



Islamabad POST

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Babar Azam wins ICC Cricketer of the Year Award

Detailed News On Page-06

Australian envoy hails ties with Pakistan

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Palestine slams US' silence over Jenin killings

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Briefs

Khan misled by some PTI leaders

NEWS DESK

LAHORE: Former Punjab Chief Minister (CM) and Pakistan Muslim League-Q leader Pervaiz Elahi has asserted that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan was misled by some of his party leaders, ARY News reported on Thursday. Talking to journalists in Lahore, Pervaiz Elahi said that his government had done a remarkable job within a five-month period, suggesting that the assemblies should have completed their terms. "PML-Q also wanted the assemblies to complete their term," he said.

Ishaq Dar's attempts harmed Pak

SAIFULLAH

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Miftah Ismail Thursday slammed Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and said that the finmin doubted his ability to keep the economy afloat. "I don't know why Mr Dar was brought back but Mr Dar thought that he could run the country without International Monetary Fund (IMF)," Ismail said while speaking during a TV show. The former finance minister said the attempt to run the country without the help of the Fund resulted in harming Pakistan.

Fawad records statement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Fawad Chaudhry, who was arrested from Lahore on Wednesday, recorded his initial statement to the Islamabad police on Thursday. Kohsar Police Station's DSP and SHO quizzed Fawad Chaudhry about his statement, to which he replied "I said what I felt. Nobody asked me to do so." To another question, the PTI leader said his mobile phone was with him when he was arrested.

'Playing with fire'

President Alvi warns against Khan's arrest

Says no contact with Establishment for over a month; denies any plans to ask PM for trust vote

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: President Dr Arif Alvi believes that the government will be "playing with fire" if it resorts to arresting Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan - as speculations are rife after PTI Senior Vice-President Fawad Chaudhry's arrest. He added he never thought about asking the prime minister to seek a trust vote nor was asked by Imran Khan or any other PTI leader. In a conversation with senior journalists on Thursday, the president, in response to a question about Khan's arrest by the incumbent government, said: "It will be tantamount to starting a fire [fueling anarchy in the country]." The president said that arresting the former prime minister or any senior politician would lead to "resistance", hinting at instability if the government tries to detain its opponents. The president also deplored the manner in which Fawad was presented in the Islamabad court and asked the officials to "have some shame" as they covered his head with a white sheet and also handcuffed him. "Institutions shouldn't need police to maintain their respect. If someone has an issue with me, then I will improve my performance instead of asking the police to take action," he said. Despite persistent agitation from the PTI since Khan's ouster in April last year, the president reiterated that the

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Imran chairs huddle to protest arrests

BUREAU REPORT

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan chaired on Thursday a meeting of the central leadership to raise his voice against the arrest of his stalwarts. The highlight of the meeting was making strategy over the possible arrests of the PTI leaders. In the huddle, the political situation and the party's future strategy were also underscored. The PTI bigwigs expressed their reservations over "the attitude of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)." The meeting also discussed developing a strategy to deal with "the ECP's delay in announcing election dates." Fawad Chaudhry, a former federal minister, was arrested from his Lahore residence in the wee hours of Wednesday after he publicly "threatened" the members of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and

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SBP foreign reserves near rock bottom

PKR sinks to historic low against dollar

BUSINESS DESK

KARACHI: The State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) foreign exchange reserves fell to a record low of \$3.7 billion as the country grapples with a severe economic crunch, striving to revive the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) bailout programme to avoid a looming debt default. In a statement, the SBP said as of January 20, its reserves fell to \$3,678.4 million due to external debt repayments, which will now provide an import cover of less than a month - 0.73 month to be exact. The net foreign reserves held by commercial banks have also fallen to \$5,774.8 million, bringing the total liquid foreign reserves to \$9,453.2 million, the central bank's statement mentioned. Inflows have virtually come to a grinding halt despite assurances from friendly nations, as the lenders seem reluctant to release funds before Pakistan completes the IMF's stalled programme. As the coalition government desperately

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IMF team due by end of month

COMMERCE REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: An International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation will visit soon to visit Pakistan to hash out the details of the stalled ninth Extended Fund Facility review, an official confirmed Thursday. Islamabad is dealing with a severe economic crunch as the foreign exchange reserves are at their lowest levels in more than eight years and the Pakistani rupee has dropped to historic lows, with the government now eyeing to revive the bailout programme as it nears a default risk. "At the request of the authorities, an in-person Fund mission is scheduled to visit Islamabad January 31-February 9 to continue the discussions under the ninth EFF review," IMF Resident Representative in Pakistan Esther Pérez Ruiz told media.



ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

Shujaat removed as PML-Q president

DNA

LAHORE: The differences between the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) factions widened on Thursday as Tariq Bashir Cheema and Chaudhry Salik Hussain denounced the decision to remove Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain as the party president, terming it to be "un-constitutional". Earlier, it was reported that the party's general council elected Chaudhry Wajahat Hussain and Kamil Ali Agha as the new PML-Q president and secretary general, respectively, during a meeting in Lahore while Chaudhry Parvez Elahi was retained as PML-Q Punjab president.

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Punjab interim cabinet takes oath

DNA

LAHORE: An 11-member cabinet of caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi took oath of their offices on Thursday. Punjab Governor Balighur Rehman administered oath to the caretaker cabinet members. They included health expert Dr Javed Akram, former bureaucrat Nasim Sadiq, senior journalist Amir Mir, cricketer Wahab Riaz, Bilal Afzal, SM Tanveer, Ibrahim Murad, Tamkinat Karim, Dr Jamal Nasir, Mansoor Qadir, and Syed Azfar Ali Nasir.

US to continue support: Blome Pak attaches great importance to ties with the US: PM

Shehbaz Sharif thanks the United States for its continued support

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to deepen economic and trade engagement with the United States. He was talking to US Ambassador Donald Blome, who called on him in Islamabad Thursday. The Prime Minister reiterated that Pakistan attached importance to its longstanding ties with the United States. Noting the recent momentum in high-level bilateral exchanges, Shehbaz Sharif stressed that structured and broad-based Pakistan-US engagement is critical to advancing both countries' shared goals in both bilateral and regional domains. The Prime Minister thanked the United States for its continued support for

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PM mulls political strategy with allies

SHUJAAT HAMZA

ISLAMABAD: Even though by-elections in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) are yet to be announced, the three key parties of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) have already started focusing on the upcoming polls and leaders of the three major parties of the coalition put their heads together on Thursday. A summit meeting was held between Prime Minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)

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Israeli army kills nine Palestinians in Jenin

NEWS DESK

OCCUPIED WEST BANK: Israeli troops have killed at least nine Palestinians in one of the deadliest days in the occupied West Bank since Israeli raids intensified at the start of last year. The Palestinian Ministry of Health said 20 others were wounded with live ammunition in the raid on the Jenin refugee camp on Thursday, which Palestinians have described as a "massacre". Four of them were in critical condi-

tion. The dead included an elderly woman, according to Palestinian officials. She was identified as Magda Obaid by the Jenin hospital authorities. Israeli forces, who withdrew from Jenin after the killings, said they were looking into reports of the woman's death. Meanwhile, Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade - an armed militia affiliated with the Palestinian political party Fatah - said the dead included one of its fighters, Izz al-Din Salahat. According to the health ministry, another person, Saeb Azriqi, 24, succumbed to his injuries in a hospital.

Palestine questions American silence: News on Back Page

Pakistan, US in new process re-engagement

Islamabad strongly condemns Quran desecration incidents in Sweden, the Netherlands

ANSAR M BHATTI/DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office (FO) on Thursday said Pakistan and the United States were in a new process of re-engagement based on "productive and cooperative" collaboration in diverse matters. "We are undertaking discussions on different issues including agriculture, climate change, investment, energy, and other sectors and we also continue to discuss all issues of concern to both sides," FO Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in response to the statement of the U.S. that Pakistan can buy Russian oil despite restrictions. She further said Pakistan has expressed grave concern over the desecration of Quran incidents in Sweden and now in the Netherlands and conveyed concerns to the governments of both countries. US State Department's spokesperson Ned Price at a press briefing Tuesday afternoon had stated Pakistan could also take advantage of the concessions Washington had given to other countries for buying oil from Russia. The FO spokesperson said Pakistan appreciated its close friendship with the United States and was in a process of "re-engagement". Asked about the claim of Pakistan national Abdul Rehman Makki that he was not provided an opportunity of defence over his listing by the United Nations, she said the decision was made by the world body under its listing procedure. "Pakistan as a responsible member of the international community follows the decision of the UN

No backchannel diplomacy with India: Hina Rabbani

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar on Thursday told the Senate that there was no backchannel diplomacy going on with India. Responding to a supplementary question of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Senator Faisal Javed at the floor of the upper house of the parliament, she said since the government had come into the power, there was no backchannel diplomacy going on between Pakistan and India. Hina made it clear that if backchannel diplomacy was the result oriented, it should be done. She said the messages, being received from India, were all conflagratory that was why; there were no talks on any kind of trade between the two neighboring countries. She expressed the possibility of talks if there was any opportunity and India comes to Pakistan's demand. "It is duty of the politicians to do the rights things instead of coming in the way of diplomacy," she maintained. Balochistan Awami Party's Senator Danesh Kumar, appreciating the Kar-

tarpur Corridor, said there was Hinglaj Mata temple in Balochistan which was almost five thousand years old adding that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also its worshiper. He expressed the hope that if this archeological site was promoted for religious tourism between Pakistan and India, it would have good impacts on the social conditions of the people of this coastal area. He asked the minister for taking any peace-building initiative for this ancient religious temple like the Kartarpur Corridor. Terming Kartarpur Corridor a good precedence, Hina said this was obviously a positive suggestion and Pakistan had always played frontman role in the execution of



Continued on Page 06

and its institutions," she said. If there was a backdoor diplomacy, brokered by the United Arab Emirates between Pakistan and India, she dismissed any such development taking place. "At this stage, no dialogue is taking place between Pakistan and India," she categorically stated. The spokesperson said Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar, later this month, would lead the Pakistan delegation to the UN Human Rights Council in The Geneva. "On January 30, she will present Pakistan's national progress report under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process at the Council," she said. The State Minister will outline the wide-ranging legal, policy, administrative and institutional steps taken by Pakistan to safeguard and advance human rights over the last five years. On consultations with Afghanistan, she said both countries were in discussion on all matters including the security of their diplomats and citizens. She confirmed that Pakistan's envoy to Afghanistan Ubaidur Rehman Nizamani was still in Pakistan for consultations after the attack on him in Kabul. Regarding ongoing atrocities committed by India in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, she said Pakistan would continue to raise its voice on the continuing grave human rights abuses in the valley. "It will also continue to extend unstinted moral, political and diplomatic support to the people of Jammu and Kashmir in their quest for self-determination in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions," she said.

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Ban on new connections to illegal housing societies

QAZI SHOAB KHAN

ATTOCK: Attock District Administration on Thursday also formally conveyed the authorities concerned of IESCO and SNGPL Islamabad to disconnect their supply immediately besides imposing complete ban for issuance of new connections to these 92 illegal housing societies operating within the revenue purview of the inter provincial bordering district.

Well placed sources of the district administration Attock told that the Deputy Commissioner Attock Dr. Waqar Hassan Cheema requested the Chief Executive Islamabad Electric Supply Company Ltd, Managing Director Sui Northern Gas Pipelines limited Islamabad through formal letters to disconnect their supply and impose ban on new connections to the housing societies declared "illegal" by the district administration Attock which are operating in the different parts of the district. Meanwhile, a copy of the same letter was also forwarded to the Director General Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Islamabad for further legal action at their end. The letter states that "You are hereby requested that the land mafia is looting innocent general public through the illegal housing societies, land sub divisions.

Police arrests four criminals

QAZI SHOAB KHAN

ATTOCK: Attock police arrested four criminals on the alleged charges of land grabbing, drug pushing and murder within the jurisdiction of three police stations include New Air Port Fatehjang, Hassanabdal and Hazro here on Thursday. Police said, land grabber identified as Jahanzab son of Abdul Ghaffar resident of Gujranwala was intercepted by the Police Station New Air port Fatehjang for trying to forcibly occupied a piece of land owned by a local complainant. Meanwhile, Hazro police arrested two drugs peddlers named Mohammad Aman son of Akhtar Zaman from outskirts village Ghourghashti for possession hashish of 1200 kg and Waqar Ahmed son of Shabir Ahmed of Jattal along with recovery of 1060 hashish from his possession respectively. Likewise, Hassanabdal police nabbed an alleged killer Israr Hussain son of Ghulam Hussain resident of village Bhoighar involved in the murder of his real brother over a minor dispute.



RAWALPINDI: President Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce, Sabiq Rafiq posing for a group photo along with the participants of the meeting of the Standing Committee for Defense Procurement. —DNA

CPDI calls for discussion on budget proposals

OUR CORRESPONDENT

PESHAWAR: Centre for Peace and Development Initiative (CPDI) on Thursday released its third annual report on the state of budget transparency in Pakistan and called for the budget proposals to be widely discussed with civic groups, government agencies and key stakeholders to address deficiencies in the budgeting process at the federal and provincial levels. It said that the participation of citizens in the budgeting process should be given legal protection and the government institutions

should be obliged to consult with the citizens during the various stages of budgeting, especially the role of the members of the assembly during budgeting and its implementation. In this regard, the member organization of Citizen Network for Budget Accountability (CNBA) Saiban Development Organization Mardan organized a dialogue on transparent budget preparations. The meeting was attended by male and female councilors, civil society and media. Mohammad Arif said that for the last ten years CPDI had been trying to improve the budgeting process from the district level to

the federal level and to promote transparency in it. CPDI Provincial Coordinator Shams Al Hadi and Muhammad Arif of Saiban Development Organization said, "Like last year, this year also the process has been reviewed at the federal and provincial levels." "As a result, a report based on Budget transparency situation in Pakistan 2023 has been released," he said. "This report consists of two parts, the first part deals with requests for information sent to various federal ministries and provincial departments in which information was sought about various stages during the budgeting

process. "Around 150 requests for obtaining information were sent to the selected federal ministries and provincial departments to check transparency in the process, in which 38 requests were sent to the Federal Capital, 112 requests to Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh provinces. "Not a single response to all these requests was received within the stipulated time, which is very disappointing," he deplored. The second part of the report examines the comprehensiveness of the budget documents and the participation of citizens in budgeting and gave first position

to KP, second to Punjab, third to Sindh and fourth to Balochistan. The report demanded that the provincial and federal governments should ensure the implementation of access to information laws and remove obstacles in the way to promote budget transparency and also extend the period of discussion and approval on the budget so that it can be discussed at length. It further said that along with this, legal protection should be given to consultation with relevant stakeholders, especially citizens, and a transparent and open budget policy based on providing maximum information should be formulated.

3-member Iraqi police delegation meets IGP Punjab

LAHORE: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr Usman Anwar met a three-member Iraqi police delegation at the Central Police Office on Thursday and promised all possible co-operation from the Punjab police to impart training to the Iraqi police to increase its efficiency. The visiting delegation is led by Lieutenant General Inspector Abdel Khaleeq Badri, and consisted of Major Muhammad Raheem and Major Zaidoun Yassin Hadi. The delegation was briefed about the training curriculum of the Punjab police and preparation of police uniforms. Issues of mutual interest including professional training and capacity building of the police force were also discussed during the meeting. The IGP directed the Additional IGP Training to share recruitment course, capacity building programmes and other training courses of the police force with the Iraqi delegation. He said the Punjab police were engaged in providing services to citizens along with protection of life and property of the citizens as well as traffic management, security of sensitive places and foreigners. The IGP Punjab emphasised sharing extensive experience of Punjab police with Iraqi police and also impart their expertise & knowledge about the latest skills in the field of training. —APP

Kashmiris observe Black Day on India's 'Republic Day'

ISLAMABAD: Kashmiris across the Line of Control and the world over observed Indian Republic Day, on January 26, as Black Day to protest against the continued denial by India of their right to self-determination in accordance with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. In Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir (IIOJK), the day was marked by a complete strike whereas protest rallies and demonstrations were held in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan and world-over. The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) had given a call for observing Black Day and was supported by other freedom-loving organizations and leaders. In IIOJK, the Indian authorities had turned the whole territory into military garrison and had intensified checking and frisking in Srinagar city and other parts of the valley. —APP

Australian High Commissioner visits Global Education Expo

DNA

ISLAMABAD: With the world moving back to normal, it is heartening that the borders of all the top study destinations have reopened. It is the best time that the students gear up and start preparing themselves to realize their dreams to study at top ranked international universities. With over 5000 alumni and 300,000+ IELTS registrations, AEO Pakistan over the past two decades has established itself as Australian & Global Education Specialists, the most trusted IELTS Official Test Centre and the preferred official OET

Test Centre in Pakistan. AEO Pakistan operates as the official Liaison office for over 40 leading Australian Universities/Institutions and facilitates the enrolment of international students at these Universities /Institutions. Since 2002, AEO Pakistan has been conducting Australian Education Expos providing an excellent opportunity to Pakistani students planning to study in Australia. Over the years thousands of students have benefited from AEO expos held twice annually, across all major cities of Pakistan. This January once again AEO's 43rd Global Education Expo is being organized across 10 major cities of Paki-

stan i.e., Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, Multan, Sialkot, Faisalabad, Abbottabad, Peshawar, Bahawalpur and Hyderabad. The AEO expo is providing an ideal platform for prospective students across the country, to get free expert advice and counselling about how to apply to study in at top ranked international universities in Australia, USA, Canada and UK. Representatives of more than 20 universities/institutes are participating at the expo providing golden opportunity for Pakistani students to get free guidance and counseling for their future study endeavors. Information about IELTS test and preparatory classes

is also being provided at the expo. After Lahore and Sialkot, the third & fourth event of the series was successfully held today in Islamabad at Serena Hotel and Faisalabad at Hotel One. Hundreds of students along with their parents participated at the expo with great interest and excitement to enroll for admissions at top ranked Australian and other leading international Universities. The participants appreciated AEO's effort in provision of a perfect platform offering free counselling sessions with official representatives of international universities to explore the options of enrolling for a degree of their choice.

Sohail successfully defends his Phd thesis

ISLAMABAD: Sohail Aftab has defended his PHD thesis successfully with distinction as he obtains Summa-Cum-Laude. He did his PHD research from University of Hamburg, Germany being a scholarship holder of German Academic Exchange Service (GAES) under the supervision of a prominent privacy law scholar Professor Dr. Marion Albers. His thesis topic was "Protecting the right to privacy in Pakistan" learning from theoretical approaches and European Experiences". Under his thesis, Mr. Sohail Aftab has undertaken an extensive content analysis of Pakistani media and has highlighted media's intrusive practices in its coverage of sexual violence and issues related to children and women. Similarly top-

ics like grief journalism and coverage in the course of legal proceedings have also been highlighted. He has attempted to establish that privacy is strongly connected to human dignity and this basic right is effectively protected in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as well as in its member states of Germany and the United Kingdom. His thesis presents a law reform proposal in the form of privacy law legislation. He has also annexed a template legislation based on this finding. It is hoped that his thesis is not only a contribution to the body of knowledge but it will also provide valuable guidelines to policy makers in Pakistan for the protection of the crucial right of privacy. —DNA

Enhancing economic trade with Russia, prime priority of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan - Russian Business Forum organized by TDAP, Ministry of Commerce in the collaboration with FPCCI on the sidelines of the 8th session of the Pakistani-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation at Islamabad. The Russian delegation includes about 15 business companies including the representatives of the Moscow Chambers of Commerce and Industry. In his welcome address Mr. Amin Ullah Baig, Vice President of FPCCI & Incharge of the Capital Office, said that there is a huge trade and investment poten-

tial between Pakistan and Russia. "Enhancing economic trade and investment relations is a prime priority of Pakistan. Mr. Mohsin Sheikh Chairman of FPCCI Pakistan Russia Business Forum said that Russia valued its relations with Pakistan and both countries had a "good level of cooperation and aimed to enhance it further." He said there is a "great potential between both economies that needed to be explored more. In his brief presentation, he said that we need trade routes to Central Asia and in this respect, we have been discussing with Russians to sign an MoU



with their NGO to move forward. He emphasizes and advocates barter trade with Russia and currency swap agreement." Mr. Ahsan Ali

Mangi, Additional Secretary (Trade Diplomacy) Ministry of Commerce, Muhammad Naseer DG TDAP Islamabad, President Moscow

Chamber, Chairman Russia Pakistan Business Forum & others have also shared their views on the occasion. —DNA

Educational Boards equipped with modern facilities are essential, says Rana Tanveer

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister of Education & Professional Training Rana Tanveer Hussain while addressing the inauguration ceremony of Student Facilitation Center equipped with modern facilities and Online Attestation Portal at the Secretariat of Inter Board Committee of Chairmen (IBCC) said that without revolution and innovation in the education system of the country, the development and stability is not possible. The ladder of development of nations is education, despite the economic situation of the country, education is the first priority of the government. IBCC's Student Facilitation Center equipped with modern facilities and Attestation

Portal will be a milestone for resolving student problems. IBCC is solving the problems of students by bringing positive changes in the system day by day. With the inauguration of online attestation portal student don't need to visit IBCC. In addition, Federal Board

has installed a self operated machine "KISOK" at IBCC facilitation center, which benefits the students of FBISE and they don't have to visit Federal Board for verification of their documents and to get sealed envelope. They can also pay their fee and generate applica-

tions through KISOK. On this occasion, Secretary IBCC Dr. Ghulam Ali Malah said that educated youth will lead Pakistan on the path of development, most of the country's population is youth who have the right to be educated. IBCC is working

hard to solve the problems of the student and bringing automotive reforms within the organization. The initiative of QR based attestation and equivalence certificates, the students don't have to visit IBCC for verification purpose. The can verify their documents from anywhere around the world within no minute. In addition to this, the inauguration of state of the art Facilitation Center students will benefit from it. IBCC is also bringing digital payment module in all their processes, with the addition of this facility the student don't need to stand in the long queues for submission of their fee, they can submit it through mobile banking etc. Dr. Malah added that the development of IBCC is not possible without the support of Government.



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA	Revolution Day
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
Jan 20 / Laos	Armed Forces Day
Jan 25 / Thailand	Armed Forces Day
Jan 26 / Australia	National Day
Jan 26 / India	Republic Day



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Airlines

Turkish Airlines.....	8494949
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Emergency

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Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....	0321-5744480
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CDA chief directs to start 'Purple Line Metro Bus'

CDA demolishes 6,295 illegal structures in markets. The Directorate of Enforcement, Capital Development Authority (CDA) has demolished around 6,295 illegal structures in the markets, roads, green belts and sidewalk tracks in the federal capital during last year

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Capt. (r) Noor ul Amin Mengal Thursday directed the official concerned to take immediate steps to start the 'Purple Line Metro Bus Service' on Inter-Junction Principal (IJP) Road. The decision was taken during a meeting regarding Metro bus service chaired by him. Speaking on the occasion chairman said that the route of the Blue Line bus service should be extended up to Rawat to facilitate maximum commuters. Mengal also directed to start Metro bus service on more new routes and extend the jurisdiction of the existing bus services so that standard travel facilities can be provided to the citizens. He said that the Silver Line bus service should be started from the Taramri area and all the new metro bus services should be aligned with the existing metro bus service operations. Moreover, the chairman has issued instructions that steps should be taken to run electronic buses on a government-to-government basis on the routes of Metro Bus Services. It was also decided that the students and citizens above 60 years of age would be given 50 percent discount on the buses, while children below 10 years of age to be provided free traveling facilities. Member Engineering, Syed Munwar Shah, Member Administration, Amir Abbas Khan and other senior officials of related departments attended the meeting. CDA demolishes 6,295 illegal structures in



markets. The Directorate of Enforcement, Capital Development Authority (CDA) has demolished around 6,295 illegal structures in the markets, roads, green belts and sidewalk tracks in the federal capital during the last year. "During the operation, around 10,262 items of encroachers have also been confiscated, subsequently these articles are auctioned. Besides, fines worth Rs. 4.082 million has also been recovered from trespassers as a penalty," an official in the CDA told APP. He said the Directorate of Enforcement has launched as many as 1,142 anti-encroachment operations carried out across the board in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) during the last year.

The official said the Directorate was vigorously undertaking anti-encroachment operations on regular basis throughout Islamabad in order to curb the illegal constructions in the ICT. He said the continuous operations were being carried out on day to day basis 24/7 for retrieval of state land from land grabbers and encroachers. The official said the matter was being dealt by the Directorate of Municipal Administration working under the administrative control of Municipal Corporation, Islamabad (MCI). About the steps taken for the protection of citizens, provision of emergency medical assistance and water facility on hiking tracks, he said the forest guards keep patrolling

throughout the day in all the trails and hiking tracks of Margalla Hills, National Park. Moreover, he said the forest guards were equipped with wireless sets which were connected to centralized control room of Environment Wing, CDA whenever any medical emergency or any untoward situation arises at any trail or hiking track; these forest guards directly communicate with centralized control room system, where control room further call to rescue teams to attend medical emergency. It is also intimated that any type of water pipelines and provision of electricity in Margalla Hills National Park is prohibited to avoid any hazard to wildlife except notified villages, he added.

14 absconders held

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad capital police have arrested 14 absconders involved in heinous crime during the last 48 hours, a police public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, special tasks were assigned to all police officials to ensure the arrest of proclaimed offenders and courts absconders involved in heinous crimes. While all SDPOs and SHOs were directed to launch a massive crackdown against proclaimed offenders and court absconders. During the crackdown against the absconders and proclaimed offenders, the Islamabad capital police team of Tarnol, Shahzad Town, Sabzi Mandi, Golra, Industrial Area, Korla, Margalla, Kohsar, Aabpara, and Ramna police station arrested 14 absconders and proclaimed offenders during the last 48 hours. IGP Islamabad said that no one is above the law and arrests those involved in heinous crimes and illegal activities. Safety to the lives and property of the citizens is the foremost priority of Islamabad capital police. No laxity will be tolerated in this regard.

Eight outlaws arrested; drugs recovered

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad capital police apprehended eight outlaws including five absconders from different areas of the city and recovered drugs from their possession, a police public relations officer said. He said that, following the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad capital police has intensified crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city. Following these directives, the Noon police team arrested an accused namely Saem Khan and recovered 510 gram hashish from his possession. Likewise, the Nilore police team arrested an accused namely Arif Ul Haq involved in illegally selling petrol. Similarly, the Lohi Bher police team arrested an accused namely Waseem involved in illegally gas refilling.

Campaign for registration of house servants

ISLAMABAD: According to details, following the special orders of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital Police's "Knock the Door" campaign for the registration of employees and tenants is in full swing, a police public relations officer said. He said that, during this campaign, various teams of Islamabad capital police are going to the streets and door-to-door to ensure the registration of tenants and domestic workers as well as to inquire about the problems faced by the citizens. In this regard, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Islamabad has registered a data of 983 employees of 581 houses from Shalimar police station jurisdiction. - DNA

PTI's slogans of change nothing but hollow assertions

ISLAMABAD: Senator Irfan Siddiqui Thursday lamented that the nearly four years performance of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has proved that their slogan of change was nothing but a hollow assertion as their deeds did not match their acts. Speaking on a point of order in Senate, he said the entire leadership of PTI swung into action to speak in support of former President Pervez Musharraf immediately after his conviction by the court instead of questioning him about his sources of income and rampant corruption done (by him) during his tenure. Regretting the treatment meted out to former Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhary Fawad Hussain, he said he was dejected to watch handcuffed Fawad on TV channels despite having serious differences with him (Fawad). He said PTI victimized its opponents during nearly four years of rule and this practice should be ended now. Siddiqui said social media was comparing the arrest of Fawad with him which was totally wrong as there was no FIR registered against him and he was arrested late night without any charges. Whereas Fawad was arrested on threatening ECP officials. He was detained in 6*8 cell in Adiyala jail under the worst conditions, that too with hardened criminals. He said not a single member of PTI had sympathized with him when he was sent to Adiyala jail under the charges that he didn't turn up before police to provide the required information of his tenure, despite the fact that the house in question was owned by his son. - APP

India has no right to call itself a republic: Mushaal

RAWALPINDI: Mushaal Hussean Mullick wife of Jailed Kashmiri Hurriyat Leader Mohammad Yasin Malik said that the apartheid and supremacist Indian state had no right to celebrate its Republic Day in the bleeding Kashmir, which was turned by notorious Narendra Modi regime into garrison city and a slaughter house. Speaking at a seminar titled 'Occupation of Kashmir: Negation of Indian Claims as Democracy' here on Thursday organized by YFK-International Kashmir Lobby Group at Department of Anthropology Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University, she said that the RSS-inspired fascist government unleashed a wave of state terrorism and brutalities to suppress the dissenting voices. However, Mushaal, Chairperson Peace and Culture Organisation, stated that they could not dampen the courage of the brave Kashmiri people, who, she said, would continue their freedom struggle until getting the birthright to self-determination.

It is pertinent to mention here that Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control and across the world observed Indian Republic Day, as Black Day in protest against India's continued denial of Kashmiris' right to self-determination. The Chairperson went on to say that it was shameful for India to call itself a republic despite the illegal occupation of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK), which was converted into a world largest tortured cell. Mushaal said that the notorious Indian authorities usurped fundamental rights of the Kashmiris, as top Kashmiri leadership including Yasin Malik were put in jails in fake and fabricated cases just to silence their voices. She lamented that India was committing the worst atrocities and usurped all legal and constitutional rights of Kashmiris but the international community, UN bodies and human rights organization still called it the largest democracy, which was disgusting. The hurriyat leader

stated that India was not a largest democracy but a world most fascist and apartheid state, where living a life not only for Kashmiris muslims but for all other minority communities a nightmare, who were subjected to inhuman and barbaric acts. She said that the Kashmir dispute was still unresolved and pending with the United Nations due to the world powers and UN bodies' apathy and callous attitude towards Kashmiris. Mushaal vowed that despite the atrocities of the Indian troops, the Kashmiri people would not give up their struggle and would continue it till taking the freedom struggle to its logical end. She said the current situation of IOJK was a big challenge for the international community and urged the world powers to help settle the lingering Kashmir dispute according to the UN resolutions and aspirations of the Kashmiri people to avoid the world worst looming humanitarian and human crises. - DNA

KSA-Pak agree to enhance bilateral trade volume

Syed Naveed Qamar highlighted the need to enhance co-op in the field of trade and investment between the countries and emphasized the need for closer economic ties

ISLAMABAD: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Pakistan on Thursday discussed matters of mutual interests and agreed to enhance bilateral trade volume between the two countries. Nawaf Saeed A. Almkaiy, Ambassador and Commercial Attache of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan called on Federal Minister for Commerce Syed Naveed

Qamar here, said a press release issued by the Ministry of Commerce. Syed Naveed Qamar highlighted the need to enhance cooperation in the field of trade and investment between the countries and emphasized the need for closer economic ties. He said that the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Islamabad is making its utmost efforts

to promote the economic relationship between the two countries and thanked Nawaf Saeed A. Almkaiy for his efforts in this regard. The Ambassador and Commercial Attache expressed his satisfaction over the existing level of economic cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and expressed the desire to further expand economic cooperation in all areas. The two sides agreed to continue their cooperation in order to further strengthen the economic relationship between the two countries and to explore new areas of cooperation. - APP

IESCO issues power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Thursday issued a power suspension programme for Saturday for various areas of its region due to the transfer of power lines/installation of a new tower on Bhara Kahu flyover. According to an IESCO Spokesman, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended from 132 KV grid stations Murree, Minhasa, Desto, Sambli Barmal from 08:00 AM to 04:00 PM. Due to this Pindi Point, Barian, Public Health, Upper Topa, Shah Dara feeders. - DNA

Media workshop concludes

ISLAMABAD: Radio News Network holds a three-day workshop on natural disasters and environmental reporting in collaboration with DW Academy (DWA) and Radio News Network (RNN) has come to an end. In this workshop, selected journalists reporting on environmental issues from Sindh, Punjab, KPK Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan were taught and briefed on the skills of constructive reporting on natural disasters and Climate change and were given an opportunity to hear the opinions of experts regarding climate change. Atif Tauqeer, Atif Baloch and Dina Selbeck from DW Academy explained to the journalists the methods of reporting on various environmental topics and the principles of being constructive and as well as, the importance of scientific data in constructive reporting was also explained. The participants were divided into different groups and engaged in various practical activities. Dina Sibulak said that the world is threatened by climate change and Pakistan is the eighth affected country, where there will be more problems due to the increase in temperature in the future. Therefore, there is a need for more awareness in Pakistan on this issue. - APP

Women empowerment through digital literacy vital: Shazia

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety, Chairperson BISP, Ms. Shazia Marri on Thursday said the women empowerment and education through Digital literacy would revolutionise Pakistan's economy and GDP at an unprecedented level. The Federal Minister was the Chief guest on the occasion flanked by SAPM on Finance, Mr. Tariq Bajwa, CEO, NRSP Dr. Rashid Bajwa, and Chairman NRSP, Shoaib Sultan Khan. The National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) organised the closing ceremony of national workshop to disseminate the results of Internet Dost and Internet Zabardast projects supported by Google.org the philanthropic arm of Google. Addressing the

ceremony the Minister said this is definitely a revolution that Pakistan needs through digital literacy and training on internet's positive and constructive usage. The "SAPM" after listening to the success stories of the two female beneficiaries of Internet Dost project said these two smart and talented women of Pakistan Aqsa Abbasi and Kaneez Fatima told us their success stories achieved through the initiative of Google and NRSP. "You have changed the lives of your families and communities and I am thankful to you for coming here after facing all odds." Ms. Marri also presented her example as a woman bringing change in her constituency by winning the National Assembly (NA) by-election through direct vote and brought a revolution against the prevailing

old taboos and ill mindset. "Google is the IT sector of the world and want to appreciate it's role as it has emerged as a household name in the world," the Minister said. Appreciating the testimonials of the project beneficiaries, she said, "I am proud of the language of women in the testimonials in the testimonials which shows a visible change among them." She emphasised that the role

of a father is crucial for building strong women to change societies. "We know to excel despite problems and challenges as the women in Pakistan face huge challenges and problems and it's not easy for them to reach this level." She also requested NRSP and Google to have such ceremonies in the rural areas of project sites, so that the local masses could observe and learn from them.

Ms. Marri mentioned that the Article 34 of the Constitution says, "The state will have to bring women in all strata of state." The IMF study claims that Pakistan GDP may rise to 33% if women workforce number is leveled with that of men. Moreover, the ILO study claims a GDP increase upto 9% amounting \$139 billion if 25% women workforce was increased as par with

men, she noted. "Women equality will benefit country's progress and women empowerment will lead to contribution in it's GDP growth. It's the potential that scares a typical mindset which needs to be defeated. We need to join heads for a resilient Pakistan in all spheres," she ended. Rashid Bajwa, CEO NRSP in his remarks said the NRSP about a year back on February 8th, 2022 celebrated safe internet day and launched Internet Dost initiative. "The NRSP is well aware of the digital growth and it's access to the masses. However, mobile banking, and digital marketing have enormous opportunity for Pakistani youth to progress." These statistics suggest that the digital divide from geographic and digital perspective is real and the digital divide explains the risks and challenges of rural

population, he said. Mr. Bajwa underlined that it had enormous potential to increase learning, skills and business opportunities for unemployed masses. The NRSP CEO said internet indeed is a tool for enhancing skills and opportunities whereas based on our digital literacy interventions we are about to introduce transfer banking in NRSP projects. "It will transform the banking set-up in Pakistan. It has been successfully piloted by NRSP. We have highest representation of the government and we extend our support for government endeavours in this area," he said. Tariq Bajwa, SAPM on Finance said the article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan discusses equal rights for all and Article 20 and 23 discuss full participation of women which we lack in every effort.



Briefs

Pakistan post holds online open court on Jan 26

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Post conducted an online Khuli Katchery (open court) in all postal circles on Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to resolve the complaints of its customers. According to official sources, the initiative was taken on the special directives of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the Ministry of Communications and Postal Services for addressing the complaints of the users and improving the services of the department. During the online interaction, the Director General of Pakistan Post listened to the complaints of the postal clients through online zoom meetings. The Director General also issued orders to authorities concerned for resolving the grievances and providing all possible facilities to them.—APP

Early elections panacea to all issues

ISLAMABAD: Leader of the House in Senate Dr Shahzad Waseem on Thursday claimed that the solution to all the problems being confronted by the country, "rests in holding free, fair and transparent elections." Speaking on a point of order in Senate, he criticized the government for arresting Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's leader Chaudhary Fawad Hussain. Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani urged the opposition to avoid criticizing constitutional institutions especially Election Commission of Pakistan and caretaker set up.—APP

NPO to organise webinar on 'Production & Operation Management'

ISLAMABAD: The National Productivity Organization (NPO) will conduct a training course on "Production and Operation Management" on January 31 (Tuesday). Production and operation management is defined as the process which transforms the inputs/resources of an organization into final goods (or services) through a set of defined, controlled and repeatable policies, according to a NPO document. The objective of the webinar includes increasing profitability, increased product quality, ensures you comply with government regulations, increased customer satisfaction, helps in waste reduction, and increased teamwork. The workshop will also provide information about productivity measurement techniques, productivity improvement techniques, production planning and control, material requirement planning (MRP), time and motion study, work ergonomics, forecasting, quality control and management. The webinar has been designed for senior management, middle management, team leaders and supervisors.—APP

Police search 142 houses in different areas

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi District Police, on special directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi on Thursday searched 142 houses and 21 shops in the jurisdiction of different police stations. According to a police spokesman, heavy police contingents, Elite Force, Special Branch personnel and Ladies police under the supervision of senior police officers conducted a search operation and searched 142 houses and 21 shops, besides checking the particulars of 38 tenants. Over 145 persons were also checked during the operations conducted in Airport, Dhawal, and Rawat police stations, he added. Senior Superintendent of Police, Operations, Rawalpindi Waseem Riaz Khan said that search operations were being conducted to net criminals and other lawbreakers.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Group photo of Principal of Model College for Girls F10/2 Prof. Sabah Faisal with the participants during Self-Grooming Contest at Model College for Girls F10/2 in connection with Intercollegiate Ceremony.—APP

Australian envoy hails relations with Pakistan

As we mark another anniversary of nationhood in Australia, we also mark another year of shared experience and friendship with Pakistan – 75 years young and going strong

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan Neil Hawkins reflects on relations with Pakistan on Australia Day. In his Australia Day messages, he said: "Australia Day (today) is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the relationship between our two great countries. In my seven months travelling around Pakistan, I've learned more about Australian cricketers than I did while in Australia! But it has also allowed me to experience the depth of talent – of both men and women – that exists here in Pakistan. My job is all about people. I've come to appreciate the amazing diversity across the many communities in Pakistan. But this diversity comes with a



warmth and generosity that is unique to this country. We have a long history together. Australia was one of the first countries to formally recognise the new nation of Pakistan in 1947. Now

more than 100,000 persons of Pakistani origin call Australia home and make a valuable contribution to our multicultural and vibrant society. And we're delighted that many Pakistani

students choose to study in Australia's high-quality educational institutions in a safe, supportive and tolerant environment. Australians are known as caring and practical people, and

tackling climate change is a shared priority for our two countries. Following the devastating floods, Australia committed A\$5.2 million through the UN to help Pakistanis in need. I was humbled to meet some of these villagers near Shwan, Sindh recently. Australia drew on our own experiences of devastating fires, to help efforts to tackle forest fires in Balochistan in 2022. Moreover, our agricultural scientists are also cooperating to address food and water security issues. I'm often asked what the highlight of my stay has been so far. I could mention the awesome scenery around Skardu, hiking near Khaplu or in the Margallas, visiting the old town of Lahore, the Mohatta Palace in Karachi, or the lovely Peshawar Museum or eating

Sajji at Lehri's in Quetta. For the most memorable, I would probably have to come back to cricket. True, it was a privilege and thrill to meet the Pakistani men's cricket team captained by Babar Azam and the women's cricket team captained by Bismah Maroof – both impressive people as well as outstanding cricketers. Promoting gender equality is a central pillar of our foreign policy. So I don't think I will forget the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of the Girls' Under-19 cricket team. Stars in the making which augurs well for Pakistan's future. As we mark another anniversary of nationhood in Australia, we also mark another year of shared experience and friendship with Pakistan – 75 years young and going strong.

Bad housing policy – The Trojan horse of economic demise

It is a global reality now that can be seen in many countries. If we want to move this forward and progress then we will have to create a conducive environment for this growth to be possible

In 2008, the US witnessed a boom in housing demand. This was mainly due to an increase in jobs that were located in urban centers such as Seattle, with professions in IT and such. But the government did not have a clear housing policy for this inflow of labor force. People who self-identified with the idea of Socialism and the Not in my backyard crowd did not allow for the development of a housing policy which is central to development. The following year brought the biggest economic meltdown in the US after the great depression of the 1920s. Today, in Pakistan the urban centers are getting crowded, with a lot of technically skilled labor. This new lot of workers in IT and related industries need housing. Pakistan's rural areas from the 50s onwards witnessed a lot of rural development promoting agriculture and food security. Now, the trend has shifted a lot from traditional professions to more modern and technical professions. This is due to the plethora of education institutes and higher education; with universities imparting skills. Now, we have a lot of skilled workers in modern fields of IT and other technical fields. These people are arriving in cities to make their contribution and earn a living. Therefore, the same trend that was seen in developed countries such as the US during the late 2000s is in a sense repeating itself in Pakistan. However, if we compare the two countries, the US has got a heavily regulated real estate system, whereas, Pakistan's real estate sector has got a traditional capitalist mindset. Nonetheless, Pakistan should capitalize on this trend and always support an open housing policy for this need to be fulfilled. Everywhere, countries have mostly, moved away from highly regulated real estate systems, another example would be Romania. The country stayed under the socialist system until 1990. However, the reforms have worked miracles as more than 90 percent of the people now own houses. This would not have been possible under the former system. Even Russia itself has become one of the biggest capitals of real estate in the 21st century. The developed countries in the world right now have better real estate's prospects, such as Dubai, Canada, and the USA. The lesson to learn here is that functional markets promote development as well as knowledge. It is the marketplace where ideas are exchanged and developed. Without a market setting, there can be no way to develop and sustain a progressive trend. The economic downfall during the Covid-19 pandemic is a clear example of how adversely development and progress are affected if markets close down. For functioning markets, labor needs to be present which is not possible without housing facilities. Private real estate is the best provider of standard living for the shifting labor force in modern times. It is a global reality now that can be seen in many countries. If we want to move this forward and progress then we will have to create a conducive environment for this growth to be possible, and for that, we must avoid making any bad housing policies.—Waqas Asmat

PTDC advises tourists to take precautionary measures

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) on Thursday has advised the tourists visiting hilly areas of the country during the current snowy season to take extra precautionary measures to ensure personal and collective safety and avoid any untoward situation in extreme weather conditions. The PTDC along with other concerned authorities have asked the visitors to dress in layers, wear a warm hat or cap, scarf and gloves or mittens to protect body heat from wind-chill or extreme cold. The tourists were asked to not keep the vehicle engine running continuously and do not switch on heaters for more than 10 minutes in an hour. The official of PTDC urged the travelers to keep vehicle windows slightly open for fresh air or ventilation and ensure that vehicle's exhaust pipe is not blocked by snow, ice or debris and check once every hour to keep your exhaust cleared in snowy conditions," it said. The travelers must check for the latest weather or travel advisories issued for your area and take appropriate pre-cautionary measures before going out.

The travelers have been advised to avoid traveling in low visibility conditions and during icy road conditions if possible. Before traveling ensure your vehicle is properly serviced, including heater, brakes, radiator and replacing worn out tyres", it said. The guideline exhorted to keep essential supplies in your vehicle when traveling for use in emergencies including additional warm clothing, warm blankets, first aid kit, water-proof matches or lighter, windshield ice-scraper, booster cables, basic toolkit, bag of sand or cat litter (to provide traction on ice or snow), wheel chains, spare wheel or repair kit, dry food or fruits and drinking water.—APP

Pakistan earns \$391.740 million by exporting transport services

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan earned US \$391.740 million by providing different transport services in various countries during the first five months of the current fiscal year (2022-23) as compared to the corresponding period of last year. This shows a growth of 31.93 per cent as compared to \$296.940 million earned through the provision of services during the corresponding period of the fiscal year (2021-22), the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. During the months under review, the exports of sea transport services witnessed an increase of 211.84 per cent, going up from \$35.630 million last year to \$111.110 million during the months under review. Among the sea transport services, the exports of freight services increased by 255.27 per cent from \$24.100 million last year to \$85.620 million whereas the exports of other sea transport services also increase by 121.08 per cent from \$11.530 million to \$25.490 million current year, the PBS data revealed. The exports of air transport rose by 6.63 per cent going up from \$254.790 million last year to \$271.670 million during July-November (2022-23).—DNA

Govt brought back country from brink of bankruptcy

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Dr Aisha Ghaus Pasha on Thursday informed the Senate that the incumbent government successfully brought back the country from the verge of bankruptcy, owing to good management policy. Replying to a Calling Attention Notice raised by Sania Nishtar regarding the current status of the economy, the short and long term distortions creating the unprecedented challenges for a poor man, the minister said the government had a plan to improve the economic situation. The government inherited fragile economy and economic situation since its inception besides devastating floods which directly affected 33 million people, she added. The minister said all commercial banks were directed to open LC for import of food items, medicines and fuel and added only import of luxury items had been curtailed.—APP

Early elections panacea to all issues

ISLAMABAD: Leader of the House in Senate Dr Shahzad Waseem on Thursday claimed that the solution to all the problems being confronted by the country, "rests in holding free, fair and transparent elections." Speaking on a point of order in Senate, he criticized the government for arresting Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's leader Chaudhary Fawad Hussain. Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani urged the opposition to avoid criticizing constitutional institutions especially Election Commission of Pakistan and caretaker set up.—APP

OPF, PGFRC support migrants in reintegration

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) in line with the vision of honorable Prime Minister of Pakistan is developing the capacity of returnee migrants and providing them with trade-specific toolkits as an In-Kind support to help them start sustained self-employment. In this connection, a ceremony was organized in Islamabad under OPF's Pak – German Facilitation & Reintegration Centre (PGFRC) where toolkits were handed over to 170 returning migrants in the fields of culinary arts, fashion designing, information technology, motorcycle mechanic, solar technician, electrician, plumber, carpenter, and mason received their toolkits alongwith Loader Rickshaws,

Passenger Rickshaw and Motorcycles for self-employment. These returnee migrants had also completed a comprehensive business development training from PGFRC in their selected trades. Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis & Human Resource Development, Mr. Sajid Hussain Turi was the chief guest at the ceremony. Dr. Amer Sheikh, Managing Director OPF, Dr. Sebastian Paust, Head of Development Cooperation, Embassy of Federal Republic of Germany, Mr. Tobias Becker, Country Director, GIZ, members of Senate and National Assembly Standing Committees on Overseas Pakistanis & HRD, Members, OPF Board of Governors, senior government officials, representatives of international

organizations and civil society representatives also attended the ceremony. Mr. Sajid Hussain Turi, Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis & Human Resource Development said that today's ceremony is a testament to the commitment of Government of Pakistan which considers overseas Pakistanis as its roaming ambassadors abroad and is actively engaged in resolving their reintegration issues in Pakistan. Ministry of OP&HRD, under the leadership of honorable Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Shehbaz Sharif through OPF is working in a focused manner on this issue. Dr. Sebastian Paust from the German Embassy, Mr. Tobias Becker Country Director GIZ, and Dr. Mansoor Zaib Khan, GIZ

Pakistan reiterated that PGFRC is playing a critical role in enhancing the capacity of returnee migrants and

reducing unemployment rate in Pakistan. The returnee Pakistani migrants, who received their Tool-Kits

expressed their gratitude to the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis & HRD/OPF and the government of Pakistan

for supporting them to make a new start and achieve sustainable self-employment in Pakistan.



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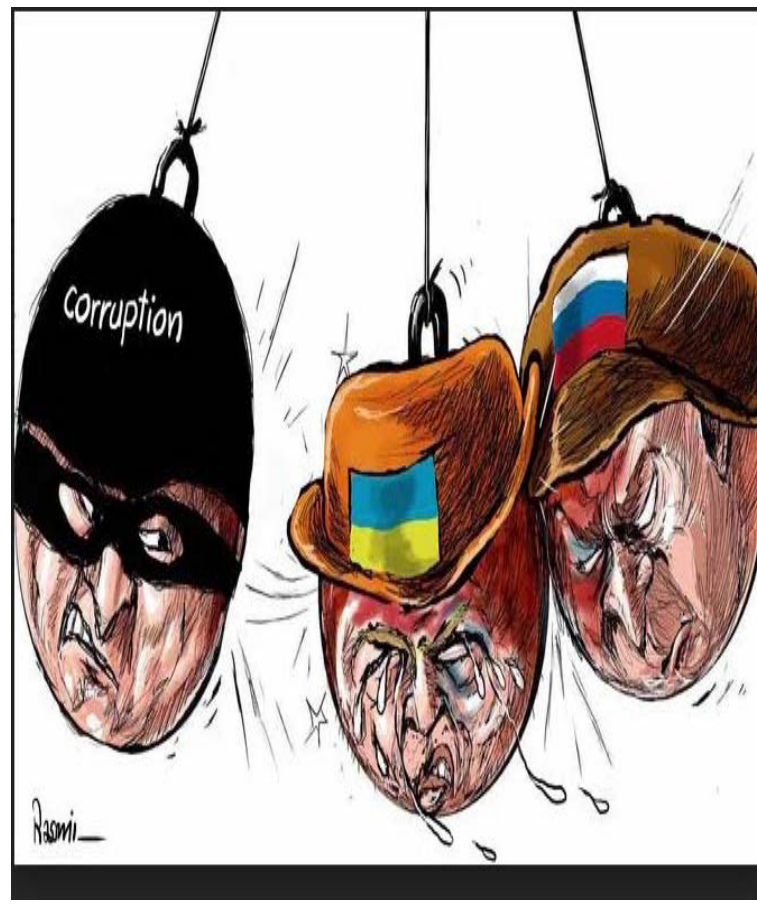
Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

Phone: 051-2266165 / 051-2261960

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

Quad members grinding their own axes

The Chinese Foreign Ministry has urged India and Japan to do more to enhance mutual trust in the regional security sphere and act in the interest of peace and stability in the region. The urging came after the Indian Air Force and Japan Air Self-Defense Force started their first joint aerial exercise, Veer Guardian 2023, at Hyakuri Air Base, Japan. The 15-day drill is a poisoned fruit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which the United States has formed with the two countries plus Australia with the aim of containing China, something it makes no bones about. Given New Delhi's reluctance to throw its weight behind the US on the Ukraine crisis, Washington should be happy to see that Tokyo is helping to pull New Delhi closer to its side through the bilateral drill. India's attitude toward the US' invitation to join its fight club has always been lukewarm. Being a member of the Quad, as well as a member of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it pays special attention to raising its own profile through balanced diplomacy. By agreeing to take part in the drills, New Delhi is continuing to stick to its balanced diplomacy, but as observers say, it is also part of its efforts to explore the possibility of diversifying its weapon sources. India can gain first-hand experience through the drill with Japan about how the US warplanes perform. The air force of Japan depends heavily on the US for weapons, intelligence and supplies. On the other hand, Japan will not waste the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of the capabilities of the Russian stealth jets of the Indian Air Force, such as the Russian SU-30 MKI, that are taking part in the exercise. Although the drill was settled months ago during the Quad meeting in Tokyo last year, its timing is apparently well calculated to serve the Fumio Kishida government's agenda as it came at the same time as Kishida's visits to the US and other Western allies, in which security cooperation was a focus. Japan is trying hard to prove to the US its use value as both a spear and a shield. In exchange, it looks forward to the US granting it more space to normalize its status at an early date, preparing for the re-rise of militarism upon which hinges its smoldering empire ambitions. That means despite its small size, the US-orchestrated bilateral air force drill provides both sides a grinder on which to sharpen their own axes, but the US should know that will not necessarily serve its interests in the long run.



Spring of China's economy will come earlier

The National Bureau of Statistics of China on Tuesday released the 2022 economic data, showing that the country's GDP grew by 3 percent. Under repeated shocks of extreme pressure from multiple factors in the past year, China's economic performance has exceeded market expectations, among which, agriculture, high-tech manufacturing and equipment manufacturing all performed well. Employment and prices were generally stable, high-quality development achieved new results, and the economic output reached a new level. Regarding this achievement, even the US and Western public opinion, which has always been harsh on China, has basically not made irresponsible remarks so far. Everyone understands what it means and how hard-won it is. Compared with the long and arduous journey that the Chinese economy traveled in 2022, people are now paying more attention and looking forward to the vigorous vitality it has displayed in 2023. Yi Kang, director of the National Bureau of Statistics, said the entire Chinese economy will definitely improve in 2023. Recently, both at the policy level and the market level, there have been strong positive signals. With the optimization of epidemic prevention and control measures, social production and life have been revived. The tourism market across the country heated up sharply during the New Year's Day holiday. In the upcoming Spring Festival, data shows that domestic travel bookings have increased by more than 70 percent year-on-year, while international travel has soared 260 percent. At present, international institutions generally believe that the Chinese economy will resume its upward trend from the end of 2022. Public opinion is more concerned about the difficulties that the private economy and small, medium and micro enterprises are currently facing. The central government attaches great importance to this issue. The Central Economic Work Conference held at the end of last year emphasized that policy and public opinion support should be provided to encourage and support the growth of the private economy and private enterprises. Difficulties are of course inevitable. Over the past 40 years of reform and opening-up, the Chinese economy has created countless miracles, and the word "miracle" itself implies a breakthrough in difficult times. In other words, China's development has never been easy, but history has repeatedly proved the advantage of the Chinese system and the infinite creativity of the Chinese people. Since the world has greater confidence and expectations in the determination and ability of China's economy to overcome difficulties, we should have this confidence even more.

Swedish hypocrisy: Silencing Anne Frank critic, enabling the Quran burning

Talha Abdulrazaq

Worse yet, it has in fact adopted the opposite position and sought to not only antagonise Türkiye, but to insult almost two billion Muslims around the world. Stockholm's stance is made even more repugnant by the fact that, while it waves the banner of freedom of expression when allowing the demonisation and insulting Muslims, it had no similar sentiments when choosing to crack down on those who were deemed to be offensive to the Jewish community just months ago. This demonstrates how Swedish officials pick and choose when they want to be free

Swedish officials pick and choose when they want to be free speech absolutists, and when they decide a horrific red line has finally been crossed. One of the first social skills you are taught as a child is to know how to behave in a manner that endears people toward you so that you can make friends while simultaneously advancing your own interests and those of the group you are in. Shockingly, and despite being one of the oldest nation-states in Europe now desirous of NATO membership, it seems as though Sweden has dramatically failed to learn this lesson. Worse yet, it has in fact adopted the opposite position and sought to not only antagonise Türkiye, but to insult almost two billion Muslims around the world. Stockholm's stance is made even more repugnant by the fact that, while it waves the banner of freedom of expression when allowing the demonisation and insulting Muslims, it had no similar sentiments when choosing to crack down on those who were deemed to be offensive to the Jewish community just months ago. This demonstrates how Swedish officials pick and choose when they want to be free speech absolutists, and when they decide a horrific red line has finally been crossed. Last October, Rebecca Fallenkvist, an official within the Sweden Democrats, came under fire from both Israeli officials and members of the Jewish community more broadly after making derogatory and offensive posts on social media about Jewish teenage diarist Anne Frank. Frank was murdered by the Nazis in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp during the Holocaust in 1945, and her diary, written while hiding in an Amsterdam attic, documents what life was like under German persecution. Rather than making excuses for their colleague who attacked a teenage Holocaust victim as "immoral", or claiming freedom of expression, the Sweden Democrats – the largest member of the right-wing governing bloc and the second largest party in the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag – rightly took decisive action and suspended Fallenkvist. The party

went further still, condemning her words as being "insensitive and inappropriate", and pledging an investigation. Mere months later, and another genocidal bigot is on the prowl, this time in the shape of Rasmus Paludan. Yet again targeting the Muslim community, Paludan, under the guise of protesting against Türkiye's demands that Sweden takes Ankara's national security priorities seriously, made an application to the Swedish authorities to sign off on his demonstration in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm where he made it clear he will desecrate and burn a copy of the Quran. Once more, the banner of freedom of expression was unfurled, as the Swedish authorities gave Paludan the greenlight to continue his persecution and demonisation of Muslims, already a vulnerable minority across the world. Stockholm is acutely aware of how Muslims are the victims of numerous far-right atrocities stoked by such stunts, including that of the Christchurch massacre in New Zealand where dozens of Muslims were murdered by white supremacist Brenton Tarrant who was inspired by another Scandinavian anti-Muslim murderer, Anders Breivik. Naturally, this did not seem to bother the Swedes. They allowed Paludan, a man they had previously banned from entering their country on the basis of his hate speech, to burn the Islamic holy book and inflame social and communal tensions in the process. Why did Stockholm allow this to happen, knowing not only Ankara, but the entire Muslim world would be gravely insulted? Why did Sweden do this, knowing Türkiye holds the key to their accession to NATO? The answer lies in their inherent Islamophobia that they simply cannot bottle up for too long. The mask of European civility, one way or another, always inevitably slips and reveals the ugly face of racism and supremacist attitudes that lie beneath. In geopolitical terms, and after the shock of Russia's incursion into Ukraine almost a year ago, Sweden made an urgent application to join NATO to protect its country from any potential aggression. Clearly, Stockholm thought Moscow

was going to steamroll its way through Ukraine and control Kiev within a short space of time. To that end, and knowing Türkiye would need to accept its application for it to accede to NATO unless it changed its behaviour, Sweden agreed to take Turkish security concerns seriously and even started deporting some terror suspects into Turkish custody. Moreover, and perhaps after seeing Russia has failed to conquer Ukraine as originally anticipated, and while facing increasing public pressure from leftist groups and others, the Swedish authorities have become more blasé about their approach to NATO membership, and have allowed their true feelings towards Türkiye and the Muslim world to rise to the surface once again. However, and if you're Sweden and you are going to pick a champion of free speech to march forth and insult your "enemies", you might want to pick a better candidate than Paludan. Not only is the man a far-right nut who has expressed genocidal ideas towards Muslims, but he is someone who has had restraining orders issued against him for stalking young men, has been convicted of racist hate speech, and was exposed by Danish newspaper Ekstra Bladet as having paedophilic tendencies by talking about sexually explicit subjects in front of teenage boys – something he did not view as being inherently wrong, even as he denied knowing their age. I am certain most normal people would rather have a more straight-laced individual as their champion, rather than a sexual predator. But, perhaps, the Swedish authorities find such vile individuals more palatable to their vaunted European values more than the sentiments of billions of Muslims around the world, including those who live in countries like Türkiye, a country Sweden now wants its people to lay their lives on the line for them in case they are attacked. But, and going back to childhood lessons, perhaps it is time for Stockholm to take stock of its own actions before asking others to sacrifice their lives for its safety.

—Courtesy: TRT World

Normalizing hate and Islamophobia in Europe

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson condemned the desecration, as have most governments, and the event led to protests around the world, harming Sweden's reputation and its relations with the Muslim world. More immediately, the incident may delay Sweden's bid to join NATO and further sour its relationship with Türkiye, which had already been angry at Sweden's harboring of Kurdish activists. While European countries struggle to contain the violence perpetrated by anti-immigrant criminals, including anti-Muslim groups

On Saturday, far-right activist Rasmus Paludan set fire to a copy of the Holy Qur'an in front of the Turkish Embassy in the Swedish capital, Stockholm. He was allowed to do so by the police, who surrounded him while he deliberately carried out this act. It was not an isolated incident, as the Swedish-Danish national is a repeat offender. He had previously been convicted for racist abuse. He has committed similar acts before, provoking violent protests in Sweden last year, when he went on a tour of the country and publicly burned copies of the Qur'an. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson condemned the desecration, as have most governments, and the event led to protests around the world, harming Sweden's reputation and its relations with the Muslim world. More immediately, the incident may delay Sweden's bid to join NATO and further sour its relationship with Türkiye, which had already been angry at Sweden's harboring of Kurdish activists. While European countries struggle to contain the violence perpetrated by anti-immigrant criminals, including anti-Muslim groups, and deal with the root causes of their violence, little is done to contain their hate speech or Islamophobia. While the overwhelming majority of Europeans reject their violent tactics, their rhetoric is moving from the fringes to the mainstream. Rantings against Islam are gradually becoming common in political campaigns and everyday discourse. This process threatens to normalize hate speech, especially Islamophobia, in many parts of Europe. Confusing incitement with freedom of speech has made it difficult to address this growing threat. However, while freedom of expression is a universal value enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international agreements have attached duties associated with its exercise. The International Covenant on Civil and Polit-

ical Rights, the main human rights instrument adhered to by most countries, seeks to address that balance. While it holds that "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression," it adds that the exercise of such a right "carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions," including "for the protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals." Many countries have included such safeguards in their national laws. While opposition to illegal migration or excessive legal migration is normal and falls within freedom of speech and legitimate political discourse, desecrating the Qur'an denigrates the faith of about 2 billion people around the world who have nothing to do with these local issues. In the case of Sweden, it has also inflamed ethnic animosities within the country and damaged its reputation and the exercise of its foreign policy, threatening its key security interests. The timing of Saturday's incident in Stockholm is curious when taking into consideration the geopolitical dimensions, such as the war in Ukraine, the changing nature of Sweden's relationship with NATO and the talks with Türkiye on that subject. Such timing raises a question about outside influence on Sweden's Islamophobes and possible foreign manipulation. Kristersson condemned the burning of the Qur'an in Stockholm as "deeply disrespectful." He tweeted on Saturday: "Freedom of expression is a fundamental part of democracy. But what is legal is not necessarily appropriate. Burning books that are holy to many is a deeply disrespectful act." He expressed sympathy "for all Muslims who are offended by what has happened in Stockholm today." Muslim countries and others expressed outrage at the incident, indicating a universal rejection of the desecration of the Qur'an as a form of protest or political expression. Muslim governments expressed astonishment that the Swedish authorities had allowed it to take place, stressing that freedom of expression must be ex-

ercised in a responsible manner. Hundreds of protests have been held worldwide since the incident. Hate groups such as Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident, known as Pegida, have done similar things and agitated against Islam and Muslims in other European countries, including burning a copy of the Qur'an in Amsterdam on Tuesday. Since Pegida was founded in Dresden, Germany, in 2014, its extremist views have crept into mainstream political discourse and the far right has made significant political gains in several European countries, including Sweden. Pegida and similar groups have repeatedly incited against Muslims, stoking irrational fears of being overrun by immigrants, especially Muslims. At times, they use Qur'an burning as a lightning rod and a tool to attract attention, rally support, recruit new followers and incite violence. Overwhelming majorities in European countries, as elsewhere, still reject hate groups and especially abhor their incendiary tactics, but they have been helpless to stop the growing popularity of their divisive rhetoric. It has been an uphill battle for moderates to contain the rise of such groups, as they have gradually attached themselves to political movements that have made significant inroads in European legislatures. However, while Europe tries to grapple with this festering problem within its borders, it would be useful to put it on the agenda for dialogue with Muslim countries and organizations. Just as it is important to double down on efforts to fight hate crimes and pursue legal means to deal with the excesses of hate speech, it is becoming necessary to discuss Islamophobia seriously in political dialogues to enhance mutual understanding and find remedies for this problem. Such discussions are also needed to guard against any ruptures in relations, temporary or otherwise, because of Islamophobic incidents, and to minimize their exploitation for political ends.

—Courtesy: Arab News

Briefs

President Alvi warns against Khan's arrest

FROM PAGE 01
former prime minister was "not against" table talks. "If politicians do not want to sit and negotiate, then what can I do? Imran Khan is not against negotiations, however, there was no response from the government [when asked to sit on the table]," he said. The president said that Khan was early ready to reconsider early polls as he wanted the government to begin negotiations. As confusion surrounds the staging of elections in Pakistan's biggest province, President Alvi said he spoke to Punjab Governor Baligh Ur Rehman about issuing a date for the polls. "The governor told me that had he signed on the summary to dissolve the elections, only then would he have issued a date for the elections," the president mentioned. President Alvi said the governor told him that he would not be partaking in "unconstitutional" moves. He added that the PTI chief also fears the polls might be put off. The Punjab Assembly was dissolved on January 14 after the governor refused to sign the dissolution summary forwarded to him by then-chief minister Parvez Elahi.

Imran chairs huddle to protest...

FROM PAGE 01
their families in a media talk a day earlier. He was then taken to Islamabad, where the capital's police were granted a two-day remand of the PTI leader in the sedition case. His arrest drew strong criticism within the federal government's ranks — which, although, has denied involvement.

SBP foreign reserves near rock...

FROM PAGE 01
seeks to revive the ninth Extended Fund Facility review, it had requested the Fund to send a delegation for a visit. In response, IMF Resident Representative in Pakistan Esther Pérez Ruiz told Geo.tv that an in-person Fund mission is scheduled to visit Islamabad from January 31-February 9 to continue the discussions under the ninth EFF review. "The mission will focus on policies to restore domestic and external sustainability, including to strengthen the fiscal position with durable and high quality measures while supporting the vulnerable and those affected by the floods; restore the viability of the power sector and reverse the continued accumulation of circular debt; and reestablish the proper functioning of the FX market, allowing the exchange rate to clear the FX shortage."

SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad had last Wednesday said that the country expects inflows from "next week", however, no physical funds have been received so far — except for a \$2 billion rollover by the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development. Financial pundits have stressed the government to complete the IMF programme to pave the way for further inflows as they warn that a delay in reviving the Fund's programme could be catastrophic for the economically distressed nation. British publication Financial Times has also warned that Pakistan's economy is at risk of collapse with the government's "failure to revive" the IMF deal. According to the report, rolling blackouts and a severe foreign currency shortage are making it difficult for businesses to continue operations.

Pakistan attaches great...

FROM PAGE 01
Pakistan's post-flood reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, including at the recently held International Conference on Resilient Pakistan in Geneva. Ambassador Blome said the United States would continue to support Pakistan's post-flood recovery as well as the Government's efforts for economic development and reform.

Australian Open-2023

Sabalenka, Kazakhstan's Rybakina march into final

Wimbledon champion Rybakina defeated Azarenka and become first Kazakhstani female in AO singles final

DNA

MELBOURNE: Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina will clash in Saturday's Australian Open women's final after both won in straight sets in the last four in Melbourne. Wimbledon champion Rybakina defeated two-time Melbourne winner Victoria Azarenka 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 at a blustery and chilly Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne on Thursday. Belarusian Sabalenka then marched into the championship match with a 7-6 (7/1), 6-2 win over Magda Linette. The 24-year-old Sabalenka will be a slight favourite to win the title, for what would be her first major crown, and promises to be a bruising showdown between two hard-hitters. "I'm super happy, super happy that I was able to get this win," said the fifth seed after reaching her first Grand Slam final. "Magda's an unbelievable player. She played really

great tennis." Sabalenka has been in the form of her life since arriving in Australia. She won the Adelaide International warm-up tournament and has now extended her unbeaten streak to 10 matches, not losing a single set in any of them. But it was Poland's Linette, contesting her first major semi-final aged 30, who was out of the gate fastest, breaking to love in the opening game and holding for an early lead. Sabalenka was being made to work hard and showed all her newfound patience to get back on terms with a break of her own, to love, for 2-2 and the set went to a tiebreak. Sabalenka timed her moment perfectly to up the aggression, and the decibel level, racing to 4-0 with a scream. An ace that barely clipped the line stretched it to 5-0 and she closed out comfortably after 51 minutes, having smacked 20 winners to just seven from Linette. "I would say that I didn't start really well," admit-



ted Sabalenka. "And then on the tiebreak I kind of found my rhythm and just started trusting myself, started going for the shots. It was great tennis from me in the tiebreak." Sabalenka showed no sign of letting up in the second set,

breaking Linette and with a scream of "Come on!" holding for a 3-1 advantage. A second break took her within sight of the finish line, which she raced across in 1hr 33min. Fifth seed Sabalenka's maiden Grand Slam final appearance

will be against the Wimbledon champion, who earlier beat Victoria Azarenka in straight sets. "I'm super happy, super happy that I was able to get this win," said the Belarusian, who had been hoping to play her compatriot Azarenka in Saturday's showpiece. "Magda's an unbelievable player. She played really great tennis," added the 24-year-old. Sabalenka came into the match as many observers' favourite for the Melbourne crown but she had never won a Grand Slam semi-final in three previous attempts. She had led world number one Iga Swiatek 4-2 in the third set of their US Open semi-final in September before a spectacular meltdown where she lost 16 of the last 20 points. That sort of mental baggage in tennis is always lurking, especially for someone as emotional as Sabalenka, who has admitted to being stymied by nerves in the past. But the world number five has been in the form of

her life since arriving in Australia. She won the Adelaide International warm-up tournament and has now extended her unbeaten streak to 10 matches, not losing a single set in any of them. Sabalenka has been exuding a calmer, more assured, persona on court, without losing any of her famed aggression. It was this new version of Sabalenka that was to undergo a severe examination early against Poland's surprise-package Linette. Linette had enjoyed a dream run to her first Grand Slam semi-final at the age of 30, already knocking out four seeded players on the way including world number four Caroline Garcia of France. The Pole was out of the gate fastest, breaking to love in the opening game and holding for an early lead. Sabalenka was being made to work hard and showed all her newfound patience to get back on terms with a break of her own, to love, for 2-2 and the set went to a tiebreak.

Dembélé strike sends Barcelona into Copa del Rey semi-finals

BARCELONA: Ousmane Dembélé's second-half strike gave Barcelona a 1-0 win over 10-man Real Sociedad in their Copa del Rey quarter-final on Wednesday, stretching their unbeaten streak to 12 games. Real Sociedad came into the match on the back of nine consecutive wins in all competitions and almost scored in the 29th minute when Japanese youngster Take Kubo's strike hit the bar. But their hopes of inflicting a surprise defeat on Barca at the Camp Nou were hit when forward Brais Mendez was shown a straight red card in the 40th minute for a wild challenge on Sergio Busquets. Barcelona were the better side for most of the match after that but only scored once thanks to a brilliant counter-attack by man-of-the-match Dembélé in the 52nd minute. The electric winger ran



through the right channel after receiving a perfectly placed long pass from his France team mate Jules Koundé and lashed an unstoppable right-foot strike into the top corner. Sociedad should have equalised seven minutes later but Alexander Sorloth missed a sitter, skying a shot from inside the six-yard box from a Kubo cross. After Gavi vol-

leyed against the crossbar from a great cross by Dembélé in the 68th minute, Real made a late push and could have scored on at least three occasions, with Barca keeper Marc-André ter Stegen making a string of saves to secure the win. "It was a struggle for us after they were one-man down because they closed down well and defended relentlessly," Bar-

ca defender Ronald Araujo told Movistar Plus. "I'm sure (coach) Xavi will give us a slap on the wrist, we probably should have closed out the game earlier. Now we need to correct the mistakes and move forward. I'm happy because we won at home and we continue on a good run." Osasuna joined Barcelona in the semi-finals after they beat Sevilla 2-1 later on Wednesday thanks to an extra-time goal by Abde Ezzalzouli. Chimy Avila opened the scoring for the hosts in the 71st minute but Youssef En-Nesyri equalised in the 94th minute, taking the match to extra time. Substitute Ezzalzouli scored the winner nine minutes into extra time on a counter-attack, slotting a right-foot shot inside the right post. In the other quarter-finals, Real Madrid faced Athletic Madrid and Valencia meet Athletic Bilbao on Thursday. — Agencies

Army to compete Navy in Inter Departmental Basketball opener

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Defending champion Pakistan Army will compete against Navy in the opening match of the Inter Departmental National Basketball Championship starting from today (Friday) here at Liaquat Gymnasium, Pakistan Sports Complex Islamabad. Defending champion Pakistan Army, POF, Railways, Navy will join group A in the tournament while Pakistan Air Force, Wapda, Police will comprise Group B. "Pakistan Basketball Federation (PBBF) has finalised all the arrangements to conduct a successful five-day championship under the supervision of the Federal Basketball Association (FBA)" said PBBF Associate Secretary Ouj E Zahoore. Ouj E Zahoore said that the inaugural match of the championship will be played between the defending champion Pakistan Army and Navy while POF and Railways, WAPDA and Police teams will compete in the first round of the championship. He said that the semi-finals of the championship will be played on January 30, while the final will be held on January 31.

SCHEDULE:

January 27 (Day-1): Army vs Navy; POF vs Railways; Wapda vs Police
January 28 (Day-2): Army vs Railway; PAF vs Police; POF vs Navy.
January 29 (Day-3): Army vs POF; PAF vs Wapda; Railway vs Navy.
January 30 (Day-4): Semi Finals
January 31 (Day-5): Final

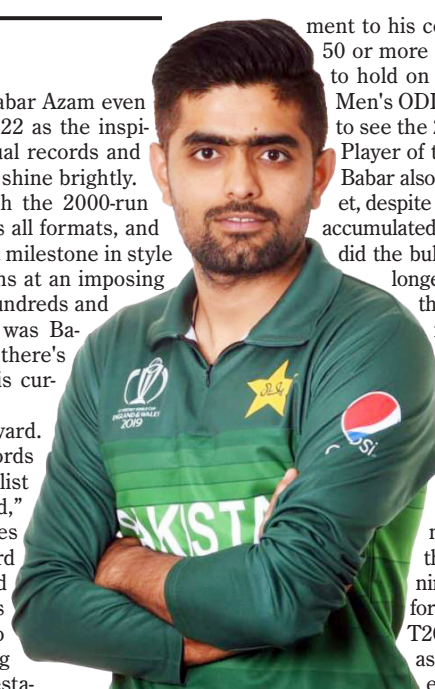
Man Utd crush Forest in League Cup final

NOTTINGHAM: Marcus Rashford scored a dazzling solo goal as Manchester United beat Nottingham Forest 3-0 in the first leg of their League Cup semi-final on Wednesday to virtually book a place at Wembley next month. The England man, enjoying a purple patch following the World Cup, netted his 18th goal of the season in the sixth minute to silence an expectant crowd at the City Ground. New United loan signing Wout Weghorst scored his first goal for the club just before half-time, to put the visitors in total control, and Bruno Fernandes added gloss to the scoreline late on. Erik ten Hag's men are hot favourites to reach Wembley as they seek to end their six-year trophy drought, with either Newcastle or Southampton lying in wait. "I'm happy with the performance and I think over 90 minutes we controlled it," Ten Hag told Sky Sports. But he highlighted a disallowed Forest goal in the first half, warning his side could not afford to let opponents back into the match when they were in charge. The Dutchman was careful to avoid any hint of complacency ahead of the second leg at Old Trafford on February 1. "We have to play one game and we have to do the same. We have to prepare, we have to make a good game plan and the players have to be focused," he said. Former Ajax boss Ten Hag has revitalised United in his first season in charge but will be desperate to win silverware to appease the hungry fans. Brazil midfielder Casemiro was back in the United starting line-up after being suspended for Sunday's 3-2 Premier League defeat at leaders Arsenal, which left United fourth in the table. Forest, with new boy Danilo in the starting line-up, came into the match full of confidence after just one defeat in their past seven Premier League matches had lifted them to 13th in the table. — APP

Babar Azam wins Sir Garfield Sobers trophy

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: It's hard to believe that Babar Azam even further elevated his game during 2022 as the inspirational skipper broke more individual records and ensured Pakistan's star continued to shine brightly. Babar was the only player to breach the 2000-run mark during the calendar year across all formats, and he did it in style as he broke past that milestone in style while amassing a whopping 2598 runs at an imposing average of 54.12. His haul of eight hundreds and 17 fifties during the calendar year was Babar's best of his career to date and there's no doubt the dynamic right-hander is currently at the top of his game. "It is an honour for me to win this award. I can't express my happiness in words because I'm now part of an elusive list of legends who have won this award," Azam said. "My family, teammates and fans deserve credit for this award since they have always supported me," he added. The 2021 ICC Men's ODI Player of the Year continued to rule in the 50-over format, scoring 679 runs in nine matches. It is a testa-



ment to his consistency that he registered scores of 50 or more in eight of those innings. He continues to hold on to his top spot in the MRF Tyres ICC Men's ODI Player Rankings and it was no surprise to see the 28-year-old crowned the ICC Men's ODI Player of the Year for a second consecutive year. Babar also enjoyed a tremendous year in Test cricket, despite team results not always going his way. He accumulated 1184 runs from just nine matches and did the bulk of the heavy lifting for Pakistan in the longer format. Babar was grateful to ICC for the recognition and aims to continue performing at the same level in future. "Winning this award gives me confidence and I will try to continue performing in the same manner in the future as well. I also want to thank the ICC for considering me as a suitable choice for this award," he said. It was also a memorable year for Babar as captain in the white-ball formats — Pakistan won all three ODI series they played, losing just one match out of nine at the hands of Australia. In the T20I format, he led Pakistan to the ICC Men's T20 World Cup final — their first since 2009 — as Babar's side finished runners-up behind eventual champions England.

Australia beat Pakistan to clinch women's T20I series

It must be noted that Australia won the first T20I of the series by eight wickets as well. The home side also whitewashed Pakistan in a 3-match ODI series during ongoing tour as well



DNA

HOBART: Australia outclassed Pakistan by eight wickets in the second T20I in Hobart to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match women's series. After deciding to bat first, Pakistan could only score 96-7 in their allotted 20 overs. Opener Muneeba Ali top-scored for Pakistan with a 43-ball 33, hitting four fours. Meanwhile, captain Bismah Maroof returned undefeated on 29 off 28 balls with the help of two fours. For Australia, leg-spinner Alana King clinched two wickets for 10 from two overs. In reply, the hosts achieved the target in

the 13 over with eight wickets in hand. Wicketkeeper-batter Beth Mooney was the highest scorer for Australia with 46 off 29 balls, laced with six fours and one six. Pakistan off-spinner Nida Dar ended up with match figures of two for 27 from four overs. It must be noted that Australia won the first T20I of the series by eight wickets as well. The home side also whitewashed Pakistan in a three-match ODI series during the ongoing tour as well. Pakistan and Australia will now feature in the third and final T20I of the series at the Manuka Oval in Canberra on 29 January. Beth Mooney made a successful return to the top of the or-

der to steer Australia to an eight-wicket victory over Pakistan in the second T20I at Blundstone Arena. Mooney, who did not bat in the series opener in Sydney as she managed soreness, struck 46 off 29 balls as Australia reeled in their target of 97 in 12.4 overs, taking an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-game series. After skipper Bismah Maroof won the toss and elected to bat, Pakistan were restricted to 7-96, with opener Muneeba Ali top-scoring with 33 from 43 balls. Alana King (2-10) led the way as Australia's bowlers shared the wickets, and the overs — with Meg Lanning using all nine options at her disposal, with the Australian skipper and

wicketkeeper Mooney the only players who did not deliver an over. Lanning was later forced to depart for 31 off 32 when she was struck on the pads by a Nida Dar full toss, with the Pakistan spinner's decision to review the original decision paying off. But Mooney was joined by newly crowned T20I Player of the Year Tahliha McGrath and the pair made short work of the remainder of the chase. Mooney found the boundary six times and cleared it once in her 46 off 29 balls, only to fall with the hosts eight runs shy of victory, while McGrath was unbeaten on 14 from nine deliveries as Australia iced victory in 12.4 overs.

No backchannel diplomacy...

FROM PAGE 01

such peace-building projects and it would keep on doing so. She said absolutely, there was no harm in looking in detail this specific proposal. Pakistan should continue to project such things, she added. She said currently, the hostility was coming from the other side of the border which was a due to hostile government over there. Pakistan was asked to normalize its relations with India on the international forums time and again. "To them our response is that they should look at the messages we have received from India," she added.

The minister said banning the BBC documentary in India put a big question mark on its credibility it professed of being the biggest democracy of the world. She was of the view that the border should remain peaceful as "it is our intention to continue to engage with India whatever platform is required to be able to do that." Pakistan was the country which had always learned from its history and it did not believe in generating more dead bodies on certain conflicts because more bloodshed was not in the interest of this region, she added. The minister mentioned that Director Generals of Military Operation of both sides reached an agreement of ceasefire adding that before entering into this understanding, the two countries had a ceasefire understanding in 2003 but India did not respect the accord and violated it 13,500 times leading to the death of 310 citizens and injuring at least 1,600. She further said the latest agreement had substantially decreased cross-border incidents and expressed the hope that despite of all that Pakistan would continue the 'journey to peace'.

PM mulls political strategy...

FROM PAGE 01

President Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari and Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) President and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur-Rehman at the PM House. The troika discussed the evolving political situation in the country after the dissolution of the two provincial assemblies of Punjab and KP and the by-polls on the vacant seats of the national assembly. They also discussed the establishment of interim cabinets in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The meeting was also attended by Federal Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Economic Affairs Minister Ayaz Sadiq and Railways Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique, PPP leader Senator Salim Mandviwala and PPP's DrAsim Hussain. This is the first meeting meeting between three leaders from the PML-N, PPP and the JUI-F since the dissolution of the assemblies and setting up of interim governments in KP and Punjab.

Shujaat removed...

FROM PAGE 01

The development also comes days after Shujaat sent a show-cause notice to Elahi and suspended his membership over his comments regarding the party's possible merger with the PTI. Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, Cheema — who was "replaced" with Agha — said the move was "unconstitutional" as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) was currently hearing a case regarding intra-party polls. "It is the first time in the country's history that a political party's decision is being made in such a botched manner by gathering the people of two to three districts of Lahore," he said, reiterating that Shujaat was the party chief. "We are the incumbent government's allies." "We strongly condemn this move. At least, I personally was not expecting that he (Elahi) would do something like this", Cheema said. He alleged that there was a "huge story" behind the move and all would be revealed at the right time. He pointed out that Elahi's faction within the party were "not daring to merge with the PTI", saying that there were a "few things not allowing them to take this step".

Briefs

Spain shaken
after deadly
church
attacks

ALGECIRAS: The southern Spanish city of Algeciras was reeling Thursday, a day after a machete-wielding assailant stormed into two churches killing a verger and badly injuring a priest. Spanish prosecutors immediately opened a terror probe following the incident near the city's port on Wednesday evening. The attacker was arrested at the scene, with a police source identifying him as a 25-year-old Moroccan man.

"Just after 7:00 pm (1800 GMT), a man entered the church of San Isidro in Algeciras, where, armed with a machete, he attacked the priest, leaving him seriously wounded," an interior ministry statement said.

"Subsequently, he entered the church of Nuestra Señora de La Palma in which, after causing damages, he attacked the verger."

The verger, Diego Valencia, "managed to get out of the church, but was caught by the attacker outside and sustained mortal injuries," it said, identifying the weapon he used as a machete.

The two churches are several hundred metres apart and located in an area very close to the port in this town of around 120,000 residents.

The emergency services said the priest had sustained injuries to the neck. His parish identified him as 74-year-old Antonio Rodriguez and said he had been celebrating the Eucharist at San Isidro church when he was attacked, describing his condition as "serious but stable". —APP

'Otoniel' pleads guilty in US

WASHINGTON: A former Colombian drug trafficker pleaded guilty Wednesday to charges in the US including engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise.

Besides charges of running a multibillion dollar drug organization and overseeing a paramilitary group known as the Clan del Golfo, or Gulf Clan cartel, Dairo Antonio Usuga David, alias "Otoniel," also pleaded guilty to related drug distribution charges, according to the Justice Department.

"When sentenced, Usuga David will face a mandatory minimum term of 20 years in prison and up to life in prison," said the department in a statement. "As part of the plea agreement, Usuga David also agreed to pay a \$216 million forfeiture money judgment." The former drug lord is also accused of carrying out acts of violence against law enforcement, military personnel and civilians in Colombia and elsewhere.

"With today's guilty plea, the bloody reign of the most violent and significant Colombian narcotics trafficker since Pablo Escobar is over," said United States Attorney Breon Peace.

Usuga David was extradited from Colombia to the Eastern District of New York in May 2022. —APP

US growth slows in 2022 as downturn fears loom

WASHINGTON: The US economy grew at a slower pace in 2022, the Commerce Department said Thursday, as activity eased in the final months of the year and recession fears loomed. Economic activity has been moderating as the US central bank hiked the benchmark lending rate seven times last year, in hopes of cooling demand and reining in costs as inflation surged. The property sector has slumped followed by declines in manufacturing and retail sales. Against this backdrop, the world's largest economy expanded 2.1 percent for all of 2022, down from the figure in 2021, according to Commerce Department data. "The increase in real GDP in 2022 primarily reflected increases in consumer spending, exports," and certain forms of investment, said the department in a statement. But for the October to December period, US gross domestic product exceeded expectations to rise at an annual rate of 2.9 percent. —DNA

Businessmen at forefront in disaster management

Sri Lanka preparedness partnership delegation visits ICCI

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Sri Lanka Preparedness Partnership led by Ms. Chandrika Kularathna visited Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry and interacted with the business community to learn about their experiences to cope with the disaster management activities. The representatives of Sri Lankan Disaster Management Centre, Asian Preparedness Centre, Ceylon Chamber of Commerce, Sabaragamuwa Chamber of Commerce & Industry and other organizations were in the delegation. Addressing the delegation, Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry briefed the Sri Lankan delegation about the contributions of the business commu-



nity to reduce the risks of disasters. He said that the business community has always been at the forefront in collaboration with disaster management authorities of the government to provide relief to the people and businesses in disaster-hit areas. He said that the business community made useful contributions to mitigate the

miseries of affected people and businesses during major disasters in Pakistan including Covid-19, 2005 earthquake, floods of 2010 and 2022. He also briefed them about the initiatives of industries to make their production activities environment-friendly in order to reduce the risks of climate-induced disasters. He said that ICCI has ar-

ranged ambulance service to facilitate members in case of disasters and other tragedies. He stressed that the private sectors of Pakistan and Sri Lanka should develop close cooperation to learn from each other and develop new disaster-resilient strategies. Brig. (Retd) Sajid Naeem of Pakistan Resilience Partnership (PRP) said that

Pakistan has established strong public-private partnerships and platforms to ignite the momentum for building business resilience. He said that the objective of PRP is to enhance the partnerships, and coordination among government, local humanitarian & civil society organizations, private sector, media and academia to contribute towards

strengthening the disaster preparedness and emergency response capacity at national and local levels. Ms. Chandrika Kularathna Head and other members of Sri Lankan delegation said that the key objective of their visit to Pakistan is to interact with SMEs and learn about their preparedness for continuity of businesses post-disasters. They showed keen interest in learning about the disaster management systems in Pakistan so that they could take advantage of them to reduce risks of disasters in their home country.

Rizwana Asif President Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce, Malik Sohail Hussain former Senior Vice President ICCI and Sana Zulfikar of PRP also spoke at the occasion and highlighted the role of the private sector in reducing the risks of disasters in the country through various initiatives.

Iran announces retaliatory sanctions on EU, UK entities

FOREIGN DESK

TEHRAN: Iran on Wednesday announced sanctions against 34 individuals and entities from the European Union and the United Kingdom, days after Brussels and London imposed a fresh round of sanctions targeting Iranian officials and organizations. The ministry said the individuals and entities were designated because of "supporting terrorism and terrorist groups, instigating and encouragement to terrorist acts and violence against Iranian people, interference in domestic affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, fomenting violence and unrest in Iran, dissemination of false information about Iran and participation in the escalation of cruel sanctions against Iranian people as an economic terrorism." Among the 22 EU individuals and three entities who face the travel ban and asset freeze include the Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, the publishing manager of Charlie Hebdo magazine Laurent Sourisseau, notorious journalist Bernard-Hen-

ri Levy, as well as Danish far-right politician Rasmus Paludan. The ministry also announced sanctions against a British entity and eight individuals, including the attorney general for England and Wales Victoria Prentis, former head of MI6 spy agency Richard Dearlove, and head of the British Army Patrick Sanders. Tehran slammed London and Brussels for supporting, facilitating, and failing to counter the destructive acts of the sanctioned individuals and entities, noting that such measures are in contravention of international obligations regarding the fight against terrorism. The EU and UK sanctions, read the statement, are "obvious violation of fundamental principles of international law set forth in the United Nations charter." It came two days after the European Union announced sanctions on more than 30 Iranian officials and organizations connected to recent deadly riots in the country, which were triggered by the death of a young Iranian woman,

Mahsa Amini, last September. The sanctions targeted a number of senior Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) officials as well as senior managers of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). Tensions between Iran and the European Union have dramatically risen amid the European Parliament's push to list the IRGC as a "terrorist organization", following a non-binding vote last week. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, however, clarified on Monday that the bloc cannot list the IRGC as a "terrorist" entity without an EU court ruling. Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Nasser Kan'ani in remarks on Tuesday condemned the new sanctions imposed by the EU and the UK, warning that retaliatory measures would follow. "The Islamic Republic will soon announce a list of new sanctions against the human rights violators of the EU and England," he asserted. "The action of the European Union and the British regime is a sign of their mental inability to properly

understand the realities of Iran." In a tweet on Wednesday, the spokesperson said the West is angry with IRGC because the force has confronted the "apartheid Zionist regime." "The reason behind US anger at IRGC, spread of lies & baseless allegations against it is clear; IRGC is a pillar of Iranian national power, has humiliated apartheid #Zionist regime & disrupted US domineering strategies in the region," he wrote. Iran sanctioned dozens of EU and British officials on December 12, 2022, over their support and instigation of recent deadly riots and also for their meddlesome statements. Back in December, EU foreign ministers agreed to impose new sanctions on a number of Iranian individuals and entities over an alleged crackdown on recent protests and drone deliveries to Russia for use in the Ukraine war. The 27-nation bloc imposed sanctions on 20 individuals along with entities - including the IRIB - over alleged human rights abuses, while four more people and as many entities were blacklisted over the issue of drones.

Switzerland imposes new raft of sanctions on Russia

GENEVA: The Swiss Federal Council enacted further sanctions against Russia on Wednesday, adopting the latest measures introduced by the European Union in response to Moscow's "military aggression in Ukraine."

"In response to Russia's ongoing military aggression against Ukraine and its continued destabilizing actions that undermine Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and security, the EU adopted new measures against Russia on 16 December 2022 as part of a ninth package of sanctions," said the council in a statement. Switzerland is not part of the EU, but its economy is closely intertwined with its neighbors. At the end of February last year, then-President Ignazio Cassis had announced that Switzerland was adopting the same financial sanctions by the EU against Russian President Vladimir Putin and other officials for Russia's war on Ukraine. The Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER) set about amending the annexes of the relevant ordinance within its competence and approved, among other things, the sanctioning of around 200 additional individuals and entities. The Federal Council comprises seven members, each of whom heads a government department and comes from four different major parties, also referred to as "the government," and which is likened to a cabinet in other countries. The sanctions came into effect on Wednesday at 6 p.m. local time (1700GMT). The sanctions include bans on services in product testing, advertising, market research, and opinion polling services and new controls and restrictions on the export of various goods. These include dual-use goods, goods for military and technological enhancement, or for the development of the defense and security sector, or goods that contribute to the enhancement of Russian industrial capacity. In addition, the government will extend the export ban on goods for the aerospace industry to include engines for aircraft and drones. Likewise, Switzerland will ban new investments in the Russian mining sector. —APP

Anti-govt protests continue in Peru's capital

LIMA: Peru's President Dina Boluarte has called for dialogue as anti-government protests continue to shake the country. Demonstrators are demanding her resignation, immediate elections and the dissolution of the country's Congress.

The protests follow the impeachment of former President Pedro Castillo last month after a failed attempt to dissolve Congress.

Although Wednesday's protests were mostly peaceful, around 50 people have been killed so far during demonstrations which started in early December.

Boluarte said the deadly violence experienced recently should be solved with peace and democracy.

"The political crisis that Peru is experiencing could transit through the path of violence, death and destruction, or it can be solved in peace, dialogue and democracy, in the way the OAS and our region has always favoured," she said.

One demonstrator said people on the streets are calling for justice for those who died in protests outside the capital Lima:

"This is what we are requesting, justice for all the brothers who have lost their lives," said Juana Quispe, "and we also request no more massacres in the town of Juliaca, in the Puno department, we are struggling." —DNA

Russian envoy slams Germany over Leopard tanks

MOSCOW: Germany's decision to send Kyiv Leopard 2 tanks takes the war in Ukraine to a new level, the Russian ambassador to Berlin said on Wednesday.

"This extremely dangerous decision takes the conflict to a new level of confrontation and contradicts the statements of German politicians about Germany's unwillingness to get involved in it," Sergey Nechayev said in a statement, published on the embassy's website.

His remarks came soon after Germany announced on Wednesday that it would send 14 Leopard 2A6 battle tanks to Ukraine and allow its allies to export them to do the same. "On Jan. 25, 2023, the German government approved the delivery of heavy Leopard 2 battle tanks to the Kyiv regime. Other countries armed with such equipment are allowed to re-export it to Ukraine." In his statement, Nechayev added that the move showed that Germany and its closest allies were not interested in a diplomatic solution in Ukraine, but instead were "set on its permanent escalation" and "unlimited pumping" of Ukraine with "new deadly weapons." "The 'red lines' are in the past," he asserted, referring to previous statements by Western politicians that some kinds of arms could not be given to Ukraine to avoid further escalation. —APP

Bomb blast in Nigeria kills 27 herdsmen

KANO: A group of 27 Fulani herdsmen were killed Wednesday and several others were wounded when a bomb exploded in the village of Ruku on the border between Nasarawa and Benue states in central Nigeria, police said. Nasarawa state police spokesman Ramhan Nansel said the local police command was working in collaboration with other security agencies and the state government to determine the circumstances that led to the bombing and to arrest the perpetrators. "It is unfortunate that such a thing happened. Twenty-seven of the herdsmen were killed after a bomb exploded in the Doma Local Government Area. The police and other security agencies are working around the clock to understand what led to the attack and track down those involved," Nansel said. Nasarawa Governor Abdullahi Sule commented on the blast, vowing to ensure that those behind the killings are apprehended and face justice. He urged all Fulani people across the state to remain calm, saying the state government was working with authorities in Benue State to find a lasting solution to the incessant attacks on people along the Nasarawa-Benue border. —Agencies

France to withdraw its troops from Burkina Faso

PARIS: France will withdraw its troops from Burkina Faso within a month, local media reported Wednesday. Burkina Faso on Monday requested that France withdraw its military, which was deployed to help local forces battle insurgents linked to the al-Qaeda and Daesh/ISIS terrorist organizations. The West African country said it has decided to end a military pact that allowed the presence of French troops because it is in line with the transition government's vision for the Burkinabe people to defend their country. It noted, however, that the request does not mean the end of diplomatic ties between the two countries. A French diplomatic source revealed that the request regarding the agreement of 2018 on the status of the French forces in the country will take effect next month, French radio broadcaster Europe 1 reported. "We will respect the terms of the agreement and proceed with the request," the source said. Relations between France and Burkina Faso have been low since soldiers seized control of the African country in September last year. Several demonstrations have been reported against the French military presence in the country on perceptions that it has been ineffective against the terrorism that has been raging in the country since 2015.

Previously, authorities in Burkina Faso also demanded "a new interlocutor" to replace the French ambassador. —APP



PARIS: Pakistan ambassador to France Asim Iftikhar Ahmad meets Diplomatic Advisors for French Ministry of Energy Transition and Ministry of Ecological Transition. Both sides exchanged views on immense potential for collaboration on renewable energy, climate change and sustainable development. —DNA

Relatives of Christchurch victims laud Ardern

AUCKLAND: Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern "stood by us" in delivering empathetic leadership, leaving her successor with "big shoes to fill," according to relatives of the victims of the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack. "The news of her resignation (last week) came as a shock to many of us and took us a while to process," Hamimah Ahmat, chair of the Sakinah Community Trust, a group of relatives of those who lost their lives in the horrific attacks, told Turkish News agency on Wednesday. "Many of us are grateful for her compassion, and empathetic leadership. She was approachable, stood by us, and most importantly showed us how a leader should support people going through tough times - with kindness," said Ahmat. On March 15, 2019, using semiautomatic weapons and livestreaming the attack, Brenton Tarrant, an Australian white supremacist, killed

51 people and injured 40 more at the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre in the city of Christchurch. Ahmat's husband Zekeriyah Tuyen is one of the worshippers lost in the terror attack, which shook the whole world. In 2020, Tarrant was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, in the first such ruling ever handed down in the

island nation. His appeal of the sentence is currently pending. "It was unfortunate for (Ardern) that the terrorist attacks happened under her leadership," Ahmat told Anadolu hours after Labour Party leader Chris Hipkins was sworn in as Ardern's successor following her surprise resignation. Hipkins has "big shoes to fill," said Ahmat. "I look for-

ward to a prime minister who will lead with similar humility and authenticity, and a Cabinet that will continue the work" addressing the causes and long-term impact of the attack, she said. "The government is the custodian of our security, so they have a moral obligation to hold agencies to account for the broken systems that allowed the March 15 terrorist attacks to happen," she added. Ardern, 42, announced her resignation last week, saying she no longer had "enough in the tank" to continue the nation's top job. Though giving up the premier post, Ardern is set to serve as a member of Parliament until April. "Long way to go" Ahmat said Ardern's government responded to the terror attack in many ways, including changing gun laws, and the introduction of the Christchurch Call, under which governments and tech companies seek to eliminate violent

extremist content online, besides the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terror attacks. "After the release of the report, the government swiftly agreed in principle to implement all 44 recommendations contained in the Royal Commission of Inquiry and is in fact currently actioning many of the recommendations," said Ahmat, but added: "This is still work in progress and we have a long way to go." Lauding Ardern for acting quickly to permanently ban a variety of weapons, Ahmat said some 51,000 firearms were handed to the police out of an estimated 170,000 in circulation at the time, yet leaving "a significant proportion of them ... still in the hands of gun owners." "Still, this is a start and a sharp contrast to attempts by countries like the United States, where their gun legislation has failed," she added. Ahmat declined comment on Tarrant's appeal, saying simply of the racist, Islamophobic mass murderer: —Agencies



Briefs

Anger soars in Beirut amid standoff over blast probe

WEB DESK

BEIRUT: Scores of protesters Thursday scuffled with riot police in Beirut as they tried to break into the chief offices of Lebanon's judiciary, after officials moved to cripple the probe into a massive port explosion that wreaked havoc on the capital city. Lebanon's chief prosecutor Ghassan Oweidat Wednesday ordered the release of all suspects detained in the investigation into the deadly 2020 port blast in Beirut and filed charges against the judge leading the probe, Tarek Bitar. Bitar on Monday resumed the investigation based on his legal interpretation, following a 13-month halt over legal challenges raised by politicians accused in the probe. He also charged over a dozen senior political, judicial, and security officials, including Oweidat. The recent developments have led to a standoff between the two judges, who each claim the other is breaking the law, crippling the country's judiciary, as its cash-strapped institutions continue to decay. The probe has stalled for years, as it threatens to rattle Lebanon's ruling elite, which is rife with corruption and mismanagement, and has helped push the country into an unprecedented economic meltdown.

Rashid suggests Imran to stage train march

DNA

LAHORE: Awami Muslim League (AML) chief Sheikh Rashid Ahmed suggested on Thursday Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan to stage train march from Karachi. Speaking to the media, Mr Ahmed lamented the rupee's "consistent depreciation against the US dollar." Mr Ahmed schooled Finance Minister Ishaq Dar over the depreciation of the rupee, saying the latter vowed to bring the greenback below Rs200. Underscoring the need to end the menace of money laundering, Mr Ahmed stressed the need to get rid of the money launderers.

Court seeks detailed answer from ECP in LG polls case

ISLAMABAD: A division bench of Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday sought arguments from lawyers and detailed answers from Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on the intra court appeals about the local body elections in Islamabad. A two-judge bench comprising Chief Justice of IHC Aamer Farooq and Justice Saman Raffat Intiaz heard the ICAs against the order of single member bench. At the outset of hearing, Additional Attorney General Munawar Dogal said that Additional Attorney General Aamer Rehman was busy in other cases while the office of the attorney general of Pakistan was vacant. - APP

Pakistan, Kazakhstan agree to enhance trade relations

Syed Naveed Qamar observed that Pakistan will host the next session of the Joint Working Group on Trade in the coming months to discuss issues in bilateral trade and undertake measures for enhancing economic integration

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Kazakhstan for Pakistan, Yerzhan Kistafin called on Federal Minister for Commerce Syed Naveed Qamar here on Thursday and agreed in principle to sign Kazakhstan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement. The two discussed potential opportunities for trade and cooperation between Kazakhstan and Pakistan, including the conclusion of several transit trade agreements, said a press release issued here. The Minister remarked that the government is keen to further strengthen bilateral economic and trade ties between the two countries, and expressed confidence that the two sides would expedite the process of concluding the agreements. Syed Naveed Qamar observed that Pakistan will host the next session of the Joint Working Group on Trade in the coming months to discuss issues in bilateral trade and undertake measures for enhancing economic integration. The minister remarked that the MoU between KAZAKH INVEST&QazTrade from Kazakhstan and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) and



Board of Investment (BOI) from Pakistan signed on 23rd December, 2022 will further enhance Trade and Investment activities between the two sides. Ambassador Kistafin appreciated the Minister for his support and expressed optimism that

the agreements would be finalized soon. Besides this agreement, the Ambassador also showed keen interest in Pakistani sports goods, furniture, and tourism. Subsequently, Syed Naveed Qamar, invited the Ambassador as "Guest of Honor"

on the 18th Trade Fair of the OIC member states scheduled to be held from 16-18th June, 2023 in Lahore with the theme of women entrepreneurship. He also invited Kazakh Government to establish a "Special Pavilion" at the OIC's Trade Fair.



ISLAMABAD: Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Muhammad Amjad Niazi calls on PM Shehbaz Sharif. - DNA

EU looks to boost returns of migrants denied asylum

STOCKHOLM: EU interior ministers on Thursday discussed how to return irregular migrants to their home countries more effectively - with some arguing for limiting visas to uncooperative nations. "Returning those who have been denied asylum in Europe is a really important issue," said Maria Malmer Stenegerd, migration minister for Sweden, which hosted the meeting as current holder of the EU presidency. European Commission statistics show that in 2021, out of 340,500 orders for migrants to be returned to their countries of origin, only 21 percent were carried out. "We have a very low return rate," noted EU home affairs commissioner Ylva Johansson. "We can do significant progress here to increase the numbers of returns and have it more effective and quicker," she said. The Swedish EU presidency believes cooperation could be improved with countries outside the EU whose citizens make up significant numbers of irregular migrants. Malmer Stenegerd said it was "crucial" that EU member states use the full weight of their governments - including leveraging development aid - to press third countries on the returns issue. The EU funds various reintegration programmes in countries that readmit their citizens who have been de-

nied asylum in Europe. These are separate from deportations or forced returns based on a court or administrative order, which are often carried out under escort and typically do not include in-country assistance. The EU has had a mechanism in place since 2020 to use visa issuance as a lever against countries that refuse to take back their nationals or decline to issue them with the necessary travel papers. But so far that measure has only been applied to Gambia, for whose citizens getting a Schengen visa is more difficult and costly. The commission in 2021 proposed the mechanism be extended to Bangladesh and Iraq, but that has not happened. Johansson said after a November visit to Bangladesh that the threat of the visa sanction has prompted Dhaka to become more "politically open" to accepting irregular migrants back from Europe. EU leaders in December 2021 called for "all relevant tools" to be used to push migrant-originating countries to cooperate on readmissions, including access to development aid, trade and visas. France backed a carrot-and-stick approach, with its junior minister for citizen affairs, Sonia Backes, saying in Stockholm that first "constructive dialogue" should be used. - APP

Zero tolerance against abusing state institutions

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Malik Muhammad Ahmed Khan here on Thursday said that the government would observe zero tolerance against individuals abusing or hurling threats to the state institutions and creating hatred among its personnel. Addressing the media persons, he castigated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan for instigating political polarization, dividing the society and promoting hatred among the people for his party's gains. He said that PTI was the party of only 30 members and the rest was provided to it by former National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Javed Iqbal, who himself admitted this as reported by columnist Javed Chaudhary. Javed Iqbal admitted that he was tasked to provide at least 40 (prominent) persons to Imran Khan's PTI. He said that he was astonished to note that his friend Fawad Chaudhary has hurled such disturbing threats to an institution. Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja was appointed by Imran Khan, he expressed. He said Imran Khan accused Donald Lu, General Qamar Javed Bajwa and now he accused Mohsin Raza Naqvi for toppling his government. He criticized former state minister Farrukh Habib for obstructing police from official duties. Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi was appointed after following a constitutional process, he added. PTI had started sully campaign against Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) after their refusal to launch Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) and CEC's principal stance on Daska election riggings by Buzdar government. - APP

Palestine condemns American silence over killings in Jenin

DNA

RAMALLAH: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine condemns in the strongest terms the bloody and barbaric incursion committed by the Occupation forces since this morning against our people in Jenin and its Camp, which has so far left at least 9 Martyrs and a number of injuries among the Palestinian citizens, disregarding all human values and Principles as they besieged the Camp and closed it all its entrances and live bullets with the aim of Extrajudicial and Cold-blooded killing, preventing Medical Staff and Ambulances from reaching the wounded, leaving them bleeding while they are on the ground to death, and attacking Jenin Hospital and patients with gas bombs, in a chilling image that the Media trusted in the sight and hearing of the International Community. It expresses the arrogance of the Occupation and its insistence on escalating the situation in the arena of conflict, which threatens to blow it up completely. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Palestine wonders: If Int'l Community and the American Administration do not move now, in light of these brutal scenes and crimes committed by the Occupying Forces, then when can it move to triumph over its Principles and Positions and preserve what remains of its Credibility?

Taliban to set new rules on women's aid work, UN says

WEB DESK

KABUL: Taliban ministers have told a senior UN official they plan to draw up new guidelines to allow Afghan women to work in some humanitarian operations. Martin Griffiths told the BBC he had received "encouraging responses" from a wide range of Taliban ministers during talks in Kabul, even if last month's edict banning Afghan women working for NGOs is not reversed. With Afghan women playing a crucial role in delivering aid, there is concern the ban is endangering urgent life-saving humanitarian operations in the country. "It's worth remembering that, this year, Afghanistan is the biggest humanitarian aid programme in the world ever," Mr Griffiths, the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, told me in Kabul. The aid arithmetic is staggering. This year, agencies will try to reach 28 million Afghans, more than half the population, including six million who are, Mr Griffiths says, "knocking on famine's door". This year is Afghanistan's coldest winter in a decade, and it's been cruel. In the past two weeks, more than 126 Afghans have perished in freezing temperatures, collapsing from hypothermia, or overcome by toxic fumes from gas heaters. And winter's icy blast strikes a people already living, perilously, on the edge. Providing aid to Afghanistan is of epic proportions too.

More than 160 Afghans die in bitterly cold weather

KABUL: More than 160 people have died from the cold in Afghanistan this month in the worst winter in more than a decade, authorities said on Thursday, as residents described being unable to afford fuel to heat homes in temperatures well below freezing. "162 people have died due to cold weather since January 10 until now," said Shafiqullah Rahimi, a spokesperson for the Minister of Disaster Management. About 84 of the deaths had taken place in the last week. The coldest winter in 15 years, which has seen temperatures dip as low as -34 degrees Celsius (-29.2 degrees Fahrenheit), has hit Afghanistan in the middle of a severe economic crisis. Many aid groups have partially suspended operations in recent weeks due to a Taliban administration ruling that most female NGO workers could not work, leaving agencies unable to operate many programmes in the conservative country. In a snowy field in the west of the Afghan capital, children rummaged through rubbish looking for plastic to burn to help their families, unable to afford wood or coal. - Agencies

14-member caretaker KP cabinet takes oath

PESHAWAR: The 14-member caretaker provincial cabinet of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Thursday took oath here at the Governor House. KP Governor Ghulam Ali administered the oath from the members of the cabinet and felicitated them and conveyed best wishes. The cabinet

members included Abdul Halim Qasuriya, Syed Masood Shah, Hamid Shah, Advocate Sawal Nazir, Bakht Nawaz, Fazl Elahi, Adnan Jalil, Shafiqullah Khan, Haji Ghafran, Khushdil Khan Malik, Taj Muhammad Afridi, Muhammad Ali Shah, Justice (R) Irshad Qaiser, Shahid Khan Khattak. Chief Secretary Dr Shehzad Bangash, Inspector General of Police Moazzam Jah Ansari, Commissioner Peshawar Riaz Mehsud, heads of administrative departments and other political and social personalities participated in the oath taking ceremony. - DNA

Ukraine hit by missiles day after West's offer of tanks

MONITORING DESK

KYIV: Russia launched a wave of missiles at Ukraine on Thursday, a day after Germany and the US pledged tanks to aid Kyiv's fight against the invasion. One person died and two others were injured after strikes hit a building in Kyiv, the city's mayor said. Officials also reported strikes on two energy facilities in the southern region of Odesa. The barrage came as Russia said it perceived the tank offer as "direct" Western involvement in the conflict. In what was a sustained and wide-ranging attack, the head of the Ukrainian army said Moscow launched 55 air and sea-based missiles on Thursday. Valery Zaluzhny added that 47 of them were shot down, including 20 around Kyiv. Earlier, Ukraine's air force said it had downed a cluster of Iranian-made attack drones launched

by Russian forces from the Sea of Azov in the south of the country. A 55-year-old man was killed and two others wounded when non-residential buildings in the south of the capital were struck, officials reported. The offensive was a continuation of Russia's months-long tactic of targeting Ukraine's infrastructure. The freezing winter has seen power stations destroyed and millions plunged into darkness. After Thursday's strikes, emergency power cuts were enforced in Kyiv and several other regions to relieve pressure on the electricity grid, said DTEK, Ukraine's largest private power producer. A day earlier, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz promised to provide Ukraine with 14 Leopard 2 tanks, following weeks of international pressure. They are widely seen as some of the most effective battle tanks available. The heavy weaponry is expected to arrive in late March or early April. President Joe Biden later announced the US would send 31 M1 Abrams battle tanks, marking a reversal of longstanding Pentagon arguments that they are a poor fit for the Ukrainian battlefield. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky welcomed the move but urged the speedy delivery of the tanks. He also appealed to the West to send long-range missiles and fighter jets. But for tanks to be "game-changer", 300 to 400 of them would be needed, an adviser to Ukraine's defence minister told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. "The sooner we defeat Russia on the battlefield using Western weapons, the sooner we will be able to stop this missile terror and restore peace," Yuriy Sak said. Speaking on the same programme, Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said sending tanks to Ukraine would make a big difference to the country's ability to win the war.

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Islamabad POST
11# Block 18-A, Awan Plaza,
G-8 Markez, Islamabad-Pakistan
Ph: 051-2261960, 051-2266165