



Islamabad POST

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Conservative party chairman sacked over tax affairs

Detailed News On Page-07

Retired General Petr wins Czech presidential poll

Detailed News On Page-07



Djokovic wins Australian Open for 10th time

Detailed News On Page-06



Briefs

Fawad files plea for medical

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senior Vice President Fawad Chaudhry Sunday submitted a petition to the Kohsar Police Station's magistrate for his medical examination. In his petition, the PTI leader said that the federal police are not conducting his medical test which is a violation of constitutional rights. It added that the police had mentally and physically tortured PTI leaders Senator Azam Khan Swati and Shahbaz Gill. "The police might do the same as they did in the past and this is why they are not conducting my medical," he added.

Blinken in Egypt amid ME violence

DNA

CAIRO: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Egypt on Sunday at the start of a Middle East trip on which he will look to notch down Israeli-Palestinian tensions after an eruption of violence. Blinken, who will travel Monday and Tuesday to Jerusalem and Ramallah after his stop in Cairo, had long planned the visit to see Israel's new right-wing government, but the trip takes on a new urgency after some of the worst violence in years. A gunman on Friday killed seven people outside a synagogue in a settler neighbourhood of east Jerusalem, and another attack followed on Saturday.

MQM shows concern over price hike

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) on Sunday expressed concern over the hike in petroleum prices by the federal government, media reported. In a statement, the political party stated that the increase in the prices of petroleum products will further increase inflation, impacting the already inflation-hit people of Pakistan.

IMF DEMAND

Govt drops petrol bomb on masses

Finance Minister says POL prices increased to avoid fuel shortage

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar on Sunday announced that the prices of 'Petrol and High-Speed Diesel (HSD)' have been increased by Rs. 35 per liter in the country. Similarly, the prices of kerosene oil and light diesel have been increased by Rs 18 per liter and these prices will be implemented from today at 11 am on January 29. Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Ishaq Dar said this while announcing the new Petroleum Prices on Pakistan Television News. He said that rumours were circulating on social media and other media for the past few hours that an increase of 80 rupees per liter is expected in the price of petrol, which were not true. The Minister said that due to these rumours, an artificial shortage of petrol was created in the market. And thus, keeping in mind the anxiety in the market, the announcement of petroleum prices on the instructions of OGRA was necessary. He said that the government had to take these measures due to the devaluation of the rupee and the 11 percent increase in oil prices in the international market. The minister said that currently there is plenty of petrol in the country and due to these rumours, efforts are being made to create an

PTI scolds govt over price hike

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Leaders of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf have lambasted the hike as well as the ruling administration in the Centre for jacking up the cost of petroleum commodities. Taking to Twitter, PTI Chairman Imran Khan criticised the "corrupt", "incompetent" and "imported" government for total mismanagement of the country's economy. "Total mismanagement of our economy by a corrupt & incompetent imported govt has crushed masses & salaried class with latest hike in petrol & diesel prices & Rs33/\$ devaluation to Rs262.6/\$. Elec & gas price hike & 35% unprecedented inflation expected with Rs200bn mini budget," he wrote. The Khan-led party's Secretary-General Asad Umar prayed for the country's people seeking Allah's mercy. "People are already worried about the worst inflation in history," he tweeted. Meanwhile, PTI member and former

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PM saddened
At least 44 die in Lasbela bus accident
Palestine, Turkiye, Iran embassies grieved over the incident



DNA

ISLAMABAD: At least 44 people died and several others were wounded in an accident after a passenger plunged into a ravine and caught fire near the Chinki stop in the Bela area of the Lasbela district on Sunday. According to a private media report, the accident

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At least 10 kids die as boat capsizes

ISLAMABAD: At least ten children were killed after a boat carrying tourists capsized in Tanda Dam in Kohat on Sunday. According to a private media report, ten children have died after a boat carrying 25 tourists including many children aged between 10-15 year were students of a religious seminary (Madrassah) overturned in the Tanda Dam of Kohat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Kohat deputy commissioner said due to the non-availability of divers in Kohat, a team was called from Peshawar. He said the divers managed to rescue eight others alive from the water. More than 40 personnel of Rescue-1122 participated in the rescue activities, 4 boats and 2 recovery vehicles were also involved in the rescue operation. - APP

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ISLAMABAD: Welcoming banners installed at Constitution Avenue during visit of President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at Federal Capital. - APP

Earthquake of 6.3 magnitude jolts Capital
Epicenter of earthquake located in Tajikistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A 6.3-magnitude earthquake jolted Islamabad and Rawalpindi on Sunday afternoon. No loss of life or damage to property has been reported. According to private media reports, the Pakistan Meteorological Department said that the epicenter of the earthquake was the Tajikistan region and the depth was reported at 150 kilometers. Tremors were also felt in surrounding areas. People rushed out of their houses and shops in panic. However, no loss of life or damage to property was reported.

3 Factory owners booked after 18 die

DNA

KARACHI: Police on Sunday booked three factory owners on charges of manslaughter and negligence after 18 people, including 16 children, died over the past few weeks from inhaling "toxic fumes" in Karachi's Keamari district. Over the past few days, 18 people have reportedly died in the neighbourhood due to inhaling mysterious toxic gases emitting from factories functioning in residential areas. Officials from the

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Desecration in Denmark
PM Shehbaz calls upon global unity to fight Islamophobia

"We are deeply hurt," the prime minister says

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday called upon the civilized world to strongly condemn the highly offensive acts of desecration of the Holy Quran. On his Twitter handle, the prime minister said, "The highly offensive desecration of the Holy Quran by a Danish politician is the third such incident in a row that should be strongly condemned by the civilized world." He further said that the need for global unity to fight Islamophobia couldn't be more urgent than it was now. "We are deeply hurt," the prime minister posted. Meanwhile, Pakistan condemned in the strongest terms the senseless and deeply offensive act of desecration of the Holy Quran in Denmark, by the same



Ulema condemn Quran desecration in Denmark

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Islam is a religion of peace and security and the teachings of the Holy Quran promote peace, affection, tolerance, and harmony. The governments should take immediate action against the blasphemers who desecrate the Holy Quran in Sweden and Netherlands, said Ulema-Mashaykh and religious leadership. Ulema-Mashaykh and religious leadership observed "Sanctity of Quran and Namoos-e-Risalat Day" here on Friday and addressing the religious congregations all over Pakistan underlined that there is a need to

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WINTER ESCAPE

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Imran Khan to contest by-polls from all 33 constituencies

No contact with establishment: Qureshi
Khawaja Asif hints at Khan's arrest



LAHORE: PTI Chairman Imran Khan addressing the core committee meeting. - DNA

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Senior Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Sunday said that his party had decided to contest in by-elections on 33 National Assembly seats in March and former prime minister Imran Khan would be their candidate in all constituencies. PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry had already announced earlier this month the party chief's decision to contest by-elections on all vacant National Assembly seats. Qureshi made the announcement again during a press conference in Islamabad flanked by PTI leader Asad Umar following a joint meeting of

STAFF REPORT

SIALKOT: Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif has warned that former premier and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan may be arrested for 'violating law and causing unrest in the country', media reported on Sunday. Talking to journalists in Sialkot, the defence minister lambasted the PTI chief for accusing PPP co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari of an assassination plot, saying that such statements can bend politics towards violence and can cause bloodshed in the country. Khawaja Asif said that such allegations can create life-threatening situations for Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) leadership, warning that the former premier will be held responsible if any tragedy occurs in the country. In response to a question regarding PTI Chairman Imran Khan's arrest, the defence minister said if PDM leaders can be arrested in 'bogus cases', then how Imran Khan can get away with 'proven charges' of Toshakhana and foreign funding? "Imran Khan can also be arrested due to the violation of the law," said Khawaja Asif.

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Zardari,
Bilawal
grieve over
loss of lives

ISLAMABAD/KARACHI: Former President of Pakistan and President Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman PPP, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari have expressed deep sorrow over the loss of precious lives in Bela, Balochistan and Kohat, KP. President Zardari and Chairman Bilawal expressed grief over the tragic accidents and said that the entire country is saddened. They said that they share the grief of the families who lost their loved ones in the accidents. The authorities should investigate the causes of the accidents so that similar tragedies can be avoided in the future. President Zardari and Chairman Bilawal while expressing sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims of the accidents, prayed to Almighty Allah to grant eternal peace to the departed souls.—DNA

Bahaar Rung
Women
Gala begins
on Feb 11

ISLAMABAD: Lets' Grow Together - a community of entrepreneurs will hold a grand event of Bahaar Rung - Islamabad Women Gala 2023 here on February 11 to promote home based women workers and artisans at f-9 Park. The two-day gala is being organized for the fourth time featuring over 150 stalls of made in Pakistan homemade products by women entrepreneurs including a variety of lifestyle exhibits like fashion products, interior decor products, furniture, resin art, paintings, garments and jewelry etc while some stalls are also given to children to inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship among the young minds and engage them in healthy activities. A traditional puppet show will be part of activities for children to create awareness about various social issues as well as keep alive the traditional performing arts. Food court will also be setup for women gala to offer a variety of foods for the families and visitors in a cultural environment while some stalls will be dedicated to imported products for income generation of women entrepreneurs, said Ambreen Haider, Leader of Lets Grow Together Community while talking to APP.—APP

Railways
starts
upgradation
work

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has accelerated the upgradation work involving the private sector to improve services in passenger trains as well as major railway stations to address the growing issues, especially sanitation issues. "The department was of the view that the cleanliness-related services in trains and at major stations, including Lahore, Faisalabad, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Quetta, Peshawar, Khanewal, Sukkur, Sahiwal, Multan and Bahawalpur were not satisfactory," an official in the Ministry told APP. He said that if services of the private sector were hired under a fast-track policy, the hygiene conditions at stations and in trains could be improved which would also restore the confidence of passengers in the department.—APP

Stipend of Rs7,000 transgenders announced

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Shazia Marri on Sunday said that the federal government will try its best to not have an effect of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreement on the poor people of the country as no one is in favour of taking loans. She said that the priorities of the country would be on top in talks with the IMF. Talking to media persons after a ceremony of transgenders' inclusion in the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) at the Arts Council of Pakistan-Karachi, she said that Prime Minister Mohammed Shahbaz Sharif had constituted an austerity committee. Shazia Marri said that they were bearing the brunt of the previous government's wrong decisions. Condemning allegations of the PTI

Fast track work on Russian, Pak Energy Corridor urged

Devcom-Pakistan Webinar: Russo - Pak Economic and Energy Cooperation, Scope and Challenges

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Speakers at a webinar on Saturday urged the government to fast track the process of economic and energy cooperation agreements with Russia after the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs). It would ease the economic conditions for the citizens. There shall be no delays from the Pakistan side while the US has also conceded to Pakistan's need for a discounted rate. Transportation and freight will be the main constraints that may make the proposition difficult. Secondly, payment terms with Russian Crude suppliers would be another impediment if not promptly handled and sorted out for smooth sailing in this regard. Refiners are concerned about payment arrangements and terms under prevalent conditions; where Russia is engaged in war with Ukraine, Pakistani Banks may not open LCs for Russian Crude Oil. Also, Russians might not want to accept payment in US Dollars. Refineries are already under obligation to honor long-term Sale and Purchase Agreements with Middle Eastern Suppliers including KPC, ADNOC, and ARAMCO and therefore, any immediate import of Russian Crude Oil seems a remote

possibility. The webinar was organized by Devcom-Pakistan (Development Communications network) and DTN on Saturday on the subject "Russo - Pak Economic and Energy Cooperation, Scope and Challenges". Senator Lt. General (Rtd) Abdul Qayyum was the keynote speaker. The guest speakers included foreign affairs expert Dr. Salma Malik, energy and environment expert Qaiser Aijaz, and Devcom-Pakistan Executive Director Munir Ahmed Hussain Ali Shah, Iftikhar Ahmed, Sarah Khan, Natasha Jameel, Maliha and Ayan Mitra also spoke on the occasion. Senator Lt. General (Rtd) Abdul Qayyum said: The recent MOUs with Russia are a long-awaited icebreaking that can lead to an important partnership and investments in defence and oil and gas development in Pakistan after the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. But, the current challenges could be the internal extreme political polarization in Pakistan, lack of foreign reserves and low productivity in every field, and balance of payment. He said Pakistan needs to have sustainable and balanced foreign relations while improving the exports, and attracting external investments. Political stability and consistency of policies shall be the key agenda of

the governments in Pakistan whosoever replaces the previous government. Secondly, Pakistan shall actively take part in the multilateral forums besides improving its indigenous economy, domestic peace and governance. These measures will help the country to develop more than one economic and energy corridor. Devcom-Pakistan Executive Director Munir Ahmed said: A comprehensive Russo-Pak Energy Corridor is very crucial for both countries at this point. Strangely, overlooking the sacrifices of about seventy years, the US has left Pakistan in isolation for siding with China in the new US-NATO cold war against Pakistan's iron friend, Russia, on the other hand, is facing a difficult battle to defend a Moscow-leaning Ukraine that has been seized by US-puppet presidents since the so-called "Revolution of Dignity," prompted by US touts. That revolt compromised the honour of common Ukrainians. While the Russian Federation defends its friends in Ukraine, the US and the West have destroyed Ukraine and frozen \$330 billion in the Russian government and citizen assets. Munir Ahmed said that the time is ripe for both the countries to think about the larger and more comprehensive Russo-Pak Energy Corridor (RPEC), similar to

the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Both corridors can help Pakistan have historic economic growth and prosperity, while the country can also play its backbone role in the regional economic bloc. Whoever takes it up will be the hero of the nation and the region too. Dr. Salma Malik said: The Pakistan-Russia energy cooperation deliberations is a welcomed step, yet needs to be viewed with cautious optimism, given the larger geo-economic dynamics. In a world with growing energy needs, conflicts such as that between Russia and Ukraine or China's economic outreach play a significant role in the advancement of geopolitical interests. Alliances, partnerships, sanctions and global regimes are used both as enablers and restrictive measures by global powers - and countries as Pakistan need to effectively apply diplomacy and power potential to get maximum benefits. She said Russia Pakistan Economic corridor seems good, but only after a deep study of what best we can in real terms get out of such a prospect than a label only. What will such bilateral regimes bring for us in immediate to long term basis. We need to be cognizant of our needs, compulsions, assets, and shortcomings and only then make an all round wholesome assessment.

She said there is a need for strong governance, a sustainable policymaking and keeping key stakeholders on board. The reason why the oil deal would work now than before, as with growing oil demand internationally, countries such as Pakistan are facing dire economic challenges and as in US administration's words they value Pakistan's economic stability and will support conversations between Pakistan and international partners. Hence, we need not fear a sanctions regime, as similarly India benefited (last year) from this selective sanctions regime. Yet the best way out in longer term is an indigenous usage of energy miz, creating a culture of efficient energy usage and sustainable policy framework that restores investors confidence, help rebuild economic growth and take us to a path of progress, with self reliance. Qaiser Aijaz said the Russo - Pak economic and energy Development Cooperation has a history. Pakistan's first five-year plan of 1950 was based on the Russian Economic Model and subsequent provision of technical and financial support for setting up Oil and Gas Development Corporation Ltd in 1960 and Pakistan Steel Mills in the 1970s. All time Pakistan-China friendship also kept Russia at arms

length though the cooperation between Russia-Pakistan remained limited. The recent developments are overwhelming and the momentum shall not meet any halt. Russia has set aside USD 14 Billion for energy sector projects including USD 2.5 Billion for gas pipeline projects in Pakistan. Russo - Pak Economic and Energy Cooperation has huge potential to grow and is expected to develop further on a fast track basis with fast changing geo-political dynamics of the region having global impacts; and mainly due to Pakistan's strategic and natural corridor location to reach out to the globe. However, he said, Pakistan's homework for importing Russian crude oil is not up to the mark. There is lack of clarity among the Ministry's own team particularly with reference to technical suitability, logistics, commercial arrangements and benchmarking with existing imports of crude oils in the country. Government should approach refiners in Pakistan and constitute a committee comprising members to have an in-depth discussion with their Russian counterparts on all issues including technical, operational, and commercial, so that an enabling import and processing mechanism and framework be formalized soonest.

Attock
police arrest
outlaws

QAZI SHOAB KHAN

ATTOCK: Attock Police nabbed ten outlaws involved in drug pushing, gambling, murder, possessing illegal weapons along with ammunition in different bids within the jurisdictions of six police stations of the district during a crackdown launched against anti-social elements here in Saturday. In the first attempt Attock Khurd Police arrested Ghulam Hussain r/o Peshawar and recovered two Kalashnikovs and a pistol from his possession. In different other attempts police arrested six drug peddlers from different areas of the district and recovered 4.4 kg chars from their possession. Those arrested include Ghulam Ansar r/o Pindigheb, Wali Ullah r/o Dir, Waseem Gul r/o Kohat, Saeed Ahmad, Waseem Abbas and Munir Hussain r/o Tehsil Hazro. Cases under the act have been registered against them and all have been sent behind the bars. Similarly Hasanabdal police have arrested an accused Israr Hussain Shah who had shot dead his elder brother Syed Safer Hussain over a petty domestic dispute in village Bhoigar. On the other hand Police Station New Airport has arrested Jahanzeb r/o Gujjar Khan for allegedly trying to occupy the land of Tahir Amin. In another attempt Injra police have arrested three gamblers from Makhad Sharif and recovered Rs 47980 bet money from their possession. Those arrested include Rizwan Khan, Masud Khan and Iftikhar u Deen.



AXILA: Visitors taking interest in antiques displayed on the occasion of Gandhara Festival organized by Punjab Arts Council at Gandhara Art Village Taxila.—DNA

Concerns raised over harassment of journalists

The report throws light on there are hazards and security risks in Pakistan's media environment. 90% of active journalists admitted to receiving threats while performing their professional duties

ISLAMABAD: The ceremony of the awareness foundation which was held in the private hotel Islamabad disclosed the bitter facts about the violence on journalists. 84 journalists were tortured, including the investigative journalist Arshad Sharif, 5 journalists were murdered, and 2 were kidnapped, during the year 2022. In the year 2022 awareness foundation released a report on the violence against journalists. Several well-known journal-

ists and other people from different organizations were invited to the room signatory hotel. According to the data of the report, during the year 2022, more than 84 cases from various sources are collected, and there were many other cases of threats that victims were unable to report due to fear of the establishment and the powerful authorities. The report throws light on there are hazards and security risks in Pakistan's media environ-

ment. 90% of active journalists admitted to receiving threats while performing their professional duties. The most alarming part of threats is their tone of severe repercussions, which is reported by 90% of journalists. Amongst the journalists who reported that they were being targeted, 5% were killed, 3% were kidnapped, 20% were verbally harassed, 8% were detained, 3% were arrested, 14% were assaulted, and legal cases were filed

against 7%. Despite rules and laws, valance existed there in Pakistan. The report unveiled the ill-gal censorship of the News channels by the PEMRA. The speakers demanded the judiciary to stop the increasing violence against journalists and also demanded freedom of speech. The speakers also demanded the investigation of the murder of Arshad Sharif. The awareness foundation thanked all the guests.—DNA

FPCCI's UBG
greets caretaker
ministers

Shahzad Ali Malik said that a sustainable economy has assumed the highest priority worldwide for the survival of a state

ISLAMABAD: Chairman United Business Group of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Shahzad Ali Malik Sunday felicitated the newly inducted caretaker ministers Punjab SM Tanveer and Syed Azfar Ali Nasir. He said the first time two renowned industrialists enjoying good repute coupled with the highest degree of integrity laced with inherited spirit of dedication and devotion have been inducted in provincial cabinet which he added will endeavour their best to deliver the goods in the prevailing scenario. He said both ministers are true representatives of the business community and have vast knowledge and rich experience of good governance in the private sector. He hoped that SM Tanveer in his capacity as minister for industries, commerce, investment and energy will push forward the industrial sector and help address the genuine problems being confronted by the private sector on top priority to pave way for economic growth. Shahzad Ali Malik said that a sustainable economy has assumed the highest priority worldwide for the survival of a state. He said our fragile economy needs immediate result-oriented measures for its durable stability. He hoped both ministers will take all stakeholders and chambers of commerce and industries into confidence to steer out the country from the prevailing economic quagmire. — APP

Two persons
killed, couple
injured

QAZI SHOAB KHAN

ATTOCK: Two persons were killed while a couple was injured in three different incidents within the jurisdiction of Attock on Sunday. In the first incident, a man was tortured to death for allegedly desecrating the Holy Quran at the outskirts village Surug of Pindigheb Police station. Police sources said that the accused Fakhar Zaman has allegedly desecrated the Holy Quran few weeks ago and Sunday his tortured body was found as some unknown person has tortured him to death. Separately body of a man was found from river Indus near Damaan in the limits of Hazro Police station. Police sources said that some locals have spotted the body of a man floating in the river and informed rescue 1122 who have recovered the body and shifted to tehsil headquarters hospital Hazro where the deceased was identified as 37 years old Sattar Ahmed.

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 - Jan 01 / Palestine Palestine Revolution Day
 - Jan 01 / Sudan National Day
 - Jan 04 / Myanmar Independence Day
 - Jan 06 / Iraq Armed Forces Day
 - Jan 12 / Tanzania Armed Forces Day
 - Jan 14 / Uzbekistan Armed Forces Day
 - Jan 15 / Nigeria Armed Forces Day
 - Jan 20 / Mali Armed Forces Day
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Water Tank

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Regional connectivity key to boost Pakistan's exports

Geo-strategic position of Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan also highlights their geo-economic importance

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan Trade House Meher Kashif Younis on Sunday said that promoting bilateral trade and economic relations between Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan could be a milestone in regional and global trade integration and connectivity. Delivering his presidential address at a seminar on "Trade Prospects between Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan" held under the aegis of Gold Ring Economic Forum, a strategic think tank, he said the geo-strategic position of Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan also highlights their geo-economic importance, which could play a significant role in promoting trade connectivity amongst different regions and potential markets of the world.

He said that Pakistan was currently a major player in global and regional trade, bordering the Middle East and South Asian states on the one hand and the global economic power China on the other. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan, due to its very important geographical location, had a distinctive place among the Central Asian states (CARs). He said Kyrgyzstan exporters can also use Gwadar port for the shipment of their products to European countries and other parts of the world and Pak importers can import value-added milk products besides either side can also promote tourism and collaboration in the mining industry. He said that Pakistan was contributing

\$100 million to the Kyrgyz economy in terms of fees and other living expenses of approximately 10,000 Pakistani students. He said Pakistan partially can also meet its energy needs from Kyrgyzstan. He said Kyrgyzstan offered many opportunities for trade with Pakistan as it was the shortest entry point of Pakistani products to the 'Eurasian Economic Markets' of 182-million people comprising Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Armenia. He said that goods once exported to Kyrgyzstan could be further transported to the Eurasian markets without payment of customs duties. Meher Kashif Younis said that many high-rising buildings for

shopping malls, apartments, and hotels were currently being constructed mostly by Turkish firms for which raw material was being imported from other countries. He said that construction materials from Pakistan could also be exported. Meher Kashif Younis said we are lucky enough to have dynamic Ambassador Kyrgyzstan Ulanbek Totuaev who is all the time available only one call away to facilitate pak traders and promote bilateral trade between two countries. He said Dr Shahid Hassan President Kyrgyzstan Trade House is also actively involved to strengthen trade relations and cooperation with two Muslim states. - Agencies

Paying special heed to differently-able persons

FARHAT FATIMA

ISLAMABAD: Allah Almighty has bestowed mankind with countless abilities to see, listen, speak, walk, think and much more regardless of their religion, caste, creed, sex, race and mobility. The creation of human beings is the best ever creation among all creatures on earth and in the heavens and Allah Almighty commands to equally protect the rights of all human beings particularly of the differently-abled persons. After the human rights enshrined in holy scripture, our Constitution guarantees social and economic well-being of all citizens.

Article 38 (d) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan states "provide basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief, for all such citizens, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race, who are permanently or temporarily unable to earn their livelihood on account of infirmity, sickness or unemployment."

It also guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and expression for all people and equal protection of the rights of normal as well as differently able persons by providing social justice. Pakistan also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in July 2011 with Ministry of Human Rights being the Focal Ministry to coordinate and facilitate implementation and reporting of UNCRPD.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Arif Alvi on Saturday directed the Islamabad Healthcare Regulatory Authority (IHRA) to issue instructions to Shifa International Hospital Islamabad (SHIFA) to refund an amount of Rs2.9 million to the daughter of a patient who died due to the medical negligence, professional misconduct, and malpractice of the doctors of the hospital. The president also upheld the imposition of fine of Rs900,000 on SHIFA as maladministration and medical negligence had been proven against the hospital, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release on Saturday. The president issued these directions while rejecting a representation filed by IHRA against the orders of the federal ombudsman in which the ombudsman had held that the complainant (deceased patient's daughter) had been discriminated against as in a similar case in the past, IHRA had not only imposed a fine on SHIFA but had also issued the directions to the hospital to refund the amount in lieu of medical bills. He ordered that the refund should be paid within a week to the complainant.

While rejecting IHRA's representation, the president observed that IHRA had investigated the complaints, found medical negligence and imposed fine of Rs900,000 upon SHIFA

President orders Shifa hospital to refund Rs 2.9 mln

The president also upheld the imposition of fine of Rs 900,000 on SHIFA as maladministration and medical negligence

which had also been received by IHRA and thus medical negligence had been established upon the healthcare establishment. He further said that IHRA did not direct the hospital to reimburse actual amount of medical bill incurred on the treatment of the complainant's mother as per orders of the learned ombudsman whereas in another case namely Dr Iqtidar Mehmood Dara against Shifa International Hospital, Islamabad, IHRA had held that "The medical bill should be refunded to the complainant by SHIFA International Hos-

pital". The president held that it was an established principle that similarly placed persons should be treated alike and equal treatment to all is the hallmark of our Constitution i.e. Article 4 and 25. He said that the object and purpose of the law would be fulfilled only when the complainant was provided relief for any negligence by the hospital. "The Agency must have been more vigilant and watchful to fulfil its responsibilities", he added. The president further observed that the main purpose of the establish-



ISLAMABAD: Chief Commissioner Islamabad Noor Ul Ameen Mengal visited Sunday Bazaar in G 9 and express dissatisfaction over facilities provided to customers. - DNA

Int'l Conference on Science Communication to start from February 1

ISLAMABAD: COMSTEC-the OIC Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation has planned to arrange an International Conference on Science Communication and Community Engagement from February 1-3. According to an official of COMSTEC, the science or media students, researchers, public relations experts, NGOs, and NPOS, Coordinators working at media organizations (electronic, print, social) will attend this conference cum workshop.

The themes of the conference under the topic Science Communication include Academia and Understanding, Science Diplomacy, Emerging Technologies, Climate Change and Life Sciences while the focus of the workshop will be Media training, Networking and Advocacy.

The international speakers who will participate in the conference include Mr. Ehsan Masood, Editor of Nature, UK; Dr. Mahaletchumy Arujanan, Malaysia; Dr. Fabio Turono, Italy; Dr.

Daborah Blum, USA; Mr. Mohammad Yahya, Egypt; Dr. Brooke Smith, USA; Prof. John Dudley, France; Dr. Saad Lotfey, UAE and Mr. Michael Wadleigh, USA. The workshop will be of hybrid nature in which the participants can attend the event in person and online. Coordinator General, COMSTEC Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary will be the Patron-in-Chief of the workshop while Prof. Dr. Syed Javaid Khurshid will be the Associate Coordinator. The event will be organized by COMSTEC in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Daily Technology Times, Regional Rapport and Pakistan Biotechnology Information Center. COMSTEC the Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation of the OIC was established by the Third Islamic Summit of OIC held at Makkah, Saudi Arabia in January 1981. - Agencies

Rs. 240,566,109 utilized to cater health expenditures

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety has utilized Rs. 240,566,109 to cater the catastrophic health expenditures of deserving patients under Tahafuz Program through twelve empanelled hospitals across the country during the year Fiscal year 2021-22. According to an official source, Tahafuz Program is a Public Sector Development Program (FY-2021-2024) demand-driven initiative designed to protect the extremely poor from catastrophic health expenditures. Tahafuz Program is providing healthcare services across Pakistan to the patients in its empanelled public sector hospitals irrespective of geographical limitations and domicile. The program is also providing healthcare assistance to the poor who fall under the pre-defined eligibility criteria primarily based on BISP or National Socio-Economic Registry Poverty scores i.e. PMT. During the Fiscal Year 2021-22, a total amount of Rs. 46,200,000 has been utilized under the Tahafuz initiative by providing health services to deserving patients in Islamabad Capital Territory. Rs. 47,176,180 has been utilized to cater the medical needs of the patients through three hospitals in Punjab while Rs. 5,038,441 has been utilized in treating patients through four hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. - APP

Martial arts training receives spotlight in twin cities

ISLAMABAD: An elevated interest to learn martial arts has been witnessed among the youngsters of twin cities, for gaining physical and mental health along with an added skill of self-defense. Talking to APP here on Sunday, Martial Arts Trainer Irfan Bhatti said that people were choosing to learn martial arts due to four reasons, including fitness, sports, career opportunities and personal safety. He said fitness is one of the primary reasons why many people choose to learn martial arts. He said martial arts involve a lot of physical activity, such as striking, grappling, and cardio training which helps in improving overall fitness level and gain strength, endurance, and flexibility. He said that sport is another popular reason for learning martial arts. Individuals learn martial arts, such as Ninjitsu, Karate, Mix Martial Arts (MMA), and Taekwondo to participate in different national and international sports competitions. Irfan said that training in martial arts can also help individuals to develop discipline, focus, and mental toughness, all of which are important in other sports as well. - APP

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GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN
Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunications
NATIONAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BOARD (NITB)

National Information Technology Board requires to procure following Items and support renewal as per given tender document from GST registered & NTN holder firms.

S.No.	SCHEDULE OF REQUIREMENTS		TIMEFRAME / PERIOD OF SUPPLY/DELIVERY from the date of issuance of purchase order.
	IT HARDWARE / SOFTWARE / SERVICES ITEMS	Qty	
Lot #01	Dell Servers and SAN Support Renewal		
a.	Dell Servers and SAN Support Renewal	06	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
b.	Server Hardware Upgrade: RAM - Dell 32GB Module	12	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 02	VmWare and VCenter Support Renewal	08	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 03	Laptops	06	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 04	Desktop Computers	09	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 05	Printers (Black and White)	08	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 06	Portable Printers Color	02	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 07	Scanners ADF	06	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 08	Video Conference Equipment	03	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 09	Antivirus Renewal	250	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 10	IBM Software SIEM Subscription and Support Renewal	1000 EPS	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 11	Firewall Next Generation	02	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 12	Virtual SmartZone Ruckus Wireless Controller	01	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 13	Microphone Conferencing System	1 Job	Six (06) to eight (08) Week
Lot # 14	Desktop for Animator	01	Six (06) to eight (08) Week

PID NO: 4678/22

Tender Document can be downloaded from www.nitb.gov.pk and www.ppra.org.pk.
Bid receiving date is 14th February, 2023 at 10.30 am and tender will be opened on the same date at 11:00am.

Director (F&A) National Information Technology Board, Plot no 24-B,
Street No 6, Sector H-9/1, Islamabad. Phone: 051-9265042, 051-9204218,
051-9008267 Fax 051-9265376 email: shahid.jadoon@nitb.gov.pk

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Phone: 051-2266165 / 051-2261960

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



Washington's intentions for Hong Kong

In a strongly worded response to the White House decision to extend and expand Deferred Enforced Departure for certain Hong Kong residents in the United States, the Office of the Commissioner of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong urged Washington to "for-sake the pipe dream of containing China with Hong Kong", and "immediately stop the execrable show of interfering in Hong Kong affairs". While the applicability of the national security legislation in Hong Kong in no way compromises the "one country, two systems" framework, the US has accused Beijing of undermining Hong Kong's autonomy. Those suspected of criminal wrongdoings, from street violence to collusion with foreign forces, and who fled the SAR after the introduction of the national security law, are being provided safe haven as "freedom fighters" worth protection. What is a natural assertion of Chinese sovereign rights over the SAR is being utilized against Beijing as evidence of it curtailing the SAR's autonomy. Likewise, what in the mainland authorities' eyes is a means of maintaining stability and order is being distorted as a tool of suppression. However, as the Foreign Ministry office in Hong Kong stated, "Hong Kong is China's Hong Kong, Hong Kong affairs are purely China's domestic affairs". The corresponding Memorandum on DED extension and expansion, it argued, defames the rule of law and human rights conditions in Hong Kong, maliciously attacks the national security law for Hong Kong, interferes in Hong Kong and China's domestic affairs, and openly tramples on the basic principles of international law and international relations. Hong Kong is "moving forward steadily on the correct track of 'one country, two systems'". The true purpose of the US memorandum is to provide "those who oppose China and disrupt Hong Kong and fled overseas" with safe havens by manipulating visa policies, which "fully exposes the malicious US intention" to destabilize the SAR. The US is hyping up the "consequences" of the national security law in Hong Kong to denigrate the legislation. The truth is around 230 people have been arrested by the SAR police authorities on suspicion of endangering national security, among these, a little more than 30 have been tried and found guilty in court. This is in clear contrast with Washington's allegation of "continued and repeated attacks on the protected rights and freedoms cherished by people in Hong Kong". The enactment of the national security law has played a decisive role in realizing Hong Kong's transition from chaos to governance and continued prosperity, by effectively countering the efforts of outside elements to instigate chaos in the SAR using local proxies. Due to its implementation Hong Kong is once again stable, united and thriving.

Britain's failings on child refugees

Unaccompanied children fleeing war, torture and chaos are surely one of the most vulnerable demographics in the world. Yet an Observer investigation has exposed how once these children reach the UK they can be treated with an appalling lack of care, to the extent that large numbers are being kidnapped in plain sight by criminal gangs. Today, we publish allegations by a whistleblower that the staff in one hotel accommodating some of these already traumatised children have subjected them to repeated emotional abuse. Peter Kyle, the Labour MP for Hove, has met some of the children being housed in a hotel in his constituency. He has described their vulnerability: one 15-year-old from Iran who had lost both of his parents travelled to the UK with a friend but was separated from him because he tested positive for Covid and was so anxious "his face was pinched and his legs were buckling". The majority of unaccompanied children arriving in Britain come from countries with terrible records of conflict and human rights abuses: Iran, Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. Many will be in immediate danger from the criminal gangs to whom they owe money for smuggling them into the country. Yet the government has absolved itself of its ethical and legal responsibilities to these children. The Children Act 1989 places a legal duty on local authorities for the safeguarding and protection of all children in need in their local area, regardless of who they are or how they arrived in the UK. The government's inaction has paved the way for more and more children to fall into the hands of criminal gangs. A borders inspectorate report last year revealed disturbing gaps in their care. Despite nurses being onsite at the hotels, they did not have the authority to prescribe medication for the children, including basic pain relief, and there was no access to emergency equipment such as defibrillators or EpiPens. There was no mental health support, despite the high levels of trauma experienced by many of the young people, and their basic educational needs were going unmet. Some of the staff living in the hotels alongside vulnerable children had not even undergone basic safeguarding checks. It is unthinkable that this has been allowed to go on so long, despite MPs like Peter Kyle having alerted the government to the growing problem. The government's inaction has paved the way for more and more children to fall into the hands of criminal gangs. There is so much to criticise in the government's approach to those seeking refuge in the UK. But its horrific treatment of a relatively small number of unaccompanied children fleeing war zones is a stain on the collective conscience of us all.

Iran's strategic moves

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Both the countries have also expressed their willingness to set up an oil refinery in Baluchistan with a capacity of 400,000 barrels of oil. In addition, Iran has offered Pakistan to increase its electricity imports from 100MW to 1,000MW and eventually 3,000MW. Since the nuclear deal Tehran has been used as a historic opportunity to expand bilateral ties and take advantage of a rising Iran in the region. The lifting of economic sanctions had opened new avenues for Iran to strengthen its

Iran is a western neighbor of Pakistan with 158 billion barrels of oil reserves and 34 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. However, the official bilateral trade of the both countries did not reach \$2 billion. In September 2022, Pakistani and Iranian officials agreed to remove hurdles, increase bilateral legal trade and implement the barter agreement for achieving the target of \$5 bilateral trade. Pakistan and Iran have maintained cordial relations since the Shah's regime butpost the Iranian Revolution many social, political, economic and security problems have arisen. Relationship between Pakistan and Iran are poor due to the Saudi element, but Pakistan strives to remain neutral in its relations with both countries. Among other issues, the competition between Chabahar and Gwadar and the slow progress in joint economic projects are affecting their bilateral relations.

Both the countries have also expressed their willingness to set up an oil refinery in Baluchistan with a capacity of 400,000 barrels of oil. In addition, Iran has offered Pakistan to increase its electricity imports from 100MW to 1,000MW and eventually 3,000MW. Since the nuclear deal Tehran has been used as a historic opportunity to expand bilateral ties and take advantage of a rising Iran in the region. The lifting of economic sanctions had opened new avenues for Iran to strengthen its economic and political power. This is time for Pakistan to strengthen its ties with its oil and gas rich neighbor and to mend the broken fence with Iran. The closest power source to Pakistan is already supplying 74 MW of power to Pakistan's Makran division, while another 100 MW transmission line is under construction to Gwadar, Pakistan's emerging economic hub. Iran has invested more than \$2 billion in the agreed gas

pipeline project, while Pakistan has yet to build the related infrastructure. Pakistan is understandably stuck in the balance of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's active participation in the Middle East security matrix is a manifestation of an important role for Pakistan.

Iran's mobilization in Middle East security is a surprising development for traditional regional powers such as Egypt, Israel, and especially Saudi Arabia. Tehran is dominating the regional security matrix from Baghdad to Damascus, Beirut and Sana'a, formed a strong coalition to demonstrate its superiority. Iranian military support for regimes in Iraq, Syria and Yemen has upset the traditional balance of power in the region. Furthermore, due to the lifting of sanctions, the Iranian economy is growing at a remarkable pace as many foreign companies are willing to invest in Iran. This development has spread panic in the Arab states. The United Arab Emirates, originally a duty-free country, now imposes the tax because billions of dollars-worth of Iranian transactions flowed through the UAE during the sanctions. Saudi Arabia is facing a budget deficit. The regional landscape is fraught with foreign support for Iran in many ways. Turkey is preoccupied with its internal problems and is unwilling to confront Iran directly. Russia supports the Assad regime, a strategic partner of Iran, with active military support. China is supporting Iran in trade, economy and investment. European states are eager to take advantage of the emerging economy, and the United States is forced to back Iran because of its geopolitical reach, political influence, and military might to defeat ISIS. Along with international support, Hassan Rouhani had won strong domestic support in the 2016 parliamentary elections, giving him much-needed backing to pursue Iran's

diplomatic, political, and economic recovery. There are two possibilities in this environment of regional security. The Iranian rise is viewed positively and the gradual normalization of the region is seen for the benefit of all, or the rise is viewed negatively and as a result increases the atmosphere of conflict. However, despite many attempts, the Assad regime has not been able to fall. The war in Yemen has failed to weaken the Houthi rebels, but rather has emboldened al-Qaeda and Iraq.

The 34-state alliance, despite the highly publicized 'North Thunder' military exercise, has failed to have a significant impact on regional dynamics as key states Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan are unwilling to contribute their forces. Currently, the national, regional and international political environment favors Iran. Therefore, it would be better to consider the rise of Iran as a positive development and to work for peace, development and stability in the region. After the end of the Iranian nuclear saga, Pakistan can easily and cheaply harness its southwestern neighbor's energy resources to maximize its economic growth. Furthermore, Pakistan has the ability and courage to address the lack of communal trust in the Muslim world, particularly in the Middle East. Pakistan should use its diplomatic offices to remove the obstacles impeding the political and economic development of the region. Pakistan can play a constructive role between Iran and Saudi Arabia to eliminate of the two's unwanted hostile regional policies. Therefore, it is time for Pakistan to formulate a pragmatic policy in view of the changing strategic dynamics in the region and expand its relations with Iran to protect its national security interests. The changing regional geopolitics and strategic dynamics may affect Pakistan; therefore, it should take advantage of Iran's geostrategic position.

Measuring the financial will of first world in COP27

Dr. Iftikhar Ahmed

UN climate summit concluded its conference of parties COP 27 with notable financial support from Austria and New Zealand. Austrian government announced 50 million Euros (US\$51 million) over the next four years for natural disaster due to climate change. The funding will provide economic cover to the Santiago Network, a UN initiative for technical support to countries facing damages from climate-related disasters. New Zealand offered allocation of NZ\$20 million (US\$12

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 27th Conference of the Parties) is being held in Sharm el-Sheikh on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt from 6 to 18 November 2022. The first UN Climate Change Conference took place in Berlin in 1995 in Berlin. Though the Humanity is heading towards a very seen disaster of warming of more than 2.5 degrees, with devastating effects on our lives on the only planet. The era of climate justice has been embarked with strong voice of global community. The time when country of south Asia like Pakistan are looking towards comity of nations for justice and compensation. It is right time understand the global financial will express in recent conference of parties COP27.

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land is taking a leading role to advance global action on loss and damage.

Climate vulnerable countries in the global South want to see the creation of a finance facility for loss and damage. The global community failed to make the agenda at COP26 in Glasgow last year in 2022 is under hot debate as resourceful nations could not put themselves liable for an accounting sum of compensation to countries in south Asia suffering most due to climate calamity.

The North American counterpart Canada affirmed a financial "practical initiatives" worth 24 million CAD (US\$15 million) to support suffering developing countries in three areas: loss and damage, access to climate finance, and climate governance. The ice pole of the world pledged US\$5 million to the Global Shield Financing Facility for resilience of climate-vulnerable countries, and US\$1 million for the Santiago Network. It also announced US\$4 million to the Climate Finance Access Network for acute affected climate-vulnerable countries. This serves as top up to the already offered US\$7 million to network in 2020. European countries pledged notable resources this year. Scotland continued its support since 2021 for loss and damage and has pledged an additional £5 million (US\$6 million), bringing its total pledge to approximately US\$8 million. The UK is to triple its contribution for climate ad-

aptation, from US\$587 million in 2019 to US\$1.8bn in 2025. It announced US\$106 million for forest conservation in the Congo Basin and US\$76 million to fuel the existing Climate Investment Program for indigenous and local forest communities. New British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also pledged US\$78 million to support researchers and scientists in developing countries to back up clean energy innovations. Belgium reserved US\$26 million for Mozambique from 2023 to 2028 and including US\$3 million for loss and damage. Germany pledged US\$175 million for the Global Shield initiative to strengthen insurance and disaster protection finance. Ireland promised US\$10 million to the Global Shield initiative for 2023. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced US\$1.4 billion over four years to assist smallholder farmers address the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change. The funding aims to build resilience against adverse weather events and support climate-smart innovations for farmers. Forests, People, Climate collaborative efforts account for US\$1.2 billion over five years to safeguard forests and the indigenous peoples and local communities that care for them.

—Dr. Iftikhar Ahmed is a University Professor and UN Advisor. His area of interests is Energy, Environment, Health and Education.

Briefs

French energy union in 'Robin Hood action'

PARIS: A French union plays "Robin Hood" by distributing free electricity and gas to protest a pension reform project - which includes gradually raising the retirement age from 62 to 64, accosting the country's largest union, CGT. The project triggered outrage after the government announced plans.

Strikes and protests broke out across the country Jan. 19, with at least 2 million people taking part in mass demonstrations, according to CGT. The CGT said Thursday that members working in the energy sector have been in a "Robin Hood action" against the reform proposal, in the Parisian region and other cities, including Lille, Nantes, Lyon, Nice and Marseille. "Several hospitals and clinics, municipal skating rinks and swimming pools, public sports centers, ... libraries, middle schools, high schools, nurseries, collective heating of universities or HLMs (low-rent housings), public lighting of small and medium-sized towns and social housings have received free electricity or gas," said CGT.

Energy workers protesting the reform project also placed small businesses, such as bakeries, on reduced tariffs. "These actions of Robin Hood of the energy have only started," said the union Sebastien Menesplier, the head of FNME, the mines and energy branch of the CGT, told broadcaster BFMTV that workers have not cut the power of specific targets. The CGT previously suggested cutting gas and electricity in towns of elected representatives who support the reform proposal.—APP

Women drive fast train to Mecca

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia, Jan 29 (AFP/APP): Driver Tharaa Ali takes her seat at the helm of a high-speed train ferrying pilgrims to Mecca, a beneficiary of conservative Saudi Arabia's bid to employ its booming female workforce. Saudi women only gained the right to drive in 2018, and until recently 25-year-old Ali's transportation experience was limited to cruising around her native Jeddah in the family sedan. But last year she joined some 28,000 applicants vying for just 32 slots for women drivers on the Haramain High Speed Railway, which plies the 450-kilometre (280-mile) route between the holy cities of Mecca and Medina at speeds of up to 300 kilometres (186 miles) per hour.—APP

Turkish firm chosen for NATO intelligence software

ANKARA: All NATO facilities around the world will soon be using an intelligence infrastructure software developed by a Turkish defense firm. STM, a Turkish state-run defense company, announced it has secured two major contracts regarding the direction, collection, process, dissemination, and use of intelligence information within NATO. The decision was taken by the NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCI Agency), which handles all acquisition, deployment, and maintenance of communications and information systems for the alliance's leaders and commanders. STM beat out competition from several leading software companies from NATO member states to land what it said was "one of the largest software development projects ever assigned by NATO to Türkiye." STM and the NCI Agency signed two contracts after pre-award negotiations regarding the projects, officially named Intelligence Functional Services (INTEL-FS 2), read a statement issued on Saturday. "The software that will be developed by STM will support the NATO commands in the direction, collection, process, dissemination, and use of intelligence information," the company said.—APP

Retired Gen. Pavel wins Czech presidential election

Turnout in the country of 10.5 million people was unusually high at 70 percent

DNA

PRAGUE: Retired NATO general Petr Pavel beat a billionaire former prime minister in an election runoff to become the fourth president of the Czech Republic, official results showed. Pavel, a former paratrooper, won 58 percent of votes while Andrej Babis scored 42 percent, with 99 percent of the vote counted, according to the Czech Statistical Office. "I would like to thank those who voted for me and also those who did not but came to the polls, because they made it clear they honored democracy and cared about this country," Pavel said after the results showed his victory.

"I can see that values such as truth, dignity, respect and humility have won in this election," he added. The 61-year-old Pavel will in March replace President Milos Zeman, an outspoken and divisive politician who fostered close ties with Moscow before making a U-turn when Russia in-



vaded Ukraine last year. I can see that values such as truth, dignity, respect and humility have won in this election. Turnout in the EU and NATO member country of 10.5 million people was unusually high at 70 percent following an acrimonious campaign marked by controversy. Babis and his family have been targeted by death

threats, while Pavel was the victim of a hoax claiming he was dead as disinformation plagued the final campaign. "Our community is somewhat hurt by the presidential campaign, by the multiple crises we have faced and are facing, but also by the political style that has recently prevailed here," said Pavel. "This has to change, and you

have helped me to take the first step on the path towards this change." While the role is largely ceremonial, the Czech president names the government, picks the central bank governor and constitutional judges, and serves as commander of the armed forces. Voting for Pavel in the small town of Dobruška southwest of Prague, Irena Cihelkova said that the new president should "be forthcoming and friendly, an asset for the country, and not make problems abroad like some other Czech statesmen." Pavel will be the fourth Czech president since the country's independence following its peaceful split with Slovakia in 1993, four years after former Czechoslovakia shed four decades of totalitarian communist rule. His predecessors were Vaclav Havel, an anti-communist dissident playwright who led the country from 1993-2003, economist Vaclav Klaus and Zeman. A graduate of a military university, Pavel was decorated as a hero in the Serbo-Croatian war when he helped free French troops from a war zone. He rose to chief

of the Czech general staff and chair of NATO's military committee. Like Babis, Pavel was a member of the Communist Party in the 1980s. But the man with a carefully trimmed beard and white hair, who has a passion for powerful motorbikes, has since become a strong advocate of EU and NATO membership. "We have no better alternative. We should use all opportunities offered by membership and try to change that which we don't like," he said on his campaign website. "Czechia is a sovereign state and a full member, therefore we can't just sit quietly, nod and then slam the result. We have to be more active and, at the same time, constructive." Pavel has vowed to be an independent president unaffected by party politics and to continue to support aid to war-torn Ukraine as well as its bid to become an EU member. "Naturally, Ukraine first has to meet all conditions to become a member, such as progress in battling corruption. But I believe it is entitled to get the same chance we got in the past," he said.

Japan's monthly COVID deaths cross 10,000

TOKYO: —Japan logged 252 new coronavirus deaths over the past 24 hours, exceeding the monthly figure of 10,000 for the first time, the Health Ministry said on Sunday. The new fatalities have brought the death toll for January to 10,124, Kyodo News agency reported, citing a tally based on prefectural reports. Previously, over 7,600 people died in December, the highest monthly total at that time. The nation has seen a rapid surge in coronavirus deaths since November. Around 54,800 new infections were reported nationwide on Saturday, with 533 patients in critical condition, according to prefectural governments. Daily infections have been declining since the middle of the month. Tokyo has decided to downgrade the legal status of coronavirus in May to the same category as seasonal influenza and other common infections, a crucial move that will lead to a normalization of social and economic activities in one of the world's top industrial countries.—DNA

5.9-magnitude quake rattles northwestern Iran

TEHRAN: A 5.9-magnitude earthquake struck Iran's northwestern province of West Azerbaijan on Saturday with shockwaves felt in many cities, emergency officials said. The quake was reported at around 9.44 p.m. local time (1814GMT) at a shallow depth of 7 kilometers (4.34 miles), with its epicenter near the city of Khoy. According to local officials and media reports, the high-intensity quake was felt in multiple cities, including the provincial capital and largest city Urmia, with multiple aftershocks. Casualties and damage to properties are feared, especially in Khoy, although there is still no confirmation on the number and extent. Mojtaba Khaledi, the spokesman of Iran's Emergency Organization, told state TV that preliminary reports suggest damage in Khoy as a result of the quake, adding that ambulances have been dispatched from nearby cities of Urmia and Tabriz.

The teams of the Red Crescent Society in the province, which borders Azerbaijan, have also been dispatched to the worst-hit areas to assess the damage, officials said. Zabihullah Kazemi, governor of Khoy, was quoted as saying by the state news agency that 15 teams have been sent to the quake-hit areas to assess the extent of damage and provide relief to people. The province was jolted by a 5.4-magnitude earthquake earlier this month, which shook the city of Khoy and caused extensive damage to properties there. In October, a 5.4 magnitude earthquake in the city of Khoy injured nearly 400 people and partially or fully damaged hundreds of urban and rural residential properties. Iran is located in a seismically active zone and has seen many catastrophic earthquakes in the past years.—APP

UK premier sacks Conservative chief Zahawi

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday fired Nadhim Zahawi as the chairman of the Conservative Party after an ethics probe into his tax affairs. Sunak said an investigation by his independent ethics adviser, Laurie Magnus, found that "it is clear that there has been a serious breach of the ministerial code." "As a result, I have informed you of my decision to remove you from your position in His Majesty's Government," he said in a letter to Zahawi published on Sunday. Zahawi had been under mounting pressure to resign after it emerged that he paid a penalty over unpaid taxes in a multimillion-pound dispute while he was chancellor last year. The dispute was related to the polling company YouGov that Zahawi co-established in 2000 before he became a member of parliament, according to local media reports.—DNA

Invest in Pak tourism sector, Masood urges Pakistani Americans

He urged the community members to encourage fellow Americans to go to Pakistan as it was a safe place to enjoy its tourist attractions.

NEW YORK: Pakistan has the most beautiful and undiscovered touristic sites with huge untapped tourism potential, Ambassador Masood Khan said Saturday, urging members of the Pakistani community to help boost tourism in their motherland by investing in this potentially lucrative sector. Masood Khan, who is Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States, was speaking at a well-attended reception for the Pakistani delegates to New York's Travel and Adventure Show at the Consulate here. Pakistan, he said, was not only home to ancient and modern civilizations, but also vast untouched coastal areas, deserts, and a rich cultural heritage - all making the country as one of the top travel destinations in the world. Ayesha Ali, the Pakistani consul general, welcomed the visiting delegates, saying they did a great job in setting up the impressive Pakistan Pavilion at the two-day Travel and Adventure show

Greek PM survives no-confidence vote

ATHENS: Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis survived a no-confidence vote filed by the main opposition SYRIZA party for his alleged links to a surveillance scandal. Talking to the floor of parliament before Mitsotakis, main opposition leader Alexis Tsipras blamed Mitsotakis for the scandal, which he called the greatest deviation in the country since 1974 when democracy was restored. "Ultimately, the time of crisis comes at some point, for everyone and everything," he said and added that Mitsotakis has been conducting concealments, blackmails, intimidation and numerous kinds of illegalities to avoid facing "this moment." To cover up, he argued: "You unleashed an unprecedented wave of intimidation against those who know of it." "You knew everything and for six months you lied everywhere," he said and argued that the premier is the mastermind of the parastatal organization which put many journalists, businessmen, generals and politicians under illegal surveillance. He accused the prime minister of "selling cheap patriotism" and drew attention to the fact that the government signed arms deals worth 14 billion (\$15.21 billion) since the summer of 2019, which did not benefit the local industry. He claimed some of the arms are not necessary or wanted by military leadership. Mitsotakis focused on comparing the "achievements" of his government in many sectors - including the fight against irregular migration, foreign policy and the economy - with the Tsipras government that ruled from 2015 -2019. He accused SYRIZA of causing divisions and consequently harming Greece. In reference to elections that are expected in late spring or early summer, Mitsotakis said "Democracy will be protected with the victory of the (ruling) Nea Dimokratia." The motion of no confidence was eventually rejected 156 to 143. — Agencies



TEHRAN: Foreign Minister of Iran inquires about health of the security guard injured during an armed attack on the Azerbaijan embassy in Tehran. Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Iran Ali Alizada briefs the minister about the attack.—DNA

Over 55,000 Sikhs vote for Khalistan referendum

MELBOURNE: More than 55,000 Sikhs voted for Khalistan Referendum in a strong show of defiance to the Indian government's attempts to stop the local Sikhs from taking part in the democratic voting system to raise demand for the creation of Khalistan in Indian Punjab. The organising group Sikhs For Justice and independent observers said the total number of Sikhs who cast their votes stood between 55,000 to 60,000 by the time the doors were closed by the centre's management as well as the Punjab Referendum Commission (PRC). While a large queue was still in place outside stretching from the voting centre all the way to the Flinders Street station. While over 55,000 Sikh men and women - over the age of 18 - were eligible to cast their votes, an estimated 15,000 voters were unable to cast their votes due to time limitations. There was a stampede when those standing in the queue crashed the entrance gate and made their way to the voting hall to cast their votes in the last 10 minutes. Thousands more stood outside in queues waiting to get in, but were stopped by the PRC members as a time to extend voting was not allowed. Addressing those waiting outside, a local Sikh leader Gurminder Singh said that they will be able to participate in the voting for their homeland of Khalistan on a separate voting date, which will be announced in due course. He regretted that thousands waited in queues and

had to be turned back, as voting ended at 5pm. The Khalistan Referendum campaign is being run across the world by the pro-Khalistan group, SFJ, whose counsel general Gurpatwant Singh Panun welcomed the turnout at Melbourne's Federation Square. "The first phase of Khalistan Referendum voting in Melbourne has established the fact that Sikhs are for Khalistan and will continue the peaceful and democratic process under the United Nations Charter to liberate Punjab from Indian occupation. Khalistan is the only solution

as successive Indian regimes from Indira Gandhi to Narendra Modi have committed the genocide of Sikhs with impunity," Panun stated. He added: "After seeing Sikh people's support for Khalistan, the liberation of Punjab from Indian occupation is inevitable and we do agree with Modi that India should be only Hindu country and [Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] BJP-RSS also should continue with Hindutva agenda." The Melbourne Khalistan Referendum voting centre was dedicated to Shaheed Bhai Satwant Singh

and Shaheed Bhai Kehar Singh - the assassins of former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The voting started at 8am local time but thousands started arriving at the centre from around 7am. Thousands of Sikhs formed queues in Melbourne's Federation Square to cast their votes for Khalistan Referendum voting at the sprawling local arts centre. Within an hour, the queue stretched to around two kilometres going past the Flinders Train Station to the deep town. Sikh youth, men, women and elderly formed queues carrying banners and flags of Khalistan. They chanted slogans of Khalistan Zindabad (Long Live Khalistan), Ban Kay Rehay Ga Khalistan (Khalistan will be formed at any cost) and Hindutva Namanzoor (Hindutva Unacceptable). At the entrance of the centre, large banners hung reading "Khalistan Referendum, Punjab, Shimla Capital" and "Khalistan Referendum, Secession of Punjab from India". Sikh men arrived in jeeps, cars and coaches to take part in voting. Outside the venue, a group of dholists played traditional Punjabi dhol, Sangat songs and chanted slogans for the martyrs of 1984 Operation Blue Star and for the freedom of Punjab. Voting in the referendum, which started in October 2021 in seven cities of the United Kingdom, has so far been held also in Switzerland, Italy and two Canadian centres.—Agencies



Briefs

Pope condemns increasing 'death spiral' in ME

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Sunday condemned a resurgence of violence in the Middle East, calling on both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to engage in a "sincere search for peace." "The death spiral that increases day by day only closes the few glimmers of trust that exist between the two peoples," said the pope following his traditional Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square. Francis, 86, cited 10 Palestinians, including a woman, killed in an Israeli army raid on a refugee camp in the West Bank, and an attack Friday by a Palestinian gunman that killed seven Israelis outside a synagogue in east Jerusalem. "Since the beginning of the year, dozens of Palestinians have been killed in clashes with the Israeli army," said the pope. "I appeal to the two governments and the international community to find other ways without delay, including dialogue and the sincere search for peace." "It is with great sorrow that I learn of the news coming from the Holy Land," he said. - APP

Strikes to disrupt public transport in France

PARIS: Public transport in France will be heavily disrupted on Tuesday due to labour union strikes protesting the government's planned changes to pension, Transport Minister Clement Beigne said on Sunday. "It will be a difficult, very difficult day for public transport... We expect major disruptions," Beigne said on LCI TV. He added that the government remained open to talks with the unions but he said that the government would maintain the core target of the change proposed by President Emmanuel Macron; the increase of the retirement age by two years to 64. "The heart of the reform will not change," he said. The government wants to gradually increase the retirement age by three months per year from September, until 2030. From 2027, workers will also have to make social security contributions over 43 years rather than 42 years in order to draw a full pension. The additional year was already foreseen in a 2014 reform but the government is accelerating the pace of transition. Unions - including the moderate CFDT union - are united against the reform and have vowed to continue strikes and demonstrations until the government drops its plans.

Poliovirus detected again in Lahore sewage

ISLAMABAD: The National Institute of Health (NIH) on Sunday confirmed the detection of poliovirus from Lahore's environmental samples for the second time this month. According to the NIH, the poliovirus was detected in sewage water in the Multan Road area, on January 16 and in samples taken from Gulshan Ravi Lahore on January 2. - APP

Iran says attack should not affect Azerbaijan ties

Iran and Azerbaijan disagree on whether Friday's attack on the Azeri embassy in Tehran constituted a 'terrorist act'

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi has told his Azerbaijani counterpart that bilateral relations should not be affected after an attack on Baku's embassy in Tehran that left one person dead. The attack took place on Friday when a man rushed the embassy with an assault rifle and opened fire, killing the head of the security staff and injuring two other guards. Raisi and President Ilham Aliyev had a phone call on Saturday to discuss the issue, during which the Iranian president expressed his condolences and said an investigation is under way.

"The governments of Iran and Azerbaijan will not allow bilateral relations to be affected by the suggestions of those who wish ill on the two nations," Raisi was quoted as saying on his official website. The Iranian president's website also quoted Aliyev as saying "this was an unexpected crime, but cooperation between the two countries on this must be in a way that no one will find an opportunity to disrupt friendly bilateral relations using such incidents as an excuse". But the read-out of the call by the Azerbaijani presidency made no mention of this, further stressing a point concerning the attack that has divided Tehran and Baku. Ilham Aliyev strongly condemned the terrorist act and stressed that

had it not been for a second guard who tackled the gunman, "he would have targeted other employees of the embassy and their family members living in the apartment section of the embassy compound". CCTV footage released by Iran showed the attacker hurriedly arriving at the scene with his car and crashing into another vehicle parked in front of the embassy. After exiting the car with the rifle in hand, he passes an unarmed Iranian guard sitting in a booth and enters the embassy shooting. While shooting at two Azerbaijani guards, a third tackles him, eventually disarming the attacker. Aliyev had immediately condemned the incident as a "terrorist act" while the

Azerbaijani foreign ministry summoned Iran's envoy to Baku and said it will evacuate its diplomatic staff. Many countries, including Pakistan, Russia, Turkey and the United States condemned the attack and called for a transparent investigation. Iran, home to millions of ethnic Azeris, has long accused Baku of fomenting separatist sentiments in the country and has also taken issue with some of its plan following the Nagorno-Karabakh war that could affect its borders with Armenia. Tehran has also repeatedly warned Baku against its expanding military cooperation with Israel, saying Israel could potentially use Azerbaijani territory as a bridgehead against Iran.

US Police unit disbanded after murder accusations

WEB DESK

MEMPHIS: The Memphis Police Department has disbanded the so-called Scorpion special unit, whose officers are accused of murdering Tyre Nichols. Scorpion stands for "Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighborhoods". The unit is a 50-person team tasked with bringing down crime levels in particular areas. But now it is being abolished after its officers were seen beating Mr Nichols, 29, in the videos from 7 January. In a statement, the department said "it is in the best interest of all to permanently deactivate" the unit.



ISLAMABAD: Leader of the House in Senate Dr. Shahzad Waseem in a meeting with South African High Commissioner Mthuzuzeli Madikiza. - DNA

Chatter ongoing to create One-Unit: Raza Rabbani

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former Senate chairman Raza Rabbani on Sunday said that speculations with regard to presidential system and change in basic structure of the constitution have surfaced again. "There is chatter with regard to an attempt to roll back 18th Amendment and create the One Unit again," Rabbani has said. "No effort will be allowed to roll back 18th Amendment," Senator Rabbani said. "We were thinking that the existing parliament was thinking about the new parliament but this parliament thinking to roll back the parliament," Raza Rabbani said. "Don't play with the basic structure of the constitution," he advised. He had also expressed opposition to the passage of the Foreign Investment (Promotion and Protection) Bill, 2022 which paved the way for the signing of a settlement deal

"We were thinking that the existing parliament was thinking about the new parliament but this parliament thinking to roll back the parliament," Raza Rabbani said. "Don't play with the basic structure of the constitution"

on Reko Diq mining project as he termed the legislation an "attempt to roll back 18th Amendment". Raza Rabbani, who is a senior leader of the Pakistan People's Party, earlier observed that the parliament's powers were encroached upon by the executive. Through subordinate legislation, an attempt is being made to roll back the 18th Constitutional Amendment, he observed. Rabbani was one of the four senators from the treasury benches who had opposed the bill in the Senate. - DNA

Iranian military factory hit by drone attack

The attack "has not affected our installations and mission...and such blind measures will not have an impact on the continuation of the country's progress"

TEHRAN: A loud explosion struck a military industry factory near Iran's central city of Isfahan overnight, in what Tehran said on Sunday was a drone strike by unidentified attackers. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast, which came amid tension with the West over Tehran's nuclear work and supply of arms for Russia's war in Ukraine, as well as months of anti-government demonstrations at home. The extent of the damage could not be independently confirmed. Iran's Defence Ministry said the explosion caused only minor damage and no casualties. Iranian media video showing a flash of light at the plant, which the official IRNA news agency described as an ammunition factory. Footage showed emergency vehicles and fire trucks outside the complex. "Around 23:30 (2000 GMT) on Saturday night, an unsuccessful attack was carried out using micro Aerial Vehicles (MAVs) on one of the ministry's workshop sites," the Defence Ministry said in a statement carried by Iran's state TV. It said one drone was shot down "and the other two were caught in defence traps and blew up. It caused only minor damage to the roof of a workshop building. There were no casualties." The attack "has not affected our installations and mission...and such blind measures will not have an impact on the continuation of the country's progress." Separately, IRNA reported early on Sunday a massive fire at a motor oil factory in an industrial zone near the northwestern city of Tabriz. It gave no information about the cause of that blaze. - DNA

Ukraine says it repels attack around Blahodatne

KYIV: Ukraine's military said on Sunday its forces repelled an attack in the area of Blahodatne in the eastern part of the Donetsk region, while Russia's Wagner private military group said it took control of the village. "Units of Ukraine's Defence Forces repelled the attacks of the occupiers in the areas of ... Blahodatne ... in the Donetsk region," the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces said in its daily morning report, referring to fighting on Saturday. It added that its forces repelled Russian attacks in the areas of 13 other settlements in the Donetsk region. The Wagner Group, designated by the United States as transnational criminal

organisation, said on the Telegram messaging app on Saturday that its units had taken control of Blahodatne. With fighting heating up in the Donetsk region, the exact line of contact has been unclear, especially around the town Bakhmut where some of the heaviest fighting of the war has been taking place in recent weeks. The Wagner Group has made premature success claims before. Ukraine has said that the Russian offensive on Bakhmut has not culminated, but the situation along the front line there has been growingly difficult. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Friday that it was acute.

Four civilians were killed, one in Bakhmut, and 17 wounded in Russian attacks on the region on Saturday, Pavlo Kyrylenko, governor of the Donetsk region said on the Telegram messaging app. Ukraine has won promises of Western battle tanks and is seeking fighter jets to push back against Russian and pro-Moscow forces, which are slowly advancing along part of the front line. On Saturday, Zelenskyy's top aide said that expedited talks were under way between Ukraine and its allies about its requests for long-range missiles to prevent Russia from destroying Ukrainian cities. - Agencies

Tunisia votes again in 2nd round of elections

In December's first round of voting, 23 candidates were elected to 161-member parliament. Special elections will be held later for seven constituencies with no candidates

TUNISIA: Tunisian voters are heading to polling stations on Sunday for the second round of parliamentary elections in a country embroiled in a deepening political crisis. Polls opened at 8 a.m. local time (0700GMT) and are set to close at 6 p.m. (1700GMT). More than 10,000 ballot boxes have been placed at 4,222 election centers across the country, according to government figures. A total of 262 candidates, including 34 women, are in the running for 131 seats. In December's first round of voting, 23

candidates were elected to the 161-member parliament. Special elections will be held later for seven constituencies with no candidates. The early polls are the latest step in a series of exceptional measures taken by President Kais Saied, which started in July 2021 with ousting the government, dissolving parliament, and drafting a new constitution. With around 9.2 million eligible voters, the first round saw a meager turnout of 11.22%, fueling more calls from the opposition for Saied to step down. - DNA

Netanyahu criticized for easing 'shoot at Palestinians'

Israeli PM's plan to expedite gun permits for Israelis gives the 'green light' to inflict more violence on Palestinians, analysts say

DNA

JERUSALEM: A rise in violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem is feared following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to make it easier for Israelis to acquire firearms. On Saturday, Netanyahu said he would expedite gun permits for Israeli citizens and to step up efforts to collect "illegal weapons". His office also promised new steps to "strengthen" illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. The announcements were made after a meeting of Netanyahu's security cabinet - filled with hardline politicians - over two shootings that included an attack in occupied East Jerusalem. Seven people were killed in the shooting outside an East Jerusalem synagogue on Friday. The shootings took place towards the end of a month of growing confrontation and follow an Israeli

raid in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin that killed nine Palestinians and exchanges of fire between Israel and Gaza. In all, Israeli forces have killed 32 Palestinians this month. The new Israeli government, inaugurated last month, is the most right-wing in the country's history and has sparked fears for Palestinians living under illegal Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and in Israel proper, as well as left-wing Israelis. Part of the new government are national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, both outspoken about their intention to expand illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank and the annexation of Palestinian land, and are notorious for inciting violence against Palestinians. "And you also have a prime minister who's making it clear that people should be armed and they're going to do nothing to stop the killing of Palestinians. You can see the recipe is that more and more Palestinians are going to be killed."

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