending like IP, TAPI, and CASA1000. Among them, TAPI is one of the world's greatest energy collaborations among the states. In contradiction to IP and PGSP, TAPI is a noncontroversial project with a highly effective outcome. These concerns have been expressed by State Minister for Petroleum Division MusadikMasood Malik last year in December. The government of Pakistan has been active in engaging Central Asian republics and Russia in energy deals. Completion of TAPI is one of the major concerns right now to overcome energy deficiency in the country. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Natural Gas Pipeline (TAPI) Pipeline project is one that Pakistan is anxious to get started on right now. The fourth-largest gas reserves in the world

are found in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan would be supplied with 1.4 billion cubic feet of gas altogether. The pipeline will travel from Turkmenistan to Chaman and then on to Multan, where it will be integrated into the Sui companies' network in Pakistan. "We are sincerely going ahead with the TAPI project and it would cost \$34 million," MusadikMasood Malik stated in an interview earlier in December. The pipeline will carry natural gas from Turkmenistan's Galkynysh Gas Field to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and finally India. In November 2014, Turkmen-gaz (the biggest shareholder with 85% interest), Afghan Gas Enterprise (5%), Inter State Gas Systems (5%), and GAIL (5%), formed a special-purpose consortium known as the TAPI Pipeline Company (TPCL) to carry out the project. On December 13, 2015, work on the project's construction began in Turkmenistan. The ceremony marking the beginning of the construction of the Afghanistan-Pakistan section of the pipeline was held in February 2018. By providing inexpensive gas to Pakistan, and India, transit fees for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and an energy market to Turkmenistan, TAPI will benefit the economies of all the member states. Consumers will receive more affordable, cleaner energy, which will boost the economy and lower inflation rates. It will provide earnings or revenues that may be applied to improving the social sectors, particularly those related to housing, health, education, and clean water. By increasing sub-regional economic cooperation and increasing the usage of natural gas resources, it is predicted that the TAPI initiative would alleviate poverty. It will result in the creation of jobs by increasing sub regional economic activity and increasing the usage of natural gas resources, it is predicted that the TAPI project would alleviate poverty. Designed to serve for 30 years, the pipeline was expected to commence operations in 2021, but it was stalled. It is expected to transport 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas a year. The project's supporters envision it as a contemporary continuation of

the Silk Road. Pakistan has tried to convince other regional actors like Kazakhstan to be part of this project. Similarly, Russian authorities showed a great interest in participating in this project and supplying pipelines to Turkmenistan for the completion of 1st step of this project. This much-touted and already-delayed gas pipeline project has seen various challenges throughout all this time. In March 2022, it ran into trouble as Asian Development Bank (ADB) halted all processing and due diligence operations until the Taliban regime is recognized and legitimized by the UN and major powers of the world. Later on, the Rise of TTP and the government of Pakistan's growing cold terms with the Taliban while dealing with it, seem like a big hurdle in the successful completion of TAPI in the given time. Therefore, rising uncertainty regarding security conditions in Afghanistan and in the adjusting region of Pakistan is a source of concern for TAPI member states. The dependence on ad hoc solutions to the issue and ongoing reliance on oil and gas imports show that the energy crisis has not yet been handled by the state effectively. Policymakers still need to craft long-term and sustainable policies including investing in the discovery of indigenous reserves, building hydropower projects, and concentrating on alternative and renewable energy sources. Otherwise, Pakistan's independent foreign policy will be impacted by the energy crisis. From a geopolitical standpoint, state sovereignty depends greatly on energy security. Foreign providers' guarantees of consistent energy supply at reasonable prices are always accompanied by a long list of demands that frequently damage a country's reputation. Therefore, as a result of the nation's inability to satisfy even the most basic energy requirements of its citizens, investor trust in the state has been eroding, and visions of industrialization and economic self-reliance are still a long way off from becoming a reality.

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Briefs

Australia finalizing security pact with Pacific neighbor

WELLINGTON: The leaders of Australia and neighboring Papua New Guinea said Thursday they are finalizing a new security treaty — a move that comes as a challenge to China's growing assertiveness in the region. Last year, China signed its own security pact with the nearby Solomon Islands, raising alarm that it could lead to a military buildup in the South Pacific region. Australia and PNG haven't released details of their planned new treaty, but Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he expected negotiations to conclude in April and the treaty to be signed in June. Albanese said the treaty would be based on the deep trust between the two nations. The people of Papua New Guinea showed heroism and humanity during World War II battles, he said. "In the years ahead, Australia and Papua New Guinea have a chance to honor our shared history of service in the cause of peace — by adding to it," Albanese said. "Deepening our defense ties and enhancing our national security cooperation, and achieving a swift conclusion to negotiations on a Bilateral Security Treaty." —Agencies

Huge surge in Italy migrant arrivals

ROME:ROME: Migrant arrivals in Italy have increased by more than 50% since far-right premier Giorgia Meloni took office at the end last October, official statistics show, contradicting claims made by her government. On Monday, interior minister Matteo Piatendosi appeared on an Italian TV show and claimed the "growth curve [of boat arrivals] had declined" in the government's first two months in power. But statistics published by the interior ministry and reviewed by Euronews show that migrant arrivals by boat have been considerably higher since Meloni took office compared to the same period the previous year. The new PM's first two full months in office — November and December — saw almost 20,000 migrants arrive by boat: a sharp rise from the same months the year before when there were 12,600 migrant landings. The upsurge in arrivals by boat in the first ten days of 2023 has been even more dramatic: 3,709 so far this year compared to just 378 during the same time period in 2022, marking an 881% increase. When confronted with the statistics from this month, Piatendosi claimed the fresh wave of boat arrivals was facilitated by milder weather conditions and that the data was only "partial." Euronews reached out to the interior ministry for further comment, but they did not yet respond. —APP

World's oceans were hottest ever in 2022

LONDON: The world's oceans were at their hottest ever on record in 2022, according to a new study. "The Earth's energy and water cycles have been profoundly altered due to the emission of greenhouse gases by human activities, driving pervasive changes in Earth's climate system," reads the report by an international group of scientists published in the Advances in Atmospheric Sciences journal. Warming of oceans has led to "more extreme weather ... and that has tremendous consequences all around the world," said John Abraham, a professor at the University of St. Thomas in the US who was part of the study team. Using records kept since 1958, the analysis determined that there has been an "inexorable rise in ocean temperature, with an acceleration in warming after 1990," British daily The Guardian reported. As oceans absorb over 90% of the excess heat created by greenhouse gas emissions, ocean warming and its effects on extreme weather will increase until humanity approaches net zero emissions.—DNA

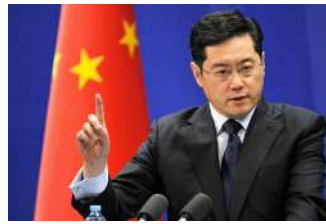
Africa should not serve as a venue for global contests

African Union says all nations are welcome to partner with Africa but must respect continent's values, beliefs and interests

NEWS DESK

NAIROBI: China's foreign minister said Wednesday that Africa should not be a platform for international competition. "Africa should be a key stage for international cooperation, not a place where powerful nations compete with one another," said Qin Gang, speaking in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa while launching the Chinese-built Africa Centers for Disease Control (Africa CDC) headquarters. In their meetings, Gang and African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat spoke on numerous matters pertaining to the connection between China and Africa, according to statements from China's Foreign Ministry and the Africa Union.

Mahamat for his part said they held wide-ranging discussions on how to deepen the already strong strategic partnership between the African Union and China for the continued benefit of their peoples. In a joint press conference with Qin, Mahamat said the absence of a permanent representation for Africa on the UN Security Council is a pressing problem as the council's agenda focuses mostly on and concerns African nations. "We are open to cooperation and partnership with everybody, but our principles, our priorities and our interests have to be respected," Mahamat said. According to officials at the ribbon-cutting ceremony, the first phase of the Africa CDC headquarters has been completed and the remaining construction will be finished soon.



The 40,000-square-meter building is equipped with modern gear to help the agency fight diseases in Africa. It features a training and conference room, laboratory, information room, emergency room and other essential rooms. The Africa CDC headquarters is a flagship project of China-Africa cooperation announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Beijing Summit in 2018. The

launching comes after Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Qin held meetings Tuesday to discuss bilateral ties between Ethiopia and China. "Soft power Qin's visit to Ethiopia builds on China's more than three-decade tradition of prioritizing Africa in its public diplomacy. Hassan Khanenje, director of the HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies, told Anadolu, adding that China has been building a lot of soft power with the continent for much of the post-Cold War period. "And right now, it's paying dividends. If you look at the extent and the degree of investment, even just starting with Ethiopia, many African countries have been extremely receptive to Chinese investment," Khanenje said. He added that Qin's visit to Africa,

which comes on the heels of the US-Africa Leaders Summit, may be viewed from the lens of geopolitical calculations to ensure that the Chinese solidify the kind of engagements they have with Africa. Khanenje lauded the move to inaugurate a CDC headquarters for Africa, noting that any contribution in terms of fighting disease and pandemics is something that is always going to be welcomed by African countries. "Inaugurating the CDC center is part of an extension of soft diplomacy or soft power by China. But it's something that, of course, is going to add to Africa's own capacity to be able to respond to the challenges of the continent," he added. After Ethiopia, Qin will visit Angola, Benin, Gabon and Egypt.

14 Malian soldiers killed by explosives

BAMAKO: Coordinated attacks by Islamic extremists have killed 14 Malian soldiers and wounded nearly a dozen, the army said. Multiple improvised explosive devices detonated between Dia and Diarabé villages as well as between Koumara and Macina towns in central Mali, said Col. Souleymane Dembele, the director of public relations for the army, in a statement Wednesday. During the same attacks, which occurred earlier this week, Mali's forces killed more than 30 "terrorists," Dembele said. The West African nation has been riddled with violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group for a decade. Thousands of people have been killed. Mali's ruling junta, which seized power in two coups starting in 2020, has been struggling to beat back the jihadis, especially since French troops pulled out of the country in August amid frayed relations with the junta. France has been in the region since 2013 when it sent in troops to Mali to push back extremists encroaching on the capital, Bamako, but the jihadis have since regrouped. Since December 2021, the junta has been working with Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group, but the Russians have also been unable to stem the violence. In August, 42 soldiers were killed when their military barracks was attacked.—APP

Tigray peace agreement
French, German foreign ministers arrive in Ethiopia

PARIS: The French and German foreign ministers arrived in Addis Ababa on Thursday on a mission to support a peace agreement signed last year to end two years of brutal war. The visit by France's Catherine Colonna and Annalena Baerbock of Germany began a day after Tigrayan rebels announced they were starting to hand in their heavy weapons, a key component of the November 2 deal to silence the guns in northern Ethiopia. During the two-day trip, the pair are due to meet Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and other ministers as well as African Union officials and human rights campaigners, and visit a World Food Programme distribution centre. Colonna said in a statement before her departure that the visit was aimed at "supporting the peace process, the fight against impunity, and reconstruction". A diplomatic source said the ministers were carrying a message from the European Union that it is ready to re-engage in Ethiopia provided the ceasefire is respected and that a transitional justice mechanism is put in place.



The devastating war that erupted in November 2020 has killed untold numbers of civilians, displaced more than two million and left millions more in need of humanitarian aid. Since the peace agreement signed in the South African capital Pretoria, there has been a limited resumption of aid deliveries to Tigray, which has long faced dire shortages of food, fuel, cash and medicines. Basic services such as communications,

banking and electricity are slowly being restored to the stricken region of six million people. While the TPLF announced it has begun disarming, local residents and aid workers say the Eritrean army and forces from the neighbouring region of Amhara remain in parts of Tigray and accuse them of murder, rape and looting. Under the deal, the disarmament should take place "concurrently" with the withdrawal of foreign

and forces that are not part of the Ethiopian national army. Access to the region is extremely difficult, and it has not been possible to verify the situation on the ground independently. The Horn of Africa and Ethiopia in particular are among the EU's priorities, as China seeks to boost its influence in the region, as illustrated by Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang's visit to Addis Ababa this week.—Agencies

Russian invasion of Ukraine 'turning point' in history

Japanese side is expected to raise "global security challenges, from the war in Ukraine to China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific," in addition to bilateral trade and energy issues with the Canadian side during the talks in the capital Ottawa

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has said Russia's invasion of Ukraine "has become a turning point in history." It has "shaken the international order to its core," Kishida told Canadian daily The Globe and Mail in a statement published on Thursday. The Japanese premier is on a tour to Canada, Italy, France, the UK, and US to meet leaders of the most industrialized nations before the G-7 summit in May in Hiroshima, Kishida's native province. "My goal is to show the world the strong will of the G7 members in a long-lasting and powerful way. Together we will resolutely reject attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force and the threat, not to mention use, of nuclear weapons," he said. "I want to make it an opportunity to firmly confirm G7 co-ordination on a free and open Indo-Pacific since the G7 Hiroshima summit is being held in Asia," said the chief executive of Japan, which has joined the US-led Quad, a loose security alliance that also includes Australia and India, to counter China's expanding economic and military influence in the wider Asia-Pacific region. The Hiroshima summit "would maintain the G7's commitment to helping Ukraine in its drive to repel Russian forces," the visiting Japanese premier added. Moscow launched a war on Ukraine last February, driving millions of people out of the country and resulting in deaths and injuries to thousands more. Kishida is set to meet his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau on Thursday. The Japanese side is expected to raise "global security challenges, from the war in Ukraine to China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific," in addition to bilateral trade and energy issues with the Canadian side during the talks in the capital Ottawa. Kishida will conclude his tour in Washington on Friday after meeting with US President Joe Biden.—Agencies

"Peru anti-govt protests spread

LIMA: Protests against Peruvian President Dina Boluarte's government that have left 48 people dead since they began a month ago spread through the south of the Andean country on Wednesday with new clashes reported in the tourist city of Cusco. Health officials in Cusco said 37 civilians and six police officers were injured after protesters tried to take over the city's airport, where many foreign tourists arrive to see sites including the nearby Incan citadel of Machu Picchu. Protests and road blockades against Boluarte and in support of ousted President Pedro Castillo were also seen in 41 provinces, mainly in Peru's south. The unrest began in early December following the destitution and arrest of Castillo, Peru's first president of humble, rural roots, following his widely condemned attempt to dissolve Congress and head off his own impeachment. The protest, mainly in neglected rural areas of the country still loyal to Castillo, are seeking immediate elections, Boluarte's resignation, Castillo's release and justice for the protesters killed in clashes with police. Some of the worst protest violence came on Monday when 17 people were killed in clashes with police in the city Juliaca near Lake Titicaca and protesters later attacked and burned a police officer to death.—Agencies

Spain drops sedition charge against former Catalan leader

MADRID: A Spanish judge has dropped sedition charges against former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont for his role in the region's illegal secession push in 2017 that brought Spain's most serious political crisis for decades. Supreme Court judge Pablo Llarena took the step, which also included four other Catalan separatists involved in the events of 2017, because changes to Spain's sedition law that have taken effect mean it no longer covers their alleged wrongdoing, the court said in a statement Thursday. However, the judge maintained the charges of embezzlement and disobedience, the court said. That means that Puigdemont and his associates who fled the country five years ago would still have to stand trial if they return, albeit for crimes that carry a lower sentence. Puigdemont lives in Belgium where he is a European Parliament member. Spanish government efforts to extradite him have failed so far, and it's unclear if the changes made by Llarena could increase the chances of him being sent back by Belgian officials.—DNA

Kosovo reaffirms its commitment to stronger ties with US

BELGRADE: Kosovo is aiming for an even stronger partnership with the US, Prime Minister Albin Kurti said Wednesday. Kurti's remarks came after meeting with US State Department Counselor Derek Chollet in the capital Pristina. "Kosovo aims for an even stronger partnership with the United States of America and integration into NATO," said Kurti, according to a government statement. The dialogue process between Serbia and Kosovo and European plans were also discussed during the meeting. The meeting highlighted the need for mutual recognition between Serbia and Kosovo towards the full normalization of relations. Chollet also met with Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani and representatives of the Serbian List party, one of the main parliamentary parties in Kosovo. Osmani emphasized that the active participation of the US in the dialogue process will be decisive for achieving a successful outcome for the benefit of the people of Kosovo. "Kosovo is ready to make proposals that will contribute to the agreement as a constructive party with full determination, in coordination with the United States," said Osmani after the meeting. Chollet is expected to visit Serbia later this week. He will support a comprehensive agreement that needs to be reached on normalizing relations, according to media reports. Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said in October that Germany and France offered to expedite Serbia's European Union membership process if it recognized Kosovo's independence. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, with most UN member states including the US, UK, France, Germany and Türkiye recognizing it as a separate autonomous country from its neighbor.—Agencies



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Saudi Fund calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.—APP

BGP (Pakistan) int'l participated 28th ATC on oil

ISLAMABAD: BGP (Pakistan) International—a world reputed Chinese Multinational actively participated in the 2-day 28th Annual Technical Conference (ATC) on Oil Sector with carefully prepared technical publicity and informative material to showcase BGP Group. The two days 28th ATC successfully attracted the participation of leading Petroleum related enterprises from across Pakistan. The participants included petroleum equipment manufacturing and leasing, software development services, UAV application, and other related materials. BGP, being one of the world's leading Chinese multinationals having completely integrated geophysical companies, delivers a full spectrum of geophysical products and services while its state-of-the-art R&D facility is staffed with outstanding personnel that is unrivaled in the industry. BGP has served more than 300 energy companies during the last few decades with a remarka-

ble footprint in over 70 countries, enabling BGP to become one of the leading geophysical contractors in the world today.

BGP carries out publicity work in seismic acquisition, data processing and interpretation, equipment manufacturing, optical fiber in-

telligence reservoir geophysics, Non-seismic surveys, Kleis and Geoeast software, new energy business, and other fields, attract-

ing strong attention from the oil industry. 28th ATC Annual Meeting came to a successful conclusion. The annual meeting is a stage to fully demonstrate the company's technical strength, a platform to communicate with many major management and technical personnel of oil companies, a stage to gather with old friends of oil companies, and a feast to make new friends. We look forward to further cooperation with oil companies in the geophysical exploration field in the New Year and continue the brilliant success of BGP in the geophysical exploration market in Pakistan. This very important 28th ATC on Oil was attended by BGP (Pakistan) International's Country General Manager for Pakistan Mr. Zheng Zhenqiang, Party Chief Mr. Ma Huiming, Chief Geophysicist Mr. Hui Jing, Party Chief Mr. Liu Hui and Operation Manager Mr. Muhammad Rizwan apart from a dedicated team from BGP (Pakistan) International.—DNA



Briefs

S. America: Solidarity with Palestine replaces pro-Israel tilt

NEWS DESK

SAO PAULO: Chile's announcement that it will open an embassy in Palestine, and Brazil's new government abandoning its predecessor's pro-Israel foreign policy, have raised hopes in Latin America about changes in regional stances on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Just one day after left-wing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva took office on Jan. 1, Brazil announced a radical shift in its diplomacy. New Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira mentioned the Palestinian issue in his inauguration speech, saying Brazil will "resume its traditional and balanced stance kept for over seven decades" and support the solution of two states "completely viable, safely co-existing side by side with internationally recognized borders." Lula, the 77-year-old Brazilian leader, took office on Jan. 1. He already served as president from 2003 to 2010. (AFP) Latin America has been sharply divided over Israel and Palestine for most of the past half-century.

SHC rejects MQM's plea for stay order against LB polls

DNA

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) on Thursday rejected the plea of Mutahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) for stay orders against the local bodies' elections in Karachi and Hyderabad. The lawyer for the MQM-P could not satisfy the court with his arguments. "How did three members of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) issue the schedule instead of five members?" the court questioned during the hearing of the plea. "The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) will answer this question," said the Advocate General of Sindh. The ECP member said that the arguments of the advocate general were satisfactory.

PIA flight delayed as plane's window glass breaks

DNA

JEDDAH: The return of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flight PK741 was delayed for 16 hours after the window glass of Boeing 777 broke during landing at Jeddah Airport. According to the PIA sources, the return of the flight was delayed because the PIA crew did not have any replacement for the broken window glass. Over 300 passengers faced with a great deal of inconvenience due to the delay in return of the flight.

It merits a mention here that the PIA plane, which had reached Jeddah from Islamabad on Wednesday, was to return on Thursday, with flight number PK740. A window glass for the replacement has been sent to Jeddah through flight PK731 from Karachi.

Putin lays into minister for 'fooling around'

DNA

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin lost his cool during his government's first meeting of 2023, publicly telling off the trade and industry minister. For several minutes he accused Denis Manturov of bureaucratic delays in ordering civilian and military planes. "Too long, it is taking too long," said the Russian leader, who has never been one to hold back in criticising top officials in public. "What are you fooling around for? When will the contracts be signed?"

MQM factions reunite ahead of LB elections

"MQM will stage the biggest dharna on Sharaf Faisal. We will see how the Jan 15 elections will take place", Farooq Sattar says

DNA

KARACHI: In a much-hyped merger, Mustafa Kamal and Dr Farooq Sattar – who had formed their separate factions – Thursday joined the Mutahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P). Kamal had established the Pak Sarzameen Party in 2016 and Sattar formed the MQM-P Bahali Committee in 2018 after developing differences with the party. In a press conference flanked by the top brass of the party, MQM-P Convener Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui said the "gravest" of the situation in Sindh's urban areas requires all people to join hands. "It is important that under the circumstances, the people, whose families laid down

their lives for Pakistan's formations, should come together for a historic struggle," the MQM-P leader said. Siddiqui said that the elements who wished to divide the nation are disappointed and vowed that the rejuvenated MQM-P would live up to the dreams of the masses and strive for urban cities' development. "I welcome you all – Kamal, Sattar, and their aides. I hope that all of you will strive for the nation," the former federal minister for information and technology added. In response to a question from a journalist, the MQM-P convener said that the party would not allow the staging of the upcoming local body polls – a move that will invite criticism from opposing parties. "If they redo the delimitation again, we are ready to participate in the local body polls.

If it is not fixed, then we will fight for our rights," Siddiqui warned. For his part, Kamal said this day will be remembered in history as an "important day" as certain decisions would be taken today that are "unthinkable". "If we [the MQM-P leaders] talk about ourselves, then we have taken such unthinkable decisions in the past as well, which were beyond people's comprehension," he said, recalling that when he left MQM founder Altaf Hussain on August 14, 2013, he was a senator and the member of the Rabta committee. He clarified that he had no personal differences with Hussain and that the decision to leave the party was completely based on political differences. Walking the journalists down the events

that took place in the past, Kamal recalled that in October 2013, then-member of the Rabta committee Anees Qaimkhani left Hussain's party, and for three years both leaders remained silent. "On March 3, 2016, we [Kamal and Qaimkhani] came to Karachi and bluntly spoke the truth, which was once again in the wider interest of the Muhajir cause," he said. Kamal said the decision taken on March 3 – the date when he formed his party – was for the people and nation. Lambasting the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), the former senator said: "We did not remove the label of Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) from Karachi so that [PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali] Zardari can consider the metropolitan as his fiefdom."



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of United States Donald Blome calls on Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. – DNA

US envoy Blome, FM Bilawal discuss flood situation

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome on Thursday called on Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to discuss the flood situation in the country. The meeting underscored the concerns of the flood-stricken people, and in this regard, Mr Bhutto-Zardari appreciated the US announcement of an additional \$100 million for the rehabilitation of the flood-hit people. During the meeting, visa interview facilities for Pakistanis were also discussed. In this regard, Mr Bhutto-Zardari said he had a detailed discussion with the US foreign minister regarding visa facilities, adding that this initiative will not only speed up the process of taking visas but also enhance public communication. In the meeting, Mr Blome reiterated his commitment to continue supporting the Pakistani people for the rehabilitation of the flood-stricken people. Earlier today, Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Nong Rong paid a farewell call on Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in Islamabad. During the meeting, views were exchanged on bilateral relations and ways to enhance cooperation in various sectors, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Mr Bhutto-Zardari thanked the outgoing Chinese Ambassador for his service and wished him well in his future endeavors.

China: Five dead after man drives into crowd

BEIJING: Chinese police have arrested a man who drove a car into pedestrians in Guangzhou, killing five people and injuring 13 others. The incident has sparked widespread public outrage, with many accusing the man of deliberately targeting people. Videos posted online show the driver getting out of the car and throwing banknotes into the air, shortly after the crash. Police have detained the 22-year-old man and launched an investigation. The crash took place on Wednesday during the evening rush hour at a busy junction in the southern city of 19 million. "He deliberately drove into the people who were waiting for the traffic light. He rammed the car into them maliciously. After that, he made a U-turn and hit people again," an eyewitness told local outlet Hongxin News. "He wasn't driving too quickly, but some people couldn't run away in time because they wouldn't have known he was hitting people deliberately." The man also reportedly drove into a traffic police officer and his motorcycle, but the officer managed to escape. – Agencies

Rain likely at various parts of country

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Rain is expected in northeast Punjab, upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, Islamabad and Potohar region during the next 24 hours, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD). Moderate to heavy rain and snowfall is expected in Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan, upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Murree and Galiyat during the period. Dense foggy conditions are likely over plain areas of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Upper Sindh. According to the synoptic situation, a westerly wave is affecting upper parts of the country and likely to persist till Friday. During the last 24 hours, rain occurred in Kashmir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad and upper or central Punjab. Snowfall was also recorded in Malam Jabba, Kalam and Murree. While, dry weather prevailed in other parts of the country. Foggy conditions prevailed over plain areas of Punjab and upper Sindh.

No new Russia-Ukraine deal on prisoner swap

"Someone misunderstood something," Moskalkova said on the sidelines of an international conference in the Turkish capital

ANKARA: Russia and Ukraine have not reached a new prisoner exchange agreement during talks in Turkey, Moscow's envoy told AFP on Thursday, saying her earlier remarks about a swap were misinterpreted. Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova held rare talks in Ankara on Wednesday with her Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Lubinets. Turkish state media later quoted her as telling reporters that they had agreed to exchange "more than 40 prisoners" from each side. But Moskalkova told AFP that those comments referred to the number of people the sides had already exchanged in the past. "Someone misunderstood something," Moskalkova said on the sidelines of an international conference in the Turkish capital. "We were talking about the results of our past work. These exchanges already happened." Moskalkova added that she and Lubinets had exchanged lists of wounded soldiers in preparation for a possible future swap. "Such exchanges happen all the time. These agreements are reached by the military, and we work jointly with them." The warring sides have held few direct contacts since Russia invaded its neighbour 11 months ago. But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has tried to use his good relations with both Moscow and Kyiv to arrange peace talks. Erdogan said on Wednesday that he backed the idea of setting up a permanent "humanitarian corridor" in war zone. Moskalkova called it a "very important proposal" that still needed to be agreed with Russian President Vladimir Putin. "The return of the wounded is a constant subject of our discussions, and Mr Erdogan proposed a new way of solving this issue," she said. – DNA

2nd batch of classified Biden documents found

WEB DESK

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's aides have found a fresh batch of classified government records at a second location, in a growing political embarrassment for the White House. The first cache was found at a private office in Washington DC that Mr Biden used after his vice-presidency. The matter is under review by the US Department of Justice. Former President Donald Trump is facing a criminal investigation for allegedly mishandling classified files. It was not yet clear on Wednesday when or where the additional tranche of files was found by Biden aides. The original batch of about 10 documents was discovered in November at the Penn Biden Center, a think tank near the White House, but only came to light this week. Those papers reportedly include US intelligence memos and briefing materials related to Ukraine, Iran and the United Kingdom. They relate to his time as vice-president under President Barack Obama but it is unclear why they turned up in a private office he started using after that. Access to classified documents is limited by law to people with special authorisation and there are rules about how they are kept and stored. All White House records, including classified ones, are required to be turned over to the US National Archives after an administration's time in office. The White House has not yet commented on the newly discovered batch. However, the find has been confirmed by the BBC's US partner CBS and other US media. During her daily press briefing on Wednesday, Biden press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to answer questions about the first cache of files. "This is under review by the Department of Justice," she said. "I'm not going to go beyond what the president shared yesterday." She was pressed on why it took two months for the news to be made public and refused to say when Mr Biden had been briefed on it. The discovery happened just days before the midterm congressional elections.

HRW highlights dire situation of Rohingya in Bangladesh

MONITORING DESK

DHAKA: Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated in its latest report, released on Thursday, that Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh face "impossible conditions" for safe and voluntary return to their homeland of Rakhine State in Myanmar. "Rohingya suffer threats, extortion, and ill-treatment by Bangladeshi security forces and other authorities," the rights organization stated in its World Report 2023. Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority country in South Asia, is currently hosting over 1.2 million persecuted Rohingya in 33 squalid refugee camps in the country's southern border district of Cox's Bazar. The majority of them fled a brutal military crackdown in their home country's Rakhine State in August 2017. "In the Rohingya refugee camps, Bangladesh officials closed community-led schools, arbitrarily destroyed shops, and imposed new obstacles on movement," the report said. Based on claims made by the refugees, the report stated that the Armed Police Battalion (APB) stationed in the congested makeshift tents is subjecting Rohingya to threats, extortion, arbitrary arrests, and torture. "The (Bangladesh) government allowed humanitarian groups to begin teaching the Myanmar curriculum but continues to deny refugee children any accredited education," HRW said. The report stated of the relocation of Rohingya to a remote island, citing Bangladeshi authorities' claim of better living facilities: "During 2022, the authorities moved about 8,000 Rohingya refugees to Bhasan Char, bringing

the total to around 28,000 refugees living on the remote silt island where they face severe movement restrictions, food and medicine shortages, and abuses by security forces." It also stated that, despite the involvement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Rohingya refugees have been prevented from returning to mainland camps to meet their other close relatives. Concerning the current political tensions in Bangladesh, the rights watchdog stated that increased attacks on members of the political opposition have raised fears of violence and repression ahead of parliamentary elections. Following the Dec. 7 clashes between police and supporters of Bangladesh's main opposition political party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), in which one person was killed and a hundred more were injured, Bangladeshi law enforcers sued thousands of opposition party members. In addition, after a clash with police on Dec. 30 in Dhaka, police arrested over a hundred Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and activists. In five separate cases, police charged over 5,000 party workers and office bearers. The Jamaat is the country's main Islamic political party and a key ally of the BNP. "The ruling Awami League is promising free and fair elections in response to increased international scrutiny but is relying on those claims by ramping up repression," Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at HRW, was quoted in the report as saying. "Donors and strategic partners should insist that Bangladesh can express themselves and select their leaders without fear, including by supporting independent election monitoring missions," she added.

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