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Putin lands in Abu Dhabi on Middle East visit

Detailed News On Page-08

Zelensky cancels US Senate briefing

Detailed News On Page-07



Watson takes charge as QG head coach

Detailed News On Page-06



Death toll reaches 16,248 Israel, Hamas battle intensifies in southern Gaza

Palestinian foreign ministry demands halt to planned far-right march on Al-Aqsa mosque

DNA

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 61 on Wednesday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound and level whole blocks and homes and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. Meanwhile, the Palestinian resistance continued to fend off Israeli incursions in different areas of Gaza, especially in Khan Yunis where they carried out operations described as "heroic" against the infiltrating troops during the past 24 hours. Al-Qassam fighters have carried out close-range operations against infiltrating troops in Khan Yunis, killing and injuring a large number of them and destroying several armored vehicles. One of those operations included a mortar attack on Israeli forces in the east of Khan Yunis. Al-Qassam fighters also fired rockets and projectiles at the military sites of Sufa and Kissufim and the illegal settlement of Nir Yitzhak. For its part, al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad, said that its fighters launched a mortar attack on gatherings of Israeli troops in the vicinity of the Cultural Center in Bani Suheila and fired a volley of rockets at the illegal settlement of Mivtahim. Al-Quds Brigades fighters also fired mortar shells at Israeli military gatherings near Sheikh Nasser area and an anti-personnel projectile at special forces near al-Dilal Mosque in the east of Khan Yunis. The Financial Times reports that the extent of devastation and destruction in northern Gaza in less than seven weeks has approached levels seen during the years-long carpet-bombing of German cities during the Second World War. More than 60 percent of buildings in northern Gaza have been damaged, the report says. Across the coastal territory, more than 300,000 residential units have been damaged or destroyed completely. "Gaza will also go down as a

Continued on Page 06

UN warns of 'horror' and 'atrocities'

NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: UN officials have warned that the risk of "atrocities" is growing in Gaza, with Palestinians stuck in "deepening horror" as Israel intensifies its assault on the enclave. Speaking at a news conference on Wednesday, Volker Türk, UN high commissioner for human rights, urged Israel, Hamas, and international actors with influence to prevent "atrocities" as Israel's advance into southern Gaza leaves displaced Palestinians with nowhere to run. "Palestinians in Gaza are living in utter deepening horror," Türk continued, describing the displacement and the systemic deprivation of millions of Palestinians, who are surviving in unsafe, overcrowded and unsanitary conditions with no security. "My colleagues describe the situation as 'apocalyptic'. In these circumstances, there is a heightened risk of atrocity crimes," he stated. The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) echoed his words, warning that the situation in Gaza is "getting worse each minute". "Another wave of displacement is underway in Gaza",

Continued on Page 06

INDEPENDENCE DAY OF FINLAND



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Finland Hannu Ripatti and Mrs Veronica Ripatti cutting the cake to celebrate the Independence Day of Finland. - DNA

Afghan gvt closes Torkham border crossing

Installation of 'Welcome to Pakistan' signboard apparent cause of latest closure

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Afghan authorities on Wednesday closed the Torkham border crossing between the two countries in an apparent protest against a 'Welcome to Pakistan' signboard being installed at the crossing's Zero Point. As work crews were installing the signboard, Afghan authorities closed the international border crossing to all vehicle and pedestrian traffic. The crossing at Torkham is a key trading waypoint.

Forces kill terrorist

DNA

RAWALPINDI: On 6 December 2023, security forces conducted an intelligence based operation in general area Kulachi, Dera Ismail Khan District, on reported presence of terrorists. Own troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location as a result of which Terrorist Habib Ur Rehman was sent to hell. Said terrorist had remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against security forces as well as innocent civilians in the area. Weapon, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from the killed terrorist. Sanitization operation is being

Continued on Page 06

IHC upholds Imran's disqualification in Toshakhana case

ECP to indict PTI founder at Adiala Jail on Dec 13

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday upheld former prime minister and PTI ex-chairman Imran Khan's disqualification by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in Toshakhana case, disposing of his plea to suspend his sentence in the case. Pronouncing the reserved verdict, IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq read out the short order on the case. A detailed verdict will be released later. The court also rejected Imran Khan's plea to withdraw his application challenging his disqualification in the Toshakhana case. On October 21, 2022, the electoral watchdog, in a consensus verdict, had disqualified the former prime minister under Article 63(1) (p) and ruled that the PTI founder was no

Continued on Page 06

'Will sweep' polls Jhagra resurfaces at PTI convention

OUR CORRESPONDENT

PESHAWAR: After months without making any public appearances, PTI leader Taimur Khan Jhagra resurfaced at a party convention in Peshawar on Wednesday and claimed that the PTI would "sweep" the general elections scheduled to be held on February 8. "Despite all these difficulties, PTI will sweep [the elections]. The reason for that is all of you. If you are standing

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

CM Naqvi breaks 45-year deadlock

ABBAS HASHMI

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi's groundbreaking initiative unfolds as he addresses the decades-long plight of landless farmers in Cholistan. Acting on CM Naqvi's directives, the protracted process of allotting land, stagnant for 45 years, has culminated in a few short months, with 344 thousand acres now allocated to 27 thousand farmers through a meticulously conducted transparent balloting. The computerized balloting, officiated by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi at his office, signifies a historic step towards empowering the farmers of Cholistan.

Ahsan Iqbal on warpath against Imran

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Ahsan Iqbal asserted on Wednesday that the country had to face the consequences following the deposed premier's "statements" against China. Speaking to the media in Lahore, the former planning minister recounted the contributions made by his party in Balochistan. "We have established the universities to a record level in Balochistan between 2013 and 2018." He vowed that it was the part of the PML-N's plan to alleviate poverty in Balochistan. Iqbal asserted that PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif is the "ray of hope" for the people of Balochistan.

PML-N, Q seat-adjustment

Nawaz, Shujaat discuss politics

A history was made as two former political allies, who had parted their ways over two decades ago, met once again

PPP hits back fazal's statement

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The PPP on Wednesday responded to JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman's recent reservations about holding elections during what he described as a worsening security situation by suggesting that opposition to polls stemmed from a "fear of the public's verdict". PPP Secretary Information Faisal Kareem Kundi's statement follows the JUI-F chief's recent statement on the feasibility of

Continued on Page 06



BUREAU REPORT/DNA

LAHORE: A history was made Wednesday as two former political friends and allies, who had parted their ways over two decades ago, met once again to contemplate on a joint strategy and decide the future of Pakistan. It was three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif - accompanied by

Continued on Page 06

Prime Minister Kakar orders emergency polio eradication plan

He directed resumption of the regular polio immunization campaign across the country

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday directed formulation of an emergency polio eradication plan and launch of integrated programmes in high-risk union councils. Chairing a meeting on Task Force on Polio Eradication, he emphasized monitoring of polio vaccination campaigns by using modern technology. Expressing the recent report of police cases, the prime minister regretted that the crippling disease, which was eradicated from the globe, still existed in Pakistan and Afghanistan. PM Kakar said regarding the use of Inactivated Polio Virus (IPV) vaccine, best international practices and research needed to be taken into consideration. He directed resumption of the regular polio immunization campaign across the country. The prime minister lauded the efforts of international community and development partners in polio eradication. He mentioned that enhanced cooperation on polio eradication was agreed upon in a meeting with Bill Gates, the co-chair of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on the sidelines of Conference of Parties (COP28). The prime minister stressed including teachers, scholars and

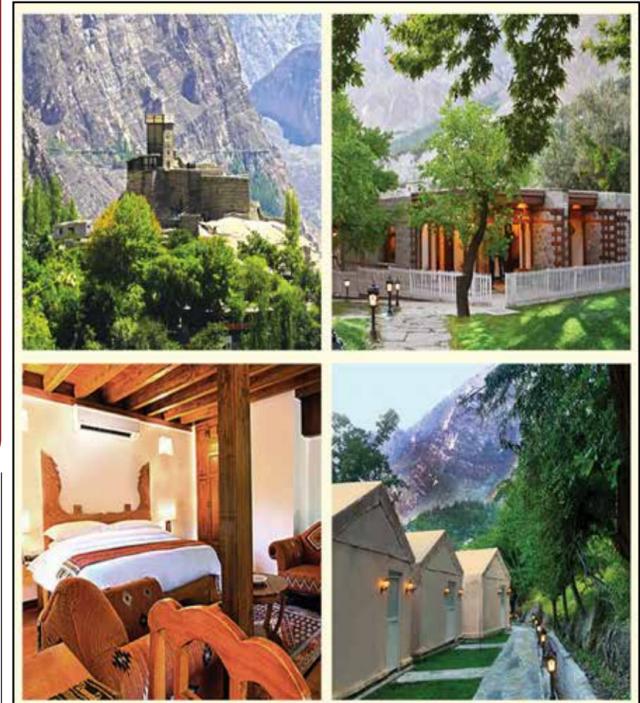
Continued on Page 06

Pakistan laments rise in Islamophobia in India

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday called on the international community to take cognisance of increasing Islamophobia, hate speech, and hate crimes against Muslims in India on the 31st anniversary of the demolition of the Babri mosque. "Today is a sad reminder of the demolition of the historic 'Babri Masjid' in India. On this day, 31 years ago, a mob of Hindu zealots demolished this centuries-old Mosque in Ayodhya in full view of Indian law enforcement authorities," a statement from the Foreign Office (FO) said. The statement refers to the demolition of the centuries-old Babri mosque by a Hindu mob in the Indian holy town of Ayodhya in December 1992. The site has been a point of contention between Hindus and Muslims. The mosque was constructed at the

Continued on Page 06



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UBG candidates will be successful in FPCCI elections

Zubair Tufail has said that in the FPCCI elections to be held on December 30, 2023, the evil intentions of the opponents to seize power through fake votes will not be successful this time

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI : President of United Business Group (UBG) Zubair Tufail has said that in the FPCCI elections to be held on December 30, 2023, the evil intentions of the opponents to seize power through fake votes will not be successful this time. Representatives of the business community from all over Pakistan have united under the patronage of Patron in Chief SM Tanveer and they know very well that their problems can be solved only through the platform of UBG. He expressed these views on Wednesday at UBG. Spokesman Gulzar Firoz, former senior vice president FPCCI Syed Mazhar Ali Nasir and former

vice president Shakeel Ahmad Dhingra. Zubair Tufail said that Atif Ikram Sheikh for the post of president of FPCCI and Saqib Fayyaz Maggo for senior vice president, is the best candidate and both have served the federation well as vice presidents. He said that the United Business Group is facing a heavy burden in the election and the leaders of the opposition group and voters are coming towards the UBG because they know very well that the survival of FPCCI is only because of the poor policies and failed leadership of the ruling group. It is possible only with the success of UBG. Zubair Tufail said that UBG has made complete preparations for the election on December 30 and we are in full contact with our voters. UBG

always conveys the problems of the business community to the government and He went to every level to find a solution and in the future, Atif Ikram Shaikh and Saqib Fayyaz Maggo will be elected to the post of president/ senior vice president and will go to every door to relieve the business community from the trouble. He said that all illegal measures will be taken. However, we will not give the businessmen panel an escape route, it is a pity that the leaders of the businessmen panel in their lust for power have destroyed the honor of FPCCI and we have financially sanctioned the Federal Organization of Businessmen. It was strong, but the incompetent ruling group has pushed it back into decline.

Dengue tally reaches 2,700 cases in city

DNA

RAWALPINDI : The dengue total tally on Wednesday reached to 2,700 positive cases with the arrival of one more patient from the Metropolitan Corporation area during the last 24 hours. District Coordinator Epidemics Prevention and Control (DCEPC), Dr Sajjad Mehmood Wednesday informed that 2,692 confirmed patients had been discharged after recovery while 16 patients were admitted to the district's health facilities of which six were positive cases. During last week's indoor vector surveillance, the teams checked 5,091 houses and larvae were detected at 55 sites while during outdoor surveillance, larvae were found at four spots while inspecting 3,220 places. The health official said that in the coming days, the dengue cases would end as the weather turned cooler, which was not suitable for the survival of the dengue mosquito.

One killed, two injured in road mishap

CHICHAWATN: One was killed and two others injured in an accident in Chichawatni when their motorbike was trampled by a tractor-trailer on Wednesday. According to Police, the accident occurred due to overspeeding near Dad Fatiana, Chichawatni where a rashly driven trailer hit a motorcycle, killing the one motorcyclist the spot while two persons were also injured in accident. The deceased has been identified as 45-year-old named Allah Ditta. Rescue teams reached the spot after being informed and shifted the injured to local civil hospital.—APP

LDA demolished several illegal constructions

DNA

LAHORE : On the directions of Commissioner Lahore and DG LDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa, the teams of TEPA and Town Planning Wing LDA conducted a mega operation in the vicinity of Main Boulevard Garden Town and Gulberg, here on Wednesday. In the five hours long operation, more than a dozen properties around Main Boulevard Garden Town and Barkat Market were sealed, encroachments were removed from more than 24 properties. During the operation, more than a dozen private offices, plazas, private banks, marquees, and restaurants were sealed over

violating parking rules.

The teams cleared encroachments from various plazas and parking area outside the offices. During the operation, encroachments were also removed from the parking area of Asia Center, Ibrahim Center, Salar Center, Al-Qadir Plaza and others located on Main Boulevard Garden Town. Encroachments built in the basement of commercial plazas and offices, cafes and other established on the space reserved for parking were also demolished. Later, TEPA and Town Planning Wing LDA carried out another joint operation in the vicinity of Mehmood Kasuri Road Gulberg and removed several encroachments and sealed the properties over parking rules violations. In

the 3 hours long operation, at Mehmood Kasuri Road Gulberg and surrounding roads, encroachments were removed from commercial properties. Encroachments from the parking area of well-known coffee shops, shopping chains, restaurants, shopping malls, hotels and others established on Mehmood Kasuri Road Gulberg were cleared. Encroachments were removed from the parking area of hotels, restaurants and cafe shops. Famous restaurant located on the main road was also sealed, temporary encroachments were removed. Offices built in parking area, kitchen, seating areas were also demolished. Several notices for corrective measures were issued to these properties prior to the operation.

RPO orders for accelerating traffic rules awareness

MULTAN : Regional Police Officer (RPO), Muhammad Sohail Chaudhary has directed the traffic police officials to speed up the awareness campaign about traffic rules in order to avoid traffic accidents. He expressed these views during a meeting with traffic police officials here Wednesday. Chief Traffic Officer Muhammad Naem and other senior officers were present on the occasion. The RPO further said that the traffic police officials were directly related to the public and leading the police so it is important to brief them about accident prevention. He further said that obtaining driving license has been made very easy and tell the people how they could get their driving licenses. He ordered for creating public awareness about traffic rules in educational institutions, schools, colleges, universities and crowded places with busy chowks and bus stands. He also appealed to the public to follow the traffic rules to avoid accidents and any kind of trouble and prove to be a good citizen by cooperating with the traffic.—APP

SBP launches 'RAAST' person to merchant payment service

KARACHI : State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Wednesday launched an interoperable RAAST Person-to-Merchant (P2M) payment service to facilitate digital payment acceptance for merchants and businesses. As part of Raast implementation project, the SBP instructed banks, Micro Finance Banks (MFBs), Electronic Money Institutions (EMIs), Payment System Operators (PSOs) and Payment Service Providers (PSPs) to enable Raast P2M service for their customers, said a statement issued here. The Raast P2M system will enable merchants to accept payments through different modes including Unified Quick Response (QR) Codes, Raast Alias (such as mobile phones), bank accounts (IBAN), and Request to Pay (RTP). The technical specifications in this regard have already been shared with REs. A circular issued by SBP's Digital Finance Group requires all regulated entities (REs) to enable the capabilities such as Read/Scan RAAST QR Codes, Process Request to Pay (Now and Later), Push Payments to merchant RAAST Aliases and IBANs and initiate the request for returns or refunds in their respective Apps by March 01, 2024. The REs were further instructed to provide efficient, seamless and easy to use interfaces to their customers while they were also directed not to charge any fee from their customers using Raast payment options to pay for their transactions. To ensure maximum adoption of digital payment through Raast P2M Service, all REs were instructed not to restrict number and amount of transactions performed by their customers, provide instant transaction confirmation and make account statements available for customers on digital channels - apps and internet portals - in real time. The SBP has also instructed the existing merchants acquiring REs to complete the integration with 'RAAST' for enabling their respective merchants and e-commerce players to accept payments through 'RAAST' P2M service by March 31, 2024. Further, all REs shall ensure that billers/bill-aggregators already on-boarded by them are also enabled to accept payments via Raast payment options by March 31, 2024. All the REs were also required to devise comprehensive dispute resolution, liability and risk management frameworks for on-boarded merchants as well as for third parties along with taking necessary steps to prevent loss of customer data and funds due to cyber security threats as well as preventing frauds and misuse of Raast P2M Service. APP

Kazakhstan confers national award upon IIUI President

The two day international conference titled Sirah, civic sense and tolerance, was organized with a joint venture of Pak-Saudi Governments by the International Centre of Excellence for Sirah Studies, Islamic Research Institute, IRI of International Islamic University.

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Kazakhstan has conferred its national award upon Dr. Hathal Homoud Alotiabi, President, International Islamic University (IIU) in recognition of his services. The award was conferred by Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan Yerzhan Kistafin and Dr. Bulat Sarsenbayev, Chairman of the Board of the governors of Kazakhstan's Institute for Development of Inter-civilizational dialogue on the behalf of President of Kazakhstan in the concluding ceremony of a conference on Sirah of Prophet (PBUH) held at the Faisal Masjid campus of the university. The two day international conference titled Sirah, civic sense and tolerance, was organized with a joint venture of Pak-Saudi Governments by the International Centre of Excellence for Sirah Studies, Islamic Research Institute, IRI of International Islamic University. The concluding ceremony of the conference was chaired by Minister for Religious Affairs and



Interfaith Harmony, H.E. Aneeq Ahmed. The Minister of Religious Affairs said that the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) teach us peaceful coexistence, mercy and good behavior. Aneeq Ahmad said that the Quran and Sunnah are the only way that tells the rules of how to build a society and how to live a life. Addressing the youth, he said that

the life of the Prophet (PBUH) is the best role model for them, they should connect with religion that it shows the way to the betterment of this world and the hereafter. He further said that the youth of Pakistan is an omen of the country's bright future. On this occasion, he also visited the Sirat-un-Nabi exhibition organized in connection with the conference and took special interest in the rare books and manuscripts there. The Federal Minister of Religious Affairs said that International Islamic University is serving the society by organizing conferences on important topics like Sirat-un-Nabi. Speakers of national and international repute presented more than 100 research papers in this two-day conference. On the occasion, Chairman of the Board of the governors of Kazakhstan's Institute for Development of Inter-civilizational Dialogue, Dr. Bulat Sarsenbayev shed light on the social aspects of Islam, the Islam's message of love for humanity.—DNA



ISLAMABAD : Ambassador of Turkiye to Pakistan Mehmet Pacaci along MD Bait-ul-Mall Amir Fida Parcha and others are visiting the different stalls during an event "Pakistan Bait-ul-Mall at a Glance" at Fatima Jinnah Park in Federal Capital.—ONLINE

AIOU ranked in top 300 world greenest campuses

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has been ranked 8th amongst the greenest Pakistani universities while it stood at 293th position worldwide in ranking of 'UT's GreenMetric' for the year 2023. According to AIOU, as for as the federal-ly chartered universities of Pakistan are concerned, the AIOU stood 3rd amongst the ranking of these universities.

Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood has expressed his gratitude for the honor and stated that the credit of this achievement goes to the Office of Research Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC) and the gardeners of the University for which they deserve congratulations. He further said that the University will pay special attention to make the campuses greener so that we can get a better position next year. As compared to previous year's ranking, the Allama Iqbal Open University has significantly improved its position worldwide by taking practical steps to green the main campus as well as the regional campuses. In the ranking of global universities in 2021, the AIOU was ranked 485th among the greenest universities in the world, while in 2022, the University was ranked 331st among global universities.

Punjab govt criticized over license fee increase

According to figures provided by the traffic police, 280,518 learner's licences and 19,761 new licences were made in November while 18,312 people renewed their licences

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : People on Wednesday lambasted the caretaker Punjab government for "unjustified and unprecedented" increase in the fee for issuance of learner's driving licence. The caretaker government had on Tuesday, in a cabinet meeting, increased the learner's driving licence fee from Rs60 to Rs1,000. The fee will be applicable from Jan 1, 2024. The cabinet also decided to raise fee for

LTV (light transport vehicle), HTV (heavy transport vehicle) and PSV (public service vehicle) licence, while the citizens of the US, Canada and other countries can apply online and will be charged \$100 as licence fee. The angry people said the increase in fee was excessive and would add to their financial woes as they are already reeling under high inflation prevailing in the country. They urged the government to review the decision and bring it down to affordable limit. As the news of fee hike spread,

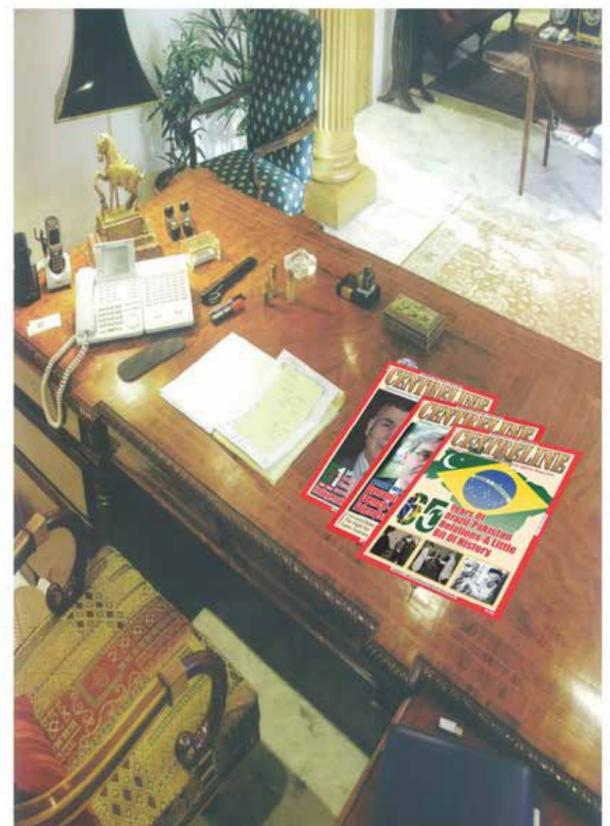
people rushed to police service centres to apply for learner's licence. There were long queues in the centres. Meanwhile, CTO Mustansar Feroze said the summary for increase in fee had been under consideration since long. He justified delay in issuance of licence fee, saying that it was due to rush of licence seekers. According to figures provided by the traffic police, 280,518 learner's licences and 19,761 new licences were made in November while 18,312 people renewed their licences.

KP IT Board launches advanced co-working space

ABBOTTABAD : Khyber Pakhtunkhwa IT Board Wednesday arranged an event to inaugurate a cutting-edge co-working space, incorporating state-of-the-art technology in Abbottabad. The initiative aims to attract private companies and foster a conducive environment for IT-related activities in the region. Ali Mahmood Khan, Managing Director of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa IT Board was the chief guest of the event. While speaking on the occasion he revealed that following the success in Peshawar, the IT Board has expanded its facilities to Abbottabad, offering 24-hour accessibility for individuals in the IT sector.

The co-working space is designed to accommodate 200 professionals and includes dedicated spaces for women with separate offices. Additionally, the facility provides freelancing opportunities, with a specific hall allocated for a set number of freelancers. He emphasized that not only national and international companies but also educational institutions such as universities, medical colleges, and commerce colleges, along with individuals affiliated with the IT sector in Abbottabad, can benefit from this cutting-edge facility. Representatives from renowned companies including Cybernet, Tech Valley, System Limited, and

IBEX commended the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa IT Board for its initiative in providing a 24-hour facility equipped with advanced technology. The administration of Work Around, the co-working space, expressed optimism that the initiative would open avenues for freelancing and enhanced job opportunities for the youth of Abbottabad. The facility is accessible at an approximate cost of \$45 per month. Company representatives conducted a thorough examination of the various computer halls and conference rooms in Work Around, acknowledging the commendable facilities provided by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa IT Board.—APP



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

DECEMBER

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

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Marriott.....051-2826121
Monal.....0334-5421812



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Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police.....9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.5555489
CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

CMH.....5611111
MH.....5611116
Cantt Hospital.....9270907-11
DHQ.....5556311-4
RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666



Departments

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CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

UK, Canada, UNFPA renew calls to end gender-based violence

British High Commissioner, Jane Marriott CMG OBE, said: "Today we rightly celebrate the progress we have made towards protecting women and girls from the heinous acts of gender-based violence. But this is no time to be complacent, and the UK will continue to speak out against a worrying rollback of women's and girls' rights, and to support grassroots organisations



MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Activists, the international community and politicians came together at the British High Commission on 4 December 2023 as part of the annual 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. Brit-

ish High Commissioner, Jane Marriott CMG OBE, jointly hosted a special reception with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Country Representative, Dr Luay Shabaneh, and Canadian High Commissioner, Leslie Scanlon.

British High Commissioner, Jane Marriott CMG OBE, said: "Today we rightly celebrate the progress we have made towards protecting women and girls from the heinous acts of gender-based violence. But this is no time to be complacent, and the UK will continue to speak out against a worrying rollback of women's and girls' rights, and to

support grassroots organisations." UNFPA Country Representative, Dr Luay Shabaneh, said: "Under UNFPA's transformative results we are working to end gender based violence by 2030. Women are a missed opportunity in Pakistan. If Women are given their chance to prosper, then

the country has a chance for prosperity and good future. We have to shame the perpetrators and we must honour and support the survivors of violence. We must and continue to invest in the health and protection services. Pakistan must advance the implementation of laws and improve the

conviction rate of perpetrator in cases of violence against women and girls." Canadian High Commissioner, Leslie Scanlon, said: "Canada has been a leading advocate for the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, globally. In Pakistan, Canada is supporting more

than 12 Pakistani women's rights organizations (WROs) to advocate for and advance gender equality rights for women and girls in the country. Additionally, each year, the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives supports small scale innovative projects often designed to advance women's rights.

Expert call for AI cooperation between China and Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani expert called for Artificial Intelligence (AI) cooperation between China and Pakistan "China has been a major player in the global Artificial Intelligence (AI) landscape, with significant investments and advancements in AI research, development, and deployment. By collaborating with China, Pakistan can accelerate its journey towards adopting and implementing cutting-edge AI technologies," said Ammara Aftab, founder of Pro AI think tank, in a recent interview with Gwadar Pro. Aimed at bringing together the world's foremost AI experts on a single, dynamic platform, the Pro AI think tank envisions a future where the brightest minds in AI converge to exchange ideas, share knowledge and embark on collaborative ventures that push the boundaries of what AI

can achieve. Through her years of experience in the industry, Ammara Aftab noticed that despite the broad spectrum of technological discussions, there was a distinct absence of events dedicated to AI. She noted that "the cooperation between China and Pakistan in the field of artificial intelligence holds significant strategic, economic, and technological importance. This collaboration can bridge the gap and foster mutual benefits for both countries and contribute to the global landscape of AI development." Recognizing the significance of developing AI as an emerging field, the Pakistani government has announced to finalize its first AI policy this month. Pakistan's Ministry of Planning also acknowledged in April that the incorporation of AI in different government sectors would lead to better decision-making processes, personalized medical treatments, and enhanced learning experiences

and solutions that were previously unattainable. Ammara Aftab noted that China has demonstrated a strong commitment to become a global leader in AI. It is worth mentioning that China has made strides in implementing AI technologies across industries, including healthcare, finance, manufacturing and transportation. The integration of AI into smart cities and the development of 5G infrastructure have further contributed to the widespread adoption of AI applications. "Besides, China has actively engaged in international collaborations in AI research and development. Partnerships with global institutions and participation in international conferences have facilitated knowledge exchange and contributed to the global AI community," she added, "Pakistan's collaboration with China in AI can facilitate knowledge transfer and skill development. China's expertise in AI can be in-

strumental in training and upskilling professionals in Pakistan." China-Pakistan relations have maintained a sound momentum of development and the two countries have enjoyed extensive cooperation in politics, economy and culture. Strengthening cooperation in the field of AI can further consolidate such cooperation and maintain peace and stability in the region. She underlined that "Pakistan has a large pool of talented and skilled individuals in the field of technology and computer science. By collaborating with Pakistan, China can gain access to a diverse talent pool and benefit from the expertise and knowledge of Pakistani professionals as well." Ammara Aftab pointed out that based on general trends and growing interest in AI cooperation, the two countries can collaborate in the areas of academic partnerships, corporate collaboration, government initiatives.

First sesame cargo will be delivered to China this month: CMEC

ISLAMABAD: The first sesame cargo of 50 tons based on contract farming will be delivered to China this month. The testing farm started early this year by China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) will boost innovative farming and agricultural cooperation between the two countries. "The first cargo of 50 tons was all collected from our contract

farming, it will reach China before 25th Dec", Xi Jianlong, project manager of contract farming at CMEC Pakistan told Gwadar Pro. He said, "We would like to expand sesame contract farming next season to 30000 acres in Pakistan and will export 10000 tons to China. Our company has many contract-based farms in Sindh and Punjab including dry red chili and

sorghum farms." "Our first project on contract farming was for dry red chili, our red chili farms are located in Multan, Khanewal, Lodhran, and Muzaffargarh. After sesame the 3rd project is contract farming of sorghum, its farms are located in Lahore, Okara, and Khanewal," Xi added. Xi Jianlong mentioned his company also plans to export red chili and sorghum

to China. "We are the first Chinese company to execute contract farming in Pakistan benefiting the local farmers. Introducing modern technology will improve Pakistan's yearly yield and trading volume giving a boost to exports." Earlier in August the company signed an MOU to revolutionize sustainable food systems, bridging small farmers and end-to-end value chains for enhanced efficiency and food security. Contract farming in Pakistan has several benefits for local farmers, such as providing smallholder farmers access to better inputs and technology, reducing market risks, improving income stability.—DNA

MOITT to empower freelancers

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MOITT) has announced a groundbreaking initiative, offering interest-free loans to freelancers to empower independent professionals by enabling them to establish e-working centers, addressing the critical challenge of inadequate workplaces. According to official of MOITT under the comprehensive plan, "Each freelancer is set to receive financial assistance of Rs 100,000 to establish their own e-working center. This strategic move is anticipated to revolutionize the freelance landscape in the country, significantly enhancing the economic contributions of freelancers." Highlighting the initiative's significance, ministry official said, "Despite approximately 1.5 million freelancers in Pakistan having undergone government training, many still face challenges in acquiring essential resources like computers and dedicated work spaces." "To address this issue, the government has allocated an impressive Rs 50 billion investment to establish private-sector co-working spaces, benefiting half a million freelancers nationwide. The goal is not only to provide necessary infrastructure but also to create an ecosystem fostering creativity and productivity," he informed. Expressing optimism, official hope that, with the support of this initiative, each freelancer could potentially earn up to \$30,000 annually, making a significant and direct contribution to the national economy.

PPP to contest election on its performance: Kundi

ISLAMABAD: PPP Information Secretary Faisal Karim Kundi said that his party has a comprehensive plan to steer the country out of crisis and to put it on its way to progress and prosperity. He said that PPP's revolutionary measures were not hidden from the masses and PPP would take part in elections based on its track record of best services towards them. He was talking to the party worker at his residence, Kundi remarked that people were faced with difficulties due to inflation and poor economic conditions in the country. He claimed that PPP would address people's issues by eliminating inflation. He said that law and order, economy, inflation, and unemployment were main issues and PPP has the solution of all these issues. He maintained that the PPP always demands free and fair elections on time in the country and his party considers transparent elections quite vital for the political and economic stability of the country. Kundi said that 65 percent country's population consisted of youth and PPP Chairman was representing the youth. He said that this time if the selection process is adopted instead of transparent elections, the nation will not accept it because now there is a majority of young people who are conscious and they will not accept the selection. He said our party is fully prepared for the next general elections and urged his party workers to gear up election preparations.

Two bike lifters arrested

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi District Police in their ongoing operation against bike lifters managed to arrest two accused and recovered 11 stolen motorcycles from their possession. According to a police spokesman, New Town police conducted a raid and rounded up two members of a gang namely Muhammad Raja and Shahid Khan and recovered 11 stolen motorcycles and other items. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is under process. Superintendent of Police, Rawal, Faisal Saleem appreciated the performance of police team and directed to accelerate operations against car, bike lifters and other lawbreakers.

COMSTECH and the University of N'Djamena, Chad sign MoU

DNA

ISLAMABAD: COMSTECH and the University of N'Djamena, N'Djamena, Chad signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote and strengthen cooperation between COMSTECH and the University of N'Djamena, provide a platform for collaborative activities in the fields of mutual interest, and encourage mobility and cooperation. Both institutions agreed to develop and implement joint educational programs and scientific programs in the fields of science, technology and innovation. Students, academic and scientific personnel of will be placed in the University of N'Djamena for training, professional development and improvement of educational activities to strengthen international academic exchange. Both institutions agreed to cooperate in research activities and development projects, collaborate in organizing national and international events, like workshops, conferences, seminars, and exhibitions. The University of N'Djamena will become the member of COMSTECH Consortium of Excellence and will register on the OIC technology and innovation portal. The MoU was signed by the Coordinator General COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary and the President of the University of N'Djamena, Prof. Dr. Mahamat Saleh Daoussa Haggat in the University of N'Djamena office.

Lack of agricultural reform in Pakistan

There is a need to develop comprehensive strategies to improve the management of factors hindering effective agricultural productivity in Pakistan

MOQADAS

Agriculture is one of the major and important part of Pakistan's economy and a large segment of country's population directly or indirectly depends on it. The agriculture sector has the potential not only to meet up the domestic demands but also provide a huge amount of products for export. But in recent decades its sheer and contribution to GDP has declined. The area that once contribute more than half of country's GDP has now dropped. Pakistan's 6th Population and Housing Census 2017 showed that Pakistan's population is growing rapidly by 2.4% per year, which is increasing the demand for agricultural products. Therefore, there is a need to develop comprehensive strategies to improve the management

of factors hindering effective agricultural productivity in Pakistan. Analyzing the agricultural growth rate in the last 2 years, it can be seen that the output has not reached the set target. The lack of comprehensive agricultural reform in Pakistan has been a long-standing issue, leading to various challenges and problems within the country's agricultural sector. Some of the key issues and consequences associated with the absence of agricultural reform in Pakistan are explained here. Outdated agricultural practices, lack of access to modern technology and low levels of mechanization have led to low agricultural productivity. As a result, Pakistan is struggling to meet its growing food demand. Unequal land distribution is a serious problem in Pakistan, where large amounts

of land are concentrated in the hands of a few people, while small farmers are often able to access land. Water shortage is a major concern in Pakistan due to inefficient irrigation, poor water resource management and climate change. This directly affects agricultural production. Farmers, especially in isolated rural areas, have difficulty accessing markets to sell their products, leading to post-harvest losses. The lack of agricultural reform has hampered Pakistan's ability to provide food security to its growing population. Climate change poses significant risks to agriculture and a lack of reform could hinder the sector's ability to adapt. To solve all of these issues following steps should be taken. Invest in modern agricultural techniques, improve

access to technology and promote research and development in agriculture. Implement land reform to redistribute land more equitably, establish land ownership and property rights, and ensure efficient land use. Improve water management, invest in efficient irrigation methods and promote water conservation. Develop micro-credit programs tailored to the needs of small farmers, encourage financial institutions to provide agricultural loans, and support the development of agricultural credit cooperatives. Improve transportation and distribution networks. Reforms are essential for modernizing the agricultural sector in Pakistan and ensuring its long-term sustainability and competitiveness. Pakistan is an agrarian country, and thus the agricultural sector of the coun-

try needs to be modernized and transformed to produce optimal outcome and boost our economy. Use of advanced techniques, refining basic infrastructure and promoting agriculture research facilities is required to revamp our agriculture sector. Latest machinery, pesticides, quality seeds and fertilizers should be provided to farmers at subsidized prices. More awareness campaigns and programs should be initiated. India-Pakistan water issues should be resolved at priority. There is a strong need to educate people about drastic consequences of water scarcity and climate change. The construction of dams must be accelerated. There should be greater investment in research, development and extension. Further improvement in agriculture sector is contingent upon effective policies.

Briefs

Qawwali legend Aziz Mian remembered on his 23rd death anniversary

ISLAMABAD: Legendary Qawwal, poet and musician Aziz Mian was remembered Wednesday on his 23rd death anniversary where people from all walks of life through various media platforms paid glowing tributes to his lifetime unforgettable services in the entertainment industry. Aziz Mian was born as Abdul Aziz in Delhi in 1942. The exclamation Mian, which he often used in his qawwalis, became part of his stage name. He was also famous for singing ghazals in Qawwali style. He began to introduce himself as Aziz Mian Mairthi.

The word Mairthi refers to Meerut, a city in northern India, from which he migrated to Pakistan in 1947, Private news channels reported.

At the age of ten, he began learning the art of Qawwali under the tutelage of Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan. He received sixteen years of training at the Data Ganj Baksh School of Lahore, and earned degrees in Urdu literature, Arabic and Persian from the University of Punjab, Lahore. Aziz Mian was one of the non-traditional Pakistani Qawwals. His voice was raspy and powerful. Aziz Mian was the only prominent qawwal to write his lyrics. For his service in philosophy and music, the Government of Pakistan awarded him the Pride of Performance medal in 1989.—APP

IRSA releases 86,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 86,000 cusecs water from various rim stations with an inflow of 41,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1491.82 feet and was 91.82 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 21,400 cusecs and 45,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1171.15 feet, which was 121.15 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 5,400 cusecs and 26,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 56,800, 43,500, 39,400, and 10,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 7,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 2,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

PCRWR 2-day water festival

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) is going to organize a two-day water festival and technology fair here from Thursday. The event would be inaugurated by caretaker minister for Water Resources Ahmad Irfan Aslam. The event features an exhibition, essay writing, water board games and poster design. The exhibition will also showcase the latest and greatest in water technologies.—APP

IESCO detects 147 meters for power theft

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Wednesday detected 147 meters from which electricity was being pilfered. Sharing the details, the IESCO spokesperson told that the IESCO teams examined over 7,000 meters in all circles of the company. Out of total, 143 meters were found slow while from four direct illegal electricity was being taken, he said. Fine of Rs over 3.9 million was imposed on the power pilferers besides registering FIRs against them in the concern police stations. The spokesperson said that anti power drive would continue till complete elimination of power theft from the IESCO region.—APP

Speakers stress an action to combat climate change

RCCI President and Chairman RWMC Saqib Rafiq in his address highlighted the challenges faced in climate impact, waste management, waste-to-energy and recycling

MEHTAB PIRZADA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) in collaboration with Beyond Carbon organized a panel discussion on Elevating & Catalyzing Climate Action in Pakistan in light of COP 28 (Conference of the Parties). The discussion addressed the significance of COP 28 and its potential impact on Pakistan, urging small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to prepare for forthcoming regulations that aim to mitigate climate change, particularly in the context of Article 6 framework. Panelists stressed urgent action to combat climate change.

RCCI President and Chairman RWMC Saqib Rafiq in his address highlighted the challenges faced in climate impact, waste management, waste-to-energy and recycling. He also emphasized joint efforts, intensifying awareness campaigns and effective communication with stakeholders.

Panelists engaged in a comprehensive dialogue on the global discourse surrounding climate change, emphasizing the pivotal role of COP (Conference of the Parties) as the supreme decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These leaders shared a wealth



of expertise, from economic and investment insights to environmental science and policy. Their diverse perspectives will shed light on the impact of COP28 and Article 6 on the public in general and business sector in specific. This knowledge-sharing initiative convened key stakeholders, including industry experts, small and medium-sized manufacturing facilities, environmental experts,

activists, and academia. The event, streamed live on the Facebook pages of RCCI and Beyond Carbon, explored the dynamic landscape of climate change and its implications for businesses, with a special focus on the ongoing COP28. Beyond Carbon Pvt. Ltd, an innovative environmental solutions startup, has solidified a strategic alliance with the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce &

Industry (RCCI) through a recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This collaborative effort signifies a commitment to fostering environmental consciousness within the business community and underscores the urgency of proactive measures in the face of evolving global climate regulations. Acknowledging RCCI's proactive stance as the first Green

Chamber, panelists commended the Chamber for actively raising awareness among its members on this critical subject. The event concluded with Beyond Carbon's COO, Mr. Adnan Shafiq, expressing gratitude to RCCI, panelists, and attendees for their active participation. As a token of appreciation, shields were presented to the Chamber President and the distinguished panelists.

Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya completes 31 years

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Today, December 6, marks the completion of 31 years of the demolition of the historic Babri Masjid in India by extremist Hindus backed by state apparatus. According to a report released by Kashmir Media Service (KMS), "The 16th-century Babri Masjid in Ayodhya city of the Uttar Pradesh state was reduced to rubble by a BJP-RSS-led Hindu mob on this day in 1992. The painful scenes of the demolition of the historic mosque are still fresh in the minds of Muslims across the world." "What is more

agonizing than the demolition of the Babri Masjid itself is the biased role of the Indian top judiciary, which in November 2019 allowed the Hindus to construct a temple at the site of the historic Masjid," It added. While announcing the verdict, the Indian Supreme Court gave priority to Hindutva ideology. Not only this, the top Indian court also acquitted BJP veterans like L.K. Advani involved in the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The report maintained, "The Indian top court's biased verdict has attested to the Hinduization of India, which is becoming increasingly intolerable for Muslims in the country. The Ayodhya ver-

dict took precedence over all principles of justice and international norms." Ironically, the then Chief Justice of India, Justice Ranjan Gogoi, was later rewarded for pronouncing the verdict in the Babri Masjid case that was in line with a key ideological commitment of the BJP. He was picked for Rajya Sabha by the BJP-led Indian government after ruling in favor of Hindus in the Babri Masjid case. In India, particularly under Modi, the KMS report said, "Religious sites of Muslims are vandalized by Hindutva forces with impunity. The RSS-backed marked thousands of mosques for demolition and to build temples in their place in In-

dia." "Even Muslim names of institutions, places, and highways are being rechristened to Hindu names. The situation has turned so ugly for Muslims that even animals have more rights than Muslims in India. The Muslims are tortured and killed in broad daylight on the pretext of eating beef and transporting cattle," the report added. "The fact is that the RSS-inspired BJP government is planning ethnic cleansing of Muslims, which needs urgent attention by the global community. There has already been a warning of possible genocide of Muslims in Indian Illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K)," said the report.

ICCI for fostering entrepreneurship

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) said that the youth is the future of Pakistan and there is a dire need that the government should take measures to foster entrepreneurship in students right from the school level to facilitate the growth of start-ups that would help uplift the economy. He said this while addressing students after administering oath as Chief Guest to the Student Council Body of Roots International Schools (RIS), Gulzare-Quaid Branch, Rawalpindi. Ahsan Bakhtawari said that the entrepreneurship education will develop a range of skills and competencies in students that would help them gain success in their personal and professional lives. He said that the entrepreneurship education at school level will also enable students to think like an entrepreneur and take the skills and knowledge gained in school or college to apply them in the real-world challenges for becoming successful businesspersons. Fostering entrepreneurship in students would create new businesses and jobs to address unemployment and economic challenges in a better manner, he said. RIS students vowed under oath to perform their duties honestly and to the best of their abilities. They affirmed that they will be responsible members of the Student Council Body and will abide by the rules and regulations made by the RIS to guarantee themselves and the student body a better campus life. Ms Saira Habib of Roots International Schools (RIS), Gulzare-Quaid Branch, Rawalpindi congratulated and advised the students to work with responsibility and honesty and through this platform learn how to uphold these honorable positions with integrity, and maintain discipline, interact with their peers and aid their fellow students. The President ICCI interacted with the students and gave them useful tips about how to excel in student life and emerge as a successful professional in various fields.

Pakneeds dynamic approach to address threats: President

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday said amid the challenging global scenario, Pakistan required a dynamic approach to address the threats to regional peace. Addressing the inaugural session of Islamabad Conclave 2023 themed 'Pakistan in a changing world' organized by Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), he said Pakistan must consciously rediscover its vision in the wake of super power rivalries and interference of neighbouring states. The president, in this regard, emphasized close liaison among politicians and parliamentarians, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence for effective deliberations and policy-making. President Alvi said Pakistan's strategic shift from geo-politics to geo-economic and the regional situation in the wake of India's belligerence needed the policies in line with regional and systemic developments. President Alvi said the civilized world today had forgotten the principles of morality and was witnessing prevalence of wars waged by powerful

against weaker segments. The situation in Gaza, he said, was an alarming sign of the apathy of the world which could not stop the massacre of innocent people including women and children. He regretted that even the gory imagery of Gaza killings could not shake the world's conscience, terming it a failure of the intellect of mankind. The president recalled that decades ago, the world after several war-related massacres in Europe had arrived at the culmination of peace treaties and bodies like the League of the Nations and the United Nations (UN). However, he pointed out that now every rule made by the civilized world as a lesson learned after several wars was being undermined. Dr Alvi said allowing few states the right of veto power was in fact the first failure of mankind to bow before the vested interests. War, he said, was not a solution to resolve any conflict and always resulted in a never-ending vicious cycle of violence. He expressed disappointment over the approach of democratic countries supporting wars and said morality must be the anchor of human thinking. He said the world at the moment direly needed the ap-

proach of love, empathy and forgiveness. In Pakistan's current political scenario, he said, the same spirit of forgiveness and empathy was lacking and added that the nations evolve on the basis of these factors. Besides conflicts, he said, the world faced several threats such as skewed development, immigration problems in first world countries as result of the conflicts in third world countries, increasing poverty, artificial intelligence, nuclear weaponization, and environmental changes. President Alvi stressed the need for adhering to the principles of socio-economic justice among communities by extending them equal opportunities in all fields of life. He said the real progress was linked with a just distribution of wealth, picking up down-trodden and empowering women. The president lauded the contribution of ISSI as a leading think-tank that carried out deliberations on matters of national, regional and international importance. Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood said ISSI was providing a dialogue platform to the research and policy community with an objective to explore the multiple layers of change and the way forward for Pakistan.

Winners of Serena Hotels' photography contest unveiled

The Discover Pakistan Competition under the Cultural Diplomacy initiative highlights the vast beauty of the country, providing a platform for young photographers to display their skills, creativity, and an awareness of the distinctive qualities of Pakistan

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels under its Cultural Diplomacy initiative announced the top three winners of Discover Pakistan Photography Competition 2023. The theme selected for this year's competition was "Cultural Chronicles: Capturing Heritage through the Lens." We received over 300 entries showcasing outstanding work from various regions across Pakistan. The judge-

es of the competition were Syed Mehdi Bukhari and Tariq Hameed Sulemani, renowned photographers who have established a name for themselves in Pakistan and around the world. Both the judge's showed appreciation for Serena Hotels initiative in organizing the Discover Pakistan Photography Competition for 5 seasons. They commended the diverse participation from talented photographers across the country, highlighting the exceptional quality of the submitted

photographs. The top three winners Ahmed Faraz from Lahore, Ubaid Ullah from Islamabad, and Husain Abbas from Gilgit-Baltistan expressed their gratitude to Serena Hotels for providing them with the opportunity to showcase their talent. They also appreciated the management of Serena Hotels and the judges for presenting and promoting the culture of Pakistan. They conveyed that this recognition would serve as encouragement for them to further expand

their creative work. The winners of the Competition will be rewarded with stay at a Serena Hotel and their photographs will be published in the Discover Pakistan coffee table book Volume 5 by Serena Hotels. The Discover Pakistan Competition under the Cultural Diplomacy initiative highlights the vast beauty of the country, providing a platform for young photographers to display their skills, creativity, and an awareness of the distinctive qualities of Pakistan.

Railways to shift entire power network on solar system

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways is all set to switch its entire stations' power network including major railway stations, offices, workshops, and factories to solar systems in different phases which would help to save billions of rupees for the department. "The step is expected to save Rs. 1.8 billion in the first phase to the department, later on, more stations, offices, and other facilities will be added in the subsequent phases," an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. Initially, in the first phase, he said that Pakistan Railways wanted to switch around 99 formations, including major railway stations, nine divisional headquarters, and other vital offices, to solar power. He said Pakistan Railways is going to hire the services of the National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAC) to convert its network to a solar system. The official said that the department has decided to shift the railway network to solar energy to eliminate the economic burden of Pakistan Railways. He said the decision to embrace solar power comes as a strategic response to alleviate the financial strain on Pakistan Railways, which has grappled with economic challenges.—APP

Landscaping in sectors G-13, G-14

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) has invited sealed bids from reputed firms for Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of horticulture and landscaping development work in sectors G-13 and G-14/4 of the federal capital. "The horticulture and landscaping development work in the sectors included green belts, parks, playground and the green areas," an official in the FGEHA told APP here. About the conditions, he said the firms should be eligible to handle the work and to have valid registration with Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) in relevant fields of specialization along with valid income tax registration with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). The official said the detail of tender notice can be seen on the FGEHA website www.fgeha.gov.pk and PPR website www.ppra.org.pk while the valid PEC registration in category C-5 and above along with relevant codes CE-09 CE-10 (v). He said the Single Stage Two Envelope (SSTE) Bidding Procedure would be adopted and the envelopes containing technical information of bids must be clearly.—APP

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Tory asylum policy criticized amid Rwanda deal

Suella Braverman wasn't sacked from her post as home secretary three weeks ago because of her zeal in promoting the deportation of asylum seekers to Rwanda – a policy she once described as her “dream”. It was an intemperate attack she made on the police in the Times that led to her dismissal by the prime minister she had defied in making it. But anyone who thought – or hoped – that her replacement by James Cleverly would bring an end to this vicious, wrong-headed policy was mistaken. Rishi Sunak's government remains wedded to its project of sending asylum seekers from all over the world to central Africa. To that end, Mr Cleverly travelled to Kigali on Tuesday and signed a treaty with the Rwandan government. Last month, the UK supreme court ruled that the existing deal, based on a memorandum rather than a treaty, is illegal. A new monitoring committee to oversee the arrangements for detainees, and an appeals system staffed by judges, are designed to answer the court's objections. In addition, ministers are expected to introduce legislation to the House of Commons. Depending on the formula they adopt, this is likely to declare Rwanda to be a “safe third country”, and remove some legal protections from asylum seekers. The One Nation caucus, which represents 106 Tory MPs, made it clear on Tuesday that it will closely scrutinise any such law. This is a small mercy. The government may not have the votes it needs to remove the right to judicial review, and allow ministers to ignore the European convention on human rights (ECHR) and other treaties. For this reason, ministers may settle for a compromise that would disapply the Human Rights Act from asylum applicants, without disallowing individual challenges to deportation orders. If this argument over how best to circumvent laws ensuring that refugees are protected were limited to the Tory ranks, it would be one thing – with the resulting divisions perhaps even a source of satisfaction to the government's critics. But the damage caused by the Rwanda scheme goes wider than this. Writing on X at the weekend, Dominic Cummings claimed that the policy, which was unveiled in April 2022, was conceived as a diversion – because the issue of small boats is in reality so hard to deal with. Having boxed themselves in with repeated pledges to crack down on people smugglers and so on, while failing to work constructively with countries including France, ministers were desperate for a way out. According to this view, the policy, like Frankenstein's monster, took on more life than its creators intended. Ministers may have been playing for time and favourable headlines. But for MPs on the Tory right, and their allies beyond the party, the prospect of sending immigrants away before their claims were processed proved irresistible. The temptation may even have been increased by the fact that their opponents were certain to be defenders of human rights. The government's failure to reduce net migration, as it pledged to post-Brexit, has only added to the desperation on the party's right. The Rwanda policy, mercifully, is not popular. The public is sceptical about the reckless promise to deal with cross-Channel migrants – most of whom come from a small number of countries including Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria – by forcing people to board planes to Africa.



The view on cystic fibrosis treatments

Cystic fibrosis is a distressing disease, clogging the lungs of children who have to fight to breathe, and shortening lives. Parents – and young adults who also suffer from it – have been on a rollercoaster ride in the last few years. They have been taken to the giddy heights of hope by the invention of drugs that for the first time work on the underlying causes of the illness where previous treatment just alleviated symptoms. And they have been plunged to the depths when those new drugs have been denied them because of their cost. The drugs that have caused such a stir are made by the US biotech company Vertex. Its groundbreaking Kalydeco drug was licensed in Europe in 2012 and useful at first to only a small percentage of sufferers. Then came Orkambi in 2015 and Symkevi in 2018 – both two-drug combinations. Since 2020, there has been Kaftrio, which is a triple combination. Hopes rose in the UK as the combination drugs were shown to target more genetic mutations and help more people, only to be dashed by the verdict of the cost-effectiveness watchdog body, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Kaftrio is the latest to be labelled unaffordable for a cash-strapped NHS. NHS England doesn't want to reject drugs that provide relief and even long-term improvement to children with cystic fibrosis who have no other prospects. Negotiations between NHS England and Vertex were tough, but deals have been done. In 2019, NHS England announced a two-year agreement with Vertex to buy Orkambi and Symkevi. In 2020, NHS England leapt on Kaftrio, declaring on the day that the drug was licensed that it had agreed an access package with Vertex. But now we are on the downswing of the rollercoaster once again. As part of the deals, evidence was collected on how well cystic fibrosis patients did on the drugs as well as trial data from Vertex. NICE now says that Kaftrio, known as Trikafta in the US, is not cost-effective. Those who are on the drug should continue to get it, but new patients should not. Cue understandable distress in the cystic fibrosis community. It would be easy to paint NICE as the villain of the piece. But it is doing the job it was set up to do. There is a good reason why it can't green light Kaftrio. The price is astronomical. If the drug were a cure, £180,000 per patient might be justified, but it is not. It is the bill to be paid every year of that person's life. Orkambi was suitable for about 50% of patients who had the particular genetic mutations that it targets. Kaftrio may work in more than 90% of the 10,800 people with cystic fibrosis in the UK. If the NHS chose to pay the price for these drugs, and had no extra cash, what would it have to cut? How many hip replacements? How much cancer care? Vertex did a tremendous thing in developing drugs for a relatively rare but horrible disease that other pharma companies had ignored. But it is demanding prices that health services here and in other countries cannot pay. Vertex, predicted to make about \$9bn this year from Kaftrio, says that it needs billions to invest in research. But what is the point if children are still condemned to suffer and die prematurely because nobody can afford to buy the drugs?

How Europe can restore its credibility in the Middle East

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

Outside of the UN, Europe is also divided between principled, duplicitous and complicit countries. A number of European countries, such as Belgium, France, Ireland and Spain, have staked out neutral positions, taking steps to help mediate the conflict and provide humanitarian assistance. Many have remained aloof to the suffering of Gaza's civilians, even when hospitals were attacked and premature babies were pulled out of incubators and left to die. Worse still, a small minority of European countries have continued to provide material and active political support for Israel to continue its war of aggression against Gaza's civilians

As Israel has now resumed its massive bombardment of the defenseless Gaza Strip, Europe is once again paralyzed by divisions on how to react to the massive loss of life and Israel's gross violations of international humanitarian law. While it is important to sort out its internal differences, the EU needs to move quickly to address at least some of the most pressing aspects of this devastating conflict. When the UN General Assembly voted on Oct. 27 on a mild resolution calling for a humanitarian truce, the protection of civilians, the upholding of legal and humanitarian obligations and unhindered aid delivery, only about a dozen European countries, including some EU members, supported it. Four even opposed it (Austria, Czechia, Croatia and Hungary), while the majority abstained, including Europe's largest countries, such as Germany, the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the Scandinavian countries (except Norway, which voted for the resolution). Outside of the UN, Europe is also divided between principled, duplicitous and complicit countries. A number of European countries, such as Belgium, France, Ireland and Spain, have staked out neutral positions, taking steps to help mediate the conflict and provide humanitarian assistance. Many have remained aloof to the suffering of Gaza's civilians, even when hospitals were attacked and premature babies were pulled out of incubators and left to die. Worse still, a small minority of European countries have continued to provide material and active political support for Israel to continue its war of aggression against Gaza's civilians. European support for Israel is at odds with the global consensus against the Gaza war and the desperate calls by UN officials and humanitarian organizations working in the Strip to stop the war. It is also clearly inconsistent with the European position on the Ukraine war and the continent's advocacy of peace and human rights and its championing of international law, including humanitarian laws, all of which have been brazenly violated by Israel's sadistic destruction of Gaza and its killing of thousands of civilians, the majority being women and children. While Ukraine in 2022 united the EU beyond expectations, the Gaza war redivided the bloc in 2023. In the EU's responses to Israel's war against Gaza, senior officials have struck different tones, reflecting the divisions between member states. They were unequivocal in their condemnation of Hamas' attack, but were divided on Israel's response. While most members insisted on prioritizing the delivery of humanitarian

aid into Gaza, many focused only on “unconditional” hostage release and Israel's “right to defend itself.” Most of the disagreement, however, was on a ceasefire, with only a minority of EU states demanding one. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, for example, called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to allow aid into Gaza, echoing UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. He was joined by only a few others, such as Belgium and Ireland. German officials, on the other hand, backed Israel unconditionally and expressed concern that a ceasefire would limit Israel's “right” to self-defense. Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he had “no doubt” the Israeli army would follow international law. His deputy evoked the Holocaust as implicit justification for Israel's excesses, as if Gaza's children have to atone for Germany's crimes. Germany's Green foreign minister also defended Israel. Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer went as far as saying that “all the fantasies of ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities led to the strengthening of Hamas.” Reflecting this disarray among its key members, the EU's collective response has been difficult to discern. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, herself a German center-right politician, promptly traveled to Israel in a show of solidarity and expressed near-total support for Tel Aviv. By contrast, EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell expressed a more nuanced position on the conflict. In the past, the EU had a more or less even-handed approach, with a slight pro-Israel bias, and tried to act as an honest broker. The impression in the Arab world now is that the EU has been overboard pro-Israeli, especially at the start of the conflict, and has not done much to dispel that impression since. Queen Rania of Jordan has accused Western leaders of applying a “glaring double standard,” reflecting the views of many in the region. While Europe quickly projected a unified position on Ukraine last year, its messaging on Gaza has been muddled. This division chips away at Europe's credibility and lowers expectations from EU institutions. Chafing at such criticism, European Council President Charles Michel said: “We do not have double standards. We have a fundamental standard, that we believe in international law.” He added that some were “attacking” the EU and “instilling doubts” about its credibility, but that “our unity will be our best argument when we are engaging with the Global South.” However, those reassuring words were lost in the actions on the ground and the disparate statements from individual member states and EU officials.

As Gaza is relentlessly bombed by Israel, hundreds of EU officials are reported to have written to Von der Leyen, criticizing what they described as her “uncontrolled” support of Israel. They said they “hardly recognize the values of the EU,” claiming that there was a “seeming indifference demonstrated over the past few days by our institution toward the ongoing massacre of civilians in the Gaza Strip, in disregard for human rights and international humanitarian law.” They said they were saddened by the European Commission's “double standards,” since it considers the blockade of Ukraine by Russia as an act of terror, while Israel's blockade of Gaza is “completely ignored.” The EU's ambiguous positions, they said, “seem to give a free hand to the acceleration and the legitimacy of a war crime in the Gaza Strip.” While a unified position by the EU and Europe in general would be extremely helpful in terms of mediating the conflict in Gaza, it would also restore Brussels' credibility and its diplomatic weight, which has taken a hit since this crisis started. While Ukraine in 2022 united the EU beyond expectations, the Gaza war redivided the bloc in 2023. Until such a unified stand is achieved, a division of labor may be helpful so as to avoid totally eclipsing Europe's role in this vital region. This could be achieved by deconstructing the conflict into its main components and assigning responsibility for each to a particular state willing to take it up or to the EU bureaucracy. There are at least six different issues that could be handled separately. First and most urgent is a call for a ceasefire, which some European countries have already championed. Second, respect for international humanitarian law and accountability for all parties who have violated it. Third, better access to humanitarian assistance, unhindered by logistics or Israeli restrictions. For example, Cyprus, supported by others in Europe, has proposed a maritime aid corridor from Larnaca to Gaza. Fourth, a resumption of negotiations for the release of civilian hostages and detainees. Fifth, containment of the conflict to avoid it further spreading into the West Bank or neighboring countries. Sixth, reenergizing talks on the wider Palestine question. In September, the EU joined Saudi Arabia and the Arab League in launching a new initiative to revitalize peace efforts. The current bloody conflict makes it imperative to redouble those efforts. By engaging on these six issues, the EU and Europe can reclaim their rightful roles as significant actors in mediating this conflict and contribute to restoring international peace and security.

—Sourced by Arab news.

Change in Washington, not Israel, the priority for Palestinians

Osama Al-Sharif

The most extreme support of Israel came from US President Joe Biden and his Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Both continue to support Israel's right to defend itself against “terrorist Hamas,” while complementing this with the almost vacuous statement that the US supports the two-state solution, even when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu comes out and says that he is the best man to derail it. But where the White House speaks of the two-state solution, the mood on the Hill is different. The vast majority of US lawmakers have pledged unquestioning support to Israel, providing billions of dollars and openly calling for the total destruction of Hamas at any

show that, if elections were to be held in Israel today, Labor, the party that led Israel for decades after its founding, would not get the necessary votes to pass the legal threshold to enter the Knesset. The right and far right now have the upper hand and will continue to do so for some time. The Palestinian answer to ending the occupation lies in Washington. And there is the problem. There are more than 50 pro-Israel groups active in the US today. The most prominent and influential of these, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, has sway over the most influential lawmakers and potential candidates. Last year, pro-Israel pressure groups spent more than \$4 million on lobbying alone. Much more goes into the so-called super PACs, which are defined as “independent expenditure-only political action committees.” They are unlike traditional PACs, in that they may raise unlimited amounts from individuals, corporations, unions and other groups to spend on, for example, ads overtly advocating for or against political candidates. American citizens elect these officials, but AIPAC and other pressure groups own them afterward. These pressure groups appeal to ordinary Americans through the mainstream media, which remains the main source of news and information for millions of adult Americans. One pro-Israel pressure group is the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, founded in 1982. It is a nonprofit, pro-Israel media monitoring, research and membership organization. According to its website, this organization is “devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of Israel and the Middle East.” Naturally, one can guess how the committee makes sure that only the Zionist point of view of the Palestine-Israel conflict is portrayed in US mainstream media. In addition, Israel has managed to penetrate the US Christian community by focusing on so-called shared Judeo-Christian values. One such group, Christians United for Israel, which claims to have more than 10 million members, moved to raise more than \$2 million in support of Israel soon after the Oct. 7 Hamas attack. But more importantly, it was able to issue a joint “Evangelical statement in support of Israel” with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission – an arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. This denomination has 45,000 churches in the US. The Palestinians have no way of counterbalancing this huge Israeli/Zionist infiltration of US politics and religious culture. Arab lobbies in the US are more focused on promoting bilateral military and

economic ties with the US. The Palestinians have no voice in American politics.

But things are slowly changing. America's Generation Z is a rebellious one; rejecting the corruption of Washington politics and supporting the Palestinian cause. This is because they have discarded mainstream media and are heading to social media platforms. They could play a pivotal role in the 2024 presidential election. According to the Pew Research Center, 58 percent of people aged 18 to 29 have an unfavorable view of Israel, versus 28 percent of Americans older than 65. An NBC News poll released last week found that Biden's approval rating among voters aged 18 to 34 fell from 46 percent to 31 percent between September and November. US Muslim voters are also abandoning Biden.

That might not change the final outcome of the November 2024 election. There are many other factors in play. But while a slim majority of Americans still support Israel's war on Hamas, according to multiple polls released last week, more people are now asking questions about the plight of Palestinians – thanks to social media platforms. Both chambers are completely at odds with the declared US foreign policy position on the Palestine-Israel conflict. The sad reality is that the American presidency has been weakened by bipartisan squabbling in Congress, servility toward Israel and unprecedentedly deep polarization over issues such as abortion, immigration, traditional family values, taxing the rich and climate change, among others. But while candidates for the highest office in the land bicker over such issues, they all agree on one thing: blind support for Israel. The world wants a two-state solution but lacks the political will to enforce it. Israel is in revenge mode but has no answer on what to do about Gaza, the West Bank or its Palestinian citizens. The Israeli far right proposes radical solutions, such as mass displacements and even transfer. How far will the US political establishment go in supporting bigots, racists and potential war criminals?

The Israeli political establishment is seeking revenge at any cost. The world's political order is about to keel over as a result. The Palestinians will not get their freedom so long as Israel is defended and protected by the US. Something has to give and, unless a major change happens in America first, the Palestinians will have to endure more years of apartheid and oppression.

—Sourced by Arab news.

Briefs

Israel, Hamas battle intensifies...

FROM PAGE 01
place name denoting one of history's heaviest conventional bombing campaigns," FT quoted US military Robert Pape as saying. The report cited the different types of munitions that the Israeli military is using against the Gaza Strip, including unguided M17 "dumb bombs" and "earth-shaking" 2,000lb GBU-31 bombs. The Hamas Movement has condemned the Israeli occupation government's "arrogant" decision to revoke the residence visa of UN humanitarian coordinator Lynn Hastings because of her refusal to adopt the Israeli narrative about the war on the Gaza Strip. "The Zionists are trying to impose their misleading and false narrative to cover up the genocidal and ethnic cleansing war they are waging on the Palestinian people," Hamas said in a statement on Wednesday.

UN warns of 'horror'...

FROM PAGE 01
UNRWA said in a post on X, labelling the enclave "one of the most dangerous places in the world". Speaking shortly before Human Rights Day on December 10, Türk noted that history has shown how a "cynical disregard" for human rights can lead to events that the world has declared should "never again" happen. It also risks resulting in impunity, he added, calling for all allegations of war-time crimes against civilians and hostages committed by Israel or Hamas to be investigated. Noting also the "alarming" escalation in "militarised violence" in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, Türk urged "the Israeli authorities [to] take immediate steps to end wide-spread impunity for such violations".

PM Kakar orders...

FROM PAGE 01
parents for raising awareness on polio eradication. Terming polio vaccine vital for the health, growth and future of children, he said all segments of the society needed to play their role in polio eradication. He directed holding an Ulama Convention and taking onboard scholars to raise awareness on the issue. The meeting was informed that special polio health camps had been set up in the high-risk zone of Dera Ismail Khan, while the same were being established in the vulnerable areas of Banu, Lakki Marwat and Tank. In the recent polio awareness drives, 44 million children have been administered vaccine.

Pak laments rise in...

FROM PAGE 01
site under India's first Mughal ruler, Babur in 1528. Meanwhile, Hindu scripture Ramayana reportedly mentions Ayodhya - the city where the mosque was located - as the birthplace of the Hindu god-king Ram. Many Hindus believe that the Babri mosque was built on the exact birthplace of Lord Ram. Hindu and Muslim groups filed separate claims over the site and the structure. In 1989, the Allahabad High Court ordered the maintenance of the status quo. In 1991, when the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in Uttar Pradesh, the campaign for the construction of a Ram temple grew.

Forces kill terrorist

FROM PAGE 01
carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area, as the Security Forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country.

Shan Masood 156 dominates Prime Minister's XI on 1st-day

Masood registered his 25th first-class century to start off his maiden tour as Pakistan's captain, taking his team to 324-6 after 89.4 overs on first day

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

CANBERRA: Shan Masood registered his 25th first-class century to start off his maiden tour as Pakistan's captain, taking his team to 324-6 after 89.4 overs on the first day of the four-day game against Prime Minister's XI at Manuka Oval in Canberra. Australian right-arm pacer Jordan Buckingham struck early to dismiss opening batter Imam-ul-Haq (9) after Pakistan won the toss and elected to bat first. Shan Masood coming in to bat at number three veered a brilliant undefeated knock of 156 from 235 deliveries, including 13 boundaries and a six, ensuring Pakistan remained within reach of an impressive total in the first innings. He was the top-scorer for the side and successfully held one end throughout the day while six wickets fell on the other end. Shan Masood had joined opening batter

Abdullah Shafique (38) on the crease at 18-1 and together they stitched a 58-run stand before the latter was caught at short cover after mistiming a length ball delivered by Steketee. Babar Azam then batted together with Shan Masood to add 92 runs to the total, however, Buckingham struck again to take Pakistan's most prized wicket as Babar walked back to the pavilion after scoring 40 from 88, including five fours. The next batter in, Saud Shakeel (13), failed to stay on the crease for too long as he fell victim to off-spinner Todd Murphy. Wicketkeeper-batter Sarfaraz Ahmed produced a brisk 41 from 47, studded with six boundaries before he was caught off Buckingham's bowling. The partnership between Shan and Sarfaraz yielded a total of 73 runs for the fifth wicket. Faheem Ashraf (17, 35b, 1x4) was the last batter to fall today as Pakistan ended the day at 324-6 after batting for 89.4 overs. The second day's play at Manuka Oval will resume at 04:30 PKT.



Shane Watson takes charge as Quetta Gladiators head coach

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson has been announced as the new head coach of Quetta Gladiators ahead of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine. "The Quetta Gladiators owner and the team management has decided to appoint Former Australian all-rounder and Gladiators' best run-getter in the PSL, Shane Watson as head coach of the team," the franchise announced in a statement. "Watson had an illustrious career as an all-rounder for Australia, having won the World Cup in 2007 and 2015. Watson played a vital role in Gladiators' successful campaign in the PSL championship 2019," the statement added. Earlier, Gladiators posted a hint on their social plat-



forms with a picture of a man waiting at an Australian airport with the famous Aussie airplane of Qantas Airlines in the background. Yesterday, Gladiators elevated Moin Khan to the position of Team Director from head coach. Khan, who has been an integral part of the team's coaching setup since the inaugural season of PSL, stepped into this new role after serving as head coach for eight years. Un-

der Khan's coaching stewardship, the team clinched the championship title in 2019 and emerged as runners-up twice, marking a period of consistent success and growth for the Gladiators. Watson, 42, retired from all cricket in 2020. He joined IPL franchise Delhi Capitals as assistant coach in 2022, serving alongside his former Australia teammate Ricky Ponting. Earlier this year, he was appoint-

ed head coach of Major League Cricket franchise San Francisco Unicorns. While Watson played 59 Tests for Australia, it was in limited-overs cricket where he was at his best. In 190 ODIs, he scored 5757 runs at 40.54 with a strike rate of 90.44, in addition to taking 168 wickets at 31.79. He was part of two World Cup-winning Australia sides - in 2007 and 2015 - and was a powerhouse performer in the Champions Trophy, winning the Player-of-the-Match award in the finals of both the 2006 and the 2009 tournaments. In T20Is, he made 1462 runs at a strike rate of 145.32 and took 48 wickets while maintaining an economy rate of just 7.65. He was the Player of the Series in the 2012 T20 World Cup in Sri Lanka, where he topped the run charts with 249 runs at a strike rate of 150, and finished second on the wickets chart with 11 strikes.

PCB provides update on Naseem rehabilitation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Wednesday provided an update on injured pacer Naseem Shah. Naseem suffered a shoulder injury during the Asia Cup and missed this year's World Cup as a result. He also underwent surgery in the United Kingdom. "Pakistan fast bowler Naseem Shah started the final stage of his rehabilitation today at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Lahore," the PCB said in a press release on Wednesday. "The young pacer was injured during the Asia Cup in September, after which he underwent surgery in the United Kingdom. Following the surgery, he remained in the UK for two months for rehabilitation and initial training as the PCB covered his medical costs and he received continuous care from a team of expert medical staff. "Naseem's rehabilitation is being continued at NCA, Lahore under the care of a strength and conditioning coach, a physiotherapist and a doctor. Currently, he is doing light gym exercises and partial bowling practice and will start batting tomorrow." Earlier, PSL side Quetta Gladiators' premium pacer Naseem joined Islamabad United in a major swap deal. Naseem was the topic of discussion among the cricket fraternity, and every PSL franchise was doing its best to get the 20-year-old on board after it was reported that the right-arm pacer had decided to leave Quetta. Quetta now has received Islamabad's first-round Platinum pick while the latter has bagged Quetta's third-round Platinum pick. There were strong rumours that Naseem might end up joining Multan Sultans, who recently got Iftikhar Ahmed in another swap deal, or Peshawar Zalmi, but Islamabad came out triumphant in the race to get the pacer's signature.



Babar Azam features in GTA VI?

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Known for his prowess on the cricket field, Pakistan's former skipper Babar Azam's illustrative image shared by his PSL franchise Peshawar Zalmi has led to speculations that the top batter might feature in the much-awaited Grand Theft Auto (GTA) VI. The 29-year-old batter, famous for his eloquent cover drives, is considered one of the top batsmen in the world and is currently ranked as the second-best ODI batter in the ICC rankings only superseded by India's Shubman Gill dethroned him to secure the top spot in November. However, Babar - who plays for Peshawar Zalmi - is one of the most sought-after players in the PSL, and his animated picture on the Zalmi's portraying him as a possible GTA VI character led to a frenzy with fans speculating star batter's possible stint in the popular game. "Jumping on the trend with #GTAVI themed," the caption of the post read, referring to Tuesday's release of the trailer of the highly-anticipated video game scheduled for release in 2025.

Messi named Time's 'Athlete of the Year'

LOS ANGELES: Lionel Messi has been named Time magazine's "Athlete of the Year" for 2023 after a trailblazing season marked by an eighth Ballon d'Or award and his ground-breaking move to Major League Soccer's Inter Miami. Time said the Argentine superstar had already had a transformative impact on the American sporting landscape, which has been historically slow to embrace football. "Lionel Messi this year managed to do what once seemed impossible, when he signed with Inter Miami: turning the US into a soccer country," Time commented. The 36-year-old Messi made his debut for Miami in July following an acrimonious departure from Paris Saint-Germain. The World Cup-winner also rebuffed a lucrative move to Saudi Arabia in favour of a new chapter in MLS. The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner made an instant impact on Miami's fortunes, playing a pivotal role in helping the team win the expanded League Cup, a cross-border competition for teams from MLS and Mexico's top flight. Messi finished the campaign with 11 goals in 14 appearances across all competitions, but an injury towards the end of the season meant he was unable to help Miami force their way into the playoffs. Messi was quoted by Time as saying that his first preference after the fairytale return move stalled. "I tried to return, and it did not happen," Messi said, adding he was also a lot about joining overseas players Saudi Pro League. "It was Saudi Arabia or MLS, and both options me," Messi told the arrival had driven prices, merchandise that on the day of his TV - which retains jumped by 110,000, previous day. - DNA



BD spinners spark comeback, kiwis struggle at 55-5

Mushfiq top-scored with 35 after Bangladesh opted to bat, helping the hosts recover from a dismal 47-4. But he then suffered a rare dismissal in the second session when, after defending a delivery from Kyle Jamieson in the 41st over, he instinctively swatted the ball away with his hand

SPORTS DESK

DHAKA: Spinners Mehidy Hasan and Tajul Islam shared five wickets between them to help Bangladesh claw their way back into contention with New Zealand struggling at 55-5 in Wednesday's opener to the second Test. An astonishing 15 wickets fell in the first day's play in Dhaka, with the hosts all out for just 172 in an innings where Mushfiqur Rahim became just the second batsman in Test history to be dismissed for obstructing the field. Mehidy and Tajul then cut a swathe through New Zealand in the final session before bad light prompted an early finish. Mehidy scalped Devon Conway (11), Kane Williamson (13) and Tom Blundell (0) in between Tajul's dismissal of Tom Latham (4) and Henry Nicholls (1) to obliterate the tourists' early advantage. Daryl Mitchell was batting on 12 alongside Glenn Phillips on five when stumps were drawn at the Shere-Bangla National Stadium, with nine overs remaining. Mitchell Santner and Phillips earlier took 3-65 and 3-31 respectively after the hosts opted to bat, while Ajaz Patel claimed 2-54 for the tourists as they dominated in

their bid to level the two-match series. Mushfiqur top-scored with 35 after Bangladesh opted to bat, helping the hosts recover from a dismal 47-4. But he then suffered a rare dismissal in the second session when, after defending a delivery from Kyle



Jamieson in the 41st over, he instinctively swatted the ball away with his hand. New Zealand appealed and television umpire Ahsan Raza declared Mushfiqur out. England's Leonard Hutton was the only other batsman to be dismissed for obstructing

the field in Test cricket, during a match against South Africa at the Oval in 1951. Mushfiqur's out would have previously been considered a "handled the ball" dismissal, but a change in the laws in 2017 brought the category under "obstructing the field". His 57-run partnership with Shahadat Hossain had helped the hosts recover from the spin demolition of their top order by Santner and Patel. But after Mushfiqur returned to the pavilion, Phillips dismissed Shahadat (31) and Nurul Hasan (seven) to put Bangladesh into further trouble. Santner - who replaced Ish Sodhi in the only change among both teams from the first Test - took the wicket of Mehidy, who made 20 before edging a catch at slip. Phillips grabbed his third wicket, trapping Tajul Islam leg before for six, before Tim Southee snared the last wicket of Shoriful Islam for 10. Southee did not concede a run in his 5.5 overs. Earlier, Zakir Hasan and Mahmudul Hasan put on 29 runs in the opening stand before a disastrous five overs saw Bangladesh lose four wickets for just 18 runs. Bangladesh are chasing a first-ever Test series win over the Black Caps after their 150-run victory in Sylhet last week.

Nawaz, Shujaat discuss...

FROM PAGE 01
PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif, Chief Organiser Maryam Nawaz, Khawaja Saad Rafique, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and other party leaders - who visited the residence of Chaudhry Shujaat - located on Chaudhry Zahoor Elahi Road in the Gulberg area of Lahore. Sources say the meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere with Nawaz and Shujaat exchanging pleasantries, as the two sides decided to formulate proposals for seat adjustment in the upcoming elections and form a committee to devise ways and means for a long-term relationship. However, the top leadership of the two parties will make final decisions on different issues after detailed deliberations at the committee-level by their representatives. Shujaat was once the second-most important person in the PML-N and had even supervised the affairs of the interior ministry, one of the most important jobs in any government, during Nawaz's second term in office before forming his own faction of the party only to join hands with Pervez Musharraf - the very person removing, jailing and exiling his former boss.

PPP hits back fazal's...

FROM PAGE 01
holding elections amid a "deteriorating" security situation. This isn't the first instance of Rehman expressing reservations about the prospect of polls. During a rally in Larkana last week, he emphasised his party's readiness for elections but underscored the necessity of a "peaceful environment" to ensure voters' safety while exercising their right to franchise. In response to the JUI-F chief's remarks, Kundi expressed surprise, stating: "Maulana has a government in the KP and we have no idea what feasible environment he is looking for." Kundi was referring to the KP governor, Haji Ghulam Ali, being a relative of Maulana Fazl.

IHC upholds...

FROM PAGE 01
more a member of the National Assembly. He was disqualified for making "false statements and incorrect declaration". The ECP had stated that Imran submitted a false affidavit and was found involved in corrupt practices under Article 63(1)(p). The decision was taken unanimously by the electoral authority's five-member bench. The deposed prime minister challenged his disqualification in the IHC, praying to the court to set aside the judgment as what he said the ECP had no jurisdiction over the matter. In the meantime, a separate petition was filed in the Lahore High Court (LHC) against Imran's disqualification.

Jhagra resurfaces...

FROM PAGE 01
then all of them are standing," he said while addressing party workers in the provincial capital. Jhagra also thanked "all those colleagues, workers who served time in jail, who remained standing, are still in jail". He thanked ex-National Assembly speaker Asad Qaiser and former MNA from Mardan, Mujahid Ali Khan, who he said were incarcerated before adding: "The one we must thank the most is Imran Khan sahib because he has been in jail for 120 days.

Afghan gnot closes...

FROM PAGE 01
where Afghanistan exports truckloads of coal and receives food and other supplies from Pakistan. Similarly in September, the border remained closed for two days after a gun battle erupted between Pakistan and Afghan border forces, with each side blaming the other for starting the firefight. In recent weeks, Pakistan's apparent shift in its policy regarding the Afghan Taliban has further created a tense environment. Islamabad earlier stated that it will no longer extend any "special privileges" to the interim Afghan Taliban government.

Briefs

Mali, Niger to cancel tax deals with France

BAMAKO : The military leaders of Mali and Niger have said that they would both scrap tax agreement with France, continuing an unravelling of ties with Paris while tightening their own relations. In a joint statement on Tuesday, the neighbouring West African nations cited "France's persistent hostile attitude towards our states" and "the unbalanced nature of these agreements, which result in a considerable loss of revenue for Mali and Niger". The tax accords with former colonial ruler France will end "within three months", the military leaders of each country said. The practical repercussions of the decision were not immediately clear. The French tax authorities' website states that France has had agreements with Mali, since 1972, and Niger, since 1965, "aimed at avoiding [eliminating] in the case of Niger] double taxation and establishing rules for mutual assistance" in fiscal matters. The agreements cover personal and corporate income tax, inheritance tax and registration duties. The two Western African nations released a joint statement announcing the cancellation which was meant to avoid double taxation and help in other tax matters.—APP

One in five rich-country children impoverished

WASHINGTON : Sixty-nine million children — or more than one in five — live in poverty in the world's 40 richest countries UNICEF said in a report released Wednesday, blasting Britain and France for their particularly bad standings. That's despite a drop in child poverty rates in the periods from 2012 to 2014 and 2019 to 2021, by around 8 percent in the 40 European Union and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) wealthy countries assessed. "This is equivalent to around 6 million children out of a total child population of 291 million," said UNICEF Innocenti, the United Nations agency's research arm. But at the end of 2021 there were still more than 69 million kids in poverty in those countries. "For most children this means that they may grow up without enough nutritious food, clothes, school supplies or a warm place to call home," said Bo Viktor Nylund of UNICEF Innocenti, highlighting the impact of such struggles on young people's physical and mental health. The UNICEF figure is based on relative poverty, which is around 60 percent of the national median income, often used in developed countries to establish their own poverty levels.—DNA

EU seeks agreement on first AI law

BRUSSELS : The European Union will seek to thrash out an agreement on sweeping rules to regulate artificial intelligence, following months of difficult negotiations in particular on how to monitor generative AI like ChatGPT. The EU is racing to approve the world's first comprehensive AI law after the issue took on greater urgency when the ChatGPT bot burst onto the scene last year, highlighting AI's dizzying advances. ChatGPT wowed with its ability to produce poems and essays within seconds. AI proponents say the technology will benefit humanity, transforming everything from work to healthcare, but others worry about the risks it poses to society, fearing it could thrust the world into unprecedented chaos. Brussels is bent on bringing big tech to heel with a powerful legal armoury to protect EU citizens' rights, especially those covering privacy and data protection. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, first proposed an AI law in 2021 that would regulate systems based on the level of risk they posed. For example, the greater the risk to citizens' rights or health, the greater the systems' obligations.—Agencies

Pakistan senate delegation strengthens ties with Baghdad

Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani is scheduled to engage in meetings with senior Iraqi leadership and parliamentary heads including acting Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament

DNA

BAGHDAD : A high-profile delegation of Senators, headed by Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani, arrived in Baghdad, Iraq. Visit is aimed at enhancing bilateral relations between Pakistan and Iraq. The distinguished delegation was warmly received by Mohammed Hussein Mohammed Bahraloom, the Undersecretary of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with senior officials of the Iraqi Parliament. During his stay in Iraq, Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani is scheduled to engage in meetings with senior Iraqi leadership and parliamentary heads including acting Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament. These discussions are expected to focus on strengthening diplomatic ties, fostering collaboration on key regional issues, and exploring avenues for mutual cooperation. In addition to diplomatic engagements, Chairman Senate Sanjrani will pay visits to Holy shrines situated in different parts of Iraq, underscoring the cultural and spiritual connections between the two nations. This multifaceted visit underscores Pakistan's commitment to promoting peace, stability, and understanding in the region.



Zelensky scraps US speech; aid's fate uncertain

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky canceled plans to appeal directly to US lawmakers for new aid, as a partisan battle over immigration policy threatened to derail President Joe Biden's request for billions of dollars for Kyiv's fight against Russia. Republicans and Biden's fellow Democrats in the Senate and House of Representatives have been debating for weeks over Biden's October request that Congress approve \$106 billion for Ukraine, Israel, security at the US border with Mexico and US interests in the Indo-Pacific. House Speak-

er Mike Johnson, a Republican, said funds for Ukraine, which has been fighting a full-scale invasion by Russia since February 2022, must be tied to "transformative change" in US immigration policy. Senate Democrats unveiled their \$110.5 billion bill addressing Biden's request, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he would try to break the impasse by offering Republicans the chance to add an amendment on border policy on legislation including aid to Ukraine and Israel. "Let's remember here: It was the Republicans who put border on the table. We did not. They have a responsibility if they believe border should be part of Ukraine, which is so vital to our

country, let them propose an amendment that can get 60 votes," Schumer told a weekly press conference. Senate rules dictate that most legislation requires 60 votes to advance in the 100-member chamber. The Senate's top Republican, Mitch McConnell, who spoke right after Schumer made his amendment offer, said he would nonetheless urge Senate Republicans to vote against the Democratic-backed legislation. "We're serious about having some significant changes in how we protect our southern border as a part of the overall package," McConnell said. "I hope all our members vote no," McConnell said. Members of the House of Representatives and Senate attended

classified briefings by top Biden administration officials, which Zelensky had been expected to address via videolink. But Schumer said the Ukrainian leader was unable to attend. "Something happened at the last minute," Schumer told reporters. Senators said their briefing was acrimonious. Schumer said one lawmaker, whom he did not identify, had shouted at one of the top generals. The most serious objections to Ukraine aid came from the Republican-led House. On Tuesday, Johnson released a letter demanding more information from Biden's administration about its strategy for Ukraine, and insisting that immigration policy changes be part of any funding bill.

ANKARA: The U.N. human rights chief called for an urgent cease-fire in Gaza, adding that the Palestinians there are living in "utter, deepening horror." Volker Türk said that in such "apocalyptic" humanitarian circumstances, there was a high risk of atrocity crimes being committed. "Civilians in Gaza continue to be relentlessly bombarded by Israel and collectively punished — suffering death, siege, destruction and deprivation of the most essential human needs such as food, water, lifesaving medical supplies and other essentials on a massive scale," he told a press conference. "Palestinians in Gaza are living in utter, deepening horror." He said 1.9 million of the 2.2 million people living in the Palestinian enclave had been displaced and were being pushed into "ever-diminishing and extremely overcrowded places in southern Gaza, in unsanitary and unhealthy conditions." "The catastrophic situation we see unfolding in the Gaza Strip was entirely foreseeable and preventable. My humanitarian colleagues have described the situation as apocalyptic. "In these circumstances, there is a heightened risk of atrocity crimes," the United Nations high commissioner for human rights said. "As an immediate step, I call for an urgent cessation of hostilities and the release of all hostages." Türk said the human rights crisis in the occupied West Bank was also "extremely alarming," as he called for the Israeli authorities to take immediate steps to end "widespread impunity" for violations.—APP

UN chief describes 'deepening horror' for Gazans

Indonesia explores aviation, railway ties with SA

JAKARTA: Indonesia was hoping for closer cooperation with Saudi Arabia in the aviation sector and to develop its urban transportation, the southeast Asian country's Ministry of Transportation has revealed. Indonesian Minister of Transport Budi Karya Sumadi held a meeting with his Saudi counterpart Saleh bin Nasser Al-Jasser in Riyadh on Sunday, where they explored potential cooperation between the two nations. In a statement issued by his ministry, Sumadi said: "This is a big momentum for our two countries to continue cooperation in transportation, which has been going really well." Sumadi was in the Saudi capital to attend the 15th International Civil Aviation Organization's Air Services Negotiation event, partaking in a ministerial session alongside Al-Jasser and other transport officials. His trip follows Indonesian President Joko Widodo's state visit to the Kingdom in October, when officials discussed the formation of a negotiation team for the Indonesia-Saudi Arabia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. "There are plenty of other collaboration opportunities we can do, especially for Hajj flights and the development of urban transportation," Sumadi added. The Indonesian minister had highlighted recent urban transportation developments in Saudi cities during his meeting with Al-Jasser, projects happening at a time when Indonesian cities were also developing mass transport systems. "There's an opportunity for (Saudi Arabia) to invest in Indonesia's railways, which has to be further discussed," Ministry of Transportation spokesperson Adita Irawati told Arab News on Wednesday. "Saudi Arabia's experience in developing urban railways can also be a benchmark for Indonesia."—DNA

UK, Rwanda renew controversial asylum deal

WEB DESK

LONDON : Britain and Rwanda have signed a new treaty in a bid to revive a controversial proposal by London to transfer irregular refugees to the east African country. The agreement was signed by Rwandan Foreign Minister Vincent Biruta and British Interior Minister James Cleverly, who travelled to the Kigali to salvage London's stalled bid to send illegal migrants to Rwanda after the UK Supreme Court blocked an earlier arrangement as unlawful. The judges sided with a lower court decision that the policy was incompatible with Britain's international obligations because Kigali could forcibly return migrants to places where they could face persecution. British Prime Minister Rishi Su-

nak had vowed to persevere with the contentious project by securing the new treaty, vowing to "address concerns" raised in the Supreme Court's ruling last month. Details of the new agreement were not available but British media reports said it would include commitments by Rwanda regarding the treatment of asylum seekers and other migrants there. "There is a lot of desire to continue to improve the process. The UK and Rwanda are working on this because it is important," Cleverly said at a joint press briefing in Kigali. "Rwanda is very committed to this partnership and that is why we worked with the UK government to address the concerns raised by the Supreme Court," Biruta added. "We do not have plans to withdraw from this partnership." The court decision was a major setback for Sunak, who also

plans to pass "emergency legislation" in parliament to designate Rwanda a safe country to end the "merry-go-round" of legal challenges. "I'm fed up with our Rwanda policy being blocked," Sunak wrote in The Sun tabloid Tuesday. "I've got the government working on emergency laws to end the merry-go-round so that we can fix this problem once and for all — and stop the boats." Legal challenges A UK-Rwanda migration "partnership" agreed in April last year envisaged sending to Kigali anyone who has made what London calls "dangerous or illegal journeys" to Britain on small boats from Europe or hidden in lorries. The first deportees were aboard a plane to fly there in June 2022 when a last-minute European Court of Human Rights injunction prevented any deportations, prompting the further legal chal-

lenges. The government insists the scheme is crucial to deter "illegal" immigration across the Channel from France on inflatable vessels — an emotional issue set to feature prominently in a general election expected next year. Nearly 30,000 have made the perilous journey this year — down on the nearly 46,000 who crossed in 2022, but still far short of meeting Sunak's vow to "stop the boats." "We are clear that Rwanda is a safe country, and we are working at pace to move forward with this partnership to stop the boats and save lives," Cleverly said in a statement ahead of the visit. "The Supreme Court recognised that changes may be delivered in future to address the conclusions they reached — and that is what we have set out to do together, with this new, internationally recognised treaty agreement."

Turkish jets safeguard NATO airspace in Romania

ANKARA : Türkiye's F-16 fighter jets have been sent to Romania as part of the NATO Enhanced Air Policing duty, the Defense Ministry announced on Wednesday. In a statement, the ministry said that four F-16s and 71 personnel were sent to the Borcea Airbase in Romania. "We appreciate our ally Romania for hosting the Turkish detachment until the end of March 2024 and wish our staff success in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities," it wrote on social media. Türkiye joined the military alliance of 29 North American and European countries in 1952 and boasts of having the second-largest army among member states after the United States. Ankara attaches utmost importance to NATO's role in maintaining security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.—Agencies

Ukrainian truckers stranded in Poland battle cold

KORCZOWA : In a Polish car park near the Ukrainian border, truck drivers stranded by a month-long blockade that has caused disruption and a row with Ukraine shoveled snow off their vehicles. Around 100 truckers have been stuck in Korczowa, one of the crossings blocked by protesting Polish hauliers who complain about what they say is unfair competition from Ukrainian companies. "This is our life now," Yurii, a 56-year-old Ukrainian trucker, told AFP. Yurii, who declined to give his surname, is carrying cargo headed for Kyiv and has been camped out at the parking lot for seven days. "I didn't expect to be stuck here this long, all our supplies are running out. Thank God there's still water, but if it gets even more frosty, there will be no water at all," Yurii said. Polish transport business owners launched blockades at the Ukrainian border in early November, demanding the reinstatement of a system of entry permits to the European Union for Ukrainian trucks. The permits were waived after Russia's full-scale 2022 invasion of Ukraine to ease the cargo traffic in and out of the war-torn country. Negotiations between Poland, Ukraine and the EU so far have failed to resolve the dispute and the stalemate continues, with hundreds of truckers waiting at the checkpoints. er from Lviv, was driving frozen fish from Lithuania to Kyiv when the protest at the border forced him to stop in Korczowa — where he has been stuck for six days.—APP

Doctors in Italy strike against pension cuts

ROME : Thousands of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers staged a 24-hour nationwide strike in Italy, demanding better working conditions and improvements to the public health system. They also protested against proposed pension cuts in the 2024 budget bill, which was approved by the government in October and is now awaiting approval by Parliament. Some 85 percent of staff of the National Health Service (SSN) and private medical facilities stayed away from work on Tuesday, according to the sector's unions. As a result, some 1.5 million health checks and surgeries planned for the day had to be postponed, although key healthcare services were provided, local media reported citing the unions. A major rally was held in Rome to support the strike. Beside their specific economic demands, Italy's healthcare professionals also urged more investment in the SSN to prepare it for current and future challenges. Late on Monday, Italy's Minister for Relations with Parliament Luca Ciriari said that the cabinet was planning to amend the budget bill's provisions on medical pensions. After holding meetings with the healthcare unions in late November, Health Minister Orazio Schillaci also told local media he was open to dialogue.—Agencies

Former PM apologizes to COVID-19 victims families

Former PM begins giving evidence at a public inquiry into his government's handling of the health crisis

NEWS DESK

LONDON: Boris Johnson on Wednesday apologized for "the pain and the loss and the suffering" caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as he began giving evidence at a public inquiry into his government's handling of the health crisis. The former prime minister, who has faced a barrage of criticism from former aides for alleged indecisiveness and a lack of scientific understanding during the pandemic, is facing two days in the witness box. Johnson, who was forced from office last year over lockdown-breaching parties held in Downing Street during the pandemic, accepted that "mistakes" had "unquestionably" been made. "I understand the feeling of the victims and their families and I'm deeply sorry for the pain and the loss and the suffering to

those victims and their families," Johnson said. Johnson, 59, was briefly interrupted as a protester was ordered from the inquiry room after refusing to sit down during the apology. "Inevitably we got some things wrong," Johnson continued, before adding "we did our level best" and that he took personal responsibility for decisions made. The former premier had arrived around three hours early for the proceedings, with some suggesting he was eager to avoid relatives of the COVID-19 bereaved who gathered outside later in the morning. Nearly 130,000 people died with COVID-19 in the UK by mid-July 2021, one of the worst official per capita tolls among Western nations. Johnson will insist the decisions he took ultimately saved hundreds of thousands of lives, the Times newspaper reported, citing a lengthy written statement set



to be published later Wednesday. The Times said he would argue he had a "basic confidence that things would turn out alright" on the "fallacious logic" that previous health threats had not proven as catastrophic as feared. But he is expected to say that overall, the government succeeded in its main goal of preventing the state-run health service from being overwhelmed by making the "right decisions at the right times." He will

also say that while the country's death toll was high, it defied most of the gloomiest predictions and "ended the pandemic well down the global league table of excess mortality." According to The Times, Johnson, who quit in part because of revelations about lockdown-breaching parties in Downing Street, has reviewed 6,000 pages of evidence and spent hours in talks with lawyers. He can expect to be questioned on whether he thought the government was initially complacent about the pandemic, despite evidence suggesting a more proactive approach was needed. He will also need to justify his timing of the first UK lockdown on March 23, 2020, which some senior ministers, officials and scientific advisers now believe was too late. Johnson, who was treated in hospital intensive care for COVID-19 early on in the pandemic, is expected to say

that shutting down the country went against all his personal and political instincts. But he had no choice because "ancient and halloved freedoms were in conflict with the health of the community." Johnson's understanding of specialist advice is likely to come under scrutiny after his former chief scientific officer, Patrick Vallance, said the former premier was frequently "bamboozled" by data. Comments about lockdowns and the death toll, including a claim that Johnson suggested the elderly might be allowed to die because they had "had a good innings," could also be raised. Johnson has denied claims he said he would rather "let the bodies pile high" than impose another lockdown. Johnson's former top aide Dominic Cummings and communications chief Lee Cain both criticized their ex-boss when they gave evidence at the inquiry.

Briefs

Putin lands in Abu Dhabi on ME visit

DNA

ABU DHABI: Vladimir Putin's plane has landed in Abu Dhabi for the Russian leader's first trip to the United Arab Emirates since 2019. At the beginning of their meeting, UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan called Putin a "dear friend," saying that he was "happy" to see his Russian counterpart again. The two leaders last met in June at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), where the UAE head of state was the guest of honor. Putin pointed out that relations between Moscow and Abu Dhabi had recently reached "an unprecedentedly high level," describing the UAE as Russia's largest trading partner in the Arab world. Emirati military jets drew the Russian tricolor in the skies above the nation's capital to herald Putin's arrival. Camel riders and horse-mounted officers greeted Putin's motorcade as it made its way from the airport to the presidential palace. The Kremlin said earlier that the leaders of the two countries will discuss "the prospects for further development of multifaceted Russia-UAE cooperation, as well as pressing international issues with the emphasis on the situation in the Middle East."

'US takes assassination plot on Pannun seriously'

DNA

WASHINGTON: United States views the matter of an alleged assassination attempt on prominent Sikh leader Gurbat Singh Pannun in New York with utmost seriousness and has communicated this sentiment to New Delhi, a spokesperson for the State Department said on Wednesday. In a daily briefing, Matthew Miller said Secretary of State Tony Blinken has formally raised concerns over the matter during discussions with India's foreign minister. When pressed for comments on the ongoing investigation into the assassination attempt, Miller deferred comment until the Department of Justice completes its inquiries. Simultaneously, he acknowledged that India is also conducting its own investigation into the matter. Responding to questions about India's cooperation with investigations, Miller refrained from speculating, noting that cooperation would be assessed once the investigations were concluded. He highlighted that the US had urged India to cooperate with Canada's investigations into the murder of a Sikh leader and was awaiting the outcome of Indian investigations into the alleged conspiracy on American soil.

Religious scholars reject Palestine's two state solution

Call for global solidarity and end to Israeli aggression on Gaza

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prominent religious scholars and leaders representing diverse schools of thought on Wednesday gathered at the Jinnah Convention Centre for the National Conference titled 'The Sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Responsibility of the Muslim Ummah.' Organized by Majlis Ittehad-e-Ummah Pakistan, the conference saw a joint declaration expressing full solidarity with the freedom of Al-Aqsa Mosque and condemning the oppression faced by Palestinian brothers. Amir Jamaat-e-Islami Siraj-ul-Haq has said that Jamaat-e-Islami supports the same ideology for the solution of the Palestine issue as that of the people of Palestine and Qauid-e-Azam. A tweet by the caretaker prime minister a day after the Al-Aqsa storm suggested a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue. I don't know where this idea came from, the caretakers do not have the mandate of the Pakistani people nor are they representative of the Palestinians. He raised the question that a fund of 30 billion dollars was established by an Islamic country to protect the environment. I ask the rulers, whose responsibility is it to save the Ummah? "Thousands of martyrs were killed in Gaza, Israel dropped more explosives on the city than Hiroshima and Nagasaki." The Muslim rulers are shying away from the moral, political and financial support of



the people of Palestine out of fear of the US. The day is not far when the Holy Land will also become the graveyard of Zionism. Addressing the gathering, the religious scholars and leaders highlighted Israel's relentless aggression, branding it as a violator of international law since its illegal establishment. They emphasized the recent brutal bombings in Gaza, resulting in the martyrdom of over 15,000 Palestinians, including 6,000 children and numerous women. They declared these actions as war crimes against humanity, targeting mosques, churches, hospitals, and even

newborns. The Ulama and Mashaykh criticized Western powers for their complicity in supporting Israel's crimes through financial, practical, and military assistance. They called for an immediate end to the brutal bombings, war crimes, and all forms of support for Israel. They asserted that the entire land of Palestine belonged to its original inhabitants, condemning the unjust settlements established by Zionists. They urged the people of Palestine to resist this aggression, emphasizing the religious duty of Muslims to support the cause. Labelling the current conflict as a grand de-

fensive Jihad rooted in pure Islam, the scholars and leaders stressed liberating the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the land of the Last Prophet Peace Be Upon Him from Zionist dominance. They demanded basic rights for the people of Palestine according to United Nations resolutions, calling for an end to military intervention, the siege on Al-Quds, Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, and the permanent opening of the Rafah border. They, expressing concern over the ongoing suffering of Palestinians, called on the Islamic world to take a united defensive stand. They urged Muslims worldwide to provide aid to the suffering people of Palestine and commended Pakistan's efforts in sending aid ships to Gaza. The scholars and leaders appealed to experts in international law to file cases against Israel's leaders in the International Court of Justice for war crimes. They called for peaceful protests globally, exposing Israel's inhuman acts and urged Muslims to boycott Israeli products and companies supporting Israel. They announced the celebration of Friday as Masjid al-Aqsa Day across the country, appealing to Muslims to hold strong protests, pass resolutions against Israeli atrocities in mosques, and inform the public about the issue of Palestine and their responsibilities. The religious scholars and leaders include Jamaat Ulema-e-Islam (Fazl) Chief Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, Jamaat-e-Islami Head Siraj-ul-Haq, Mufti Taqi Usmani, Mufti Munib-ur-Rehman, Senator Prof. Sajid Mir, Senator Dr. Abdul Kareem, Qari Hanif Jalandhri and others.

PTI Chairman makes key appointments

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a significant development, PTI newly elected Chairman Gohar Ali Khan has made important appointments on key positions in the party. According to the notification issued by the PTI Chairman here on Wednesday, Shah Mehmood Qureshi was appointed as PTI Vice Chairman and Chaudhary Parvaiz Elahi as Central President of the party with immediate effect. Moreover, Firdous Shamim Naqvi, Senator Saif Ullah Abro, Qasim Khan Suri and Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani are appointed as PTI Central Vice Presidents (CVP).

Iraqi group hit US-run al-Harir base

BAGHDAD: A US-run airbase in northern Iraq has again been attacked by anti-US groups in retaliation for Washington's unwavering support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza. In a statement, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of anti-terror fighters, said it had directly hit the US occupation airbase using a drone on Wednesday. - Agencies



ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi being briefed about innovative technological startups and their products, at the Angels Investors Summit & Startup Showcase held at Aiwan-e-Sadr. - DNA

ADB approves loan of \$658.8mln for Pakistan's sustainable development

The projects would focus on improving domestic resource mobilization; rehabilitating schools damaged by the devastating August 2022 floods

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved this week three projects amounting to \$658.8 million to help Pakistan achieve its goal of more inclusive and sustainable growth and development. The projects would focus on improving domestic resource mobilization; rehabilitating schools damaged by the devastating August 2022 floods; and enhancing agricultural productivity to improve food security, a news release said on Wednesday. "This significant new wave of financing will help Pakistan recover from the impacts of last year's cost-of-living crisis and super-floods and return to the path of long-

term development that is sustainable and inclusive," ADB Director General for Central and West Asia Yevgeniy Zhukov said. "This multifaceted approach is part of ADB's strategic engagement in Pakistan and cohesively deploys our program lending and project investments to enhance support for Pakistan's efforts to improve its economic situation and enhance the quality of life for its people," he added. The Improved Resource Mobilization and Utilization Reform Programme would support the government to realize its ambition of achieving economic growth that is sustainable, broad-based, and inclusive. The \$300 million policy-based loan would support the initiative's first subprogram, which focuses on laying the foundation for

reforms to policies, laws, and institutional capacity that would improve domestic resource mobilization and utilization. The programme is helping to transform tax administration, public expenditure management, and other institutional structures to strengthen resource mobilization including non-debt resources such as private investment and savings. The ongoing Sindh Secondary Education Improvement Project would receive additional financing—a \$275 million emergency assistance loan that is part of ADB's \$1.5 billion pledge of support for Pakistan's recovery from the devastating 2022 floods. The additional financing would help reconstruct up to 1,600 flood-damaged schools using disaster & climate-resilient and gender-responsive designs.

SC likely to revisit ZAB's case judgement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court has decided to fix for hearing next week the presidential reference brought during the tenure of the PPP-led former government in 2011 seeking to revisit the trial which had led to the hanging of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB), the PPP's founding chairman and one of the country's most popular prime ministers. According to the PPP, the objective of the presidential reference was to get the apex court to undo the wrong that ZAB had been subjected to. It calls the execution of its founder a "judicial murder". The reference had been filed by the

Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs in April 2011. Asif Ali Zardari, the then president, had signed the reference under Article 186 of the Constitution which stipulates, "If, at any time, the president considers that it is desirable to obtain the opinion of the Supreme Court on any question of law which he considers of public importance, he may refer the question to the Supreme Court for consideration. The Supreme Court shall consider a question so referred and report its opinion on the question to the President." According to sources, the reference is likely to be fixed for hearing next week. They said the court might constitute a larger bench led by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa for hearing. In 2011, Dr Babar Awan, the then law minister, had said that the PPP had always contested the impartiality of the 1979 verdict handed down by the Lahore High Court during Ziaul Haq's dictatorial regime. Slain former prime minister Benazir Bhutto had vowed to reopen the case, but she did not live to make it happen.

US official pledges support for Afghan refugee resettlement

During her visit, Assistant Secretary appreciated the opportunity to meet international partners, including UNHCR and the Int'l Organization for Migration

ISLAMABAD: U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Julieta Valls Noyes visited Pakistan December 4-6 to reaffirm the United States' steadfast commitment to the protection and safe, efficient resettlement and relocation of eligible Afghan refugees to the United States. In meetings with senior Pakistani government officials, Assistant Secretary Noyes discussed how both countries can work together to accelerate the processing of Afghan nationals eligible for relocation or resettlement in the United States, expressed the U.S. desire to continue working with the Government of Pakistan as we process individuals in U.S. resettlement pathways, and encouraged upholding international humanitarian principles, including non-refoulement, and protecting vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. During her visit, Assistant Secretary Noyes appreciated the opportunity to meet international partners, including UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross and like-minded diplomatic partners to thank them for their intensive efforts to support and protect Afghan refugees. The Assistant Secretary also met and heard directly from Afghan refugees on the concerns most important to them. The United States has worked tirelessly to ensure the protection of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, including those in U.S. resettlement pathways. We continue to actively explore all possible options to accelerate our refugee and immigrant visa processing in Pakistan. - DNA

China launches world's first 4th-generation nuclear power plant

The facility operated in test mode for 168 hours prior to commercial operation, according to the Chinese National Energy Administration. BEIJING: The world's first fourth-generation nuclear power plant (NPP) has officially started commercial operation in the Chinese province of Shandong, the National Energy Administration (NEA) announced on Wednesday. A high-temperature gas-cooled reactor (HTGR) at the Shidao Bay NPP, commonly known as Shidaowan, successfully completed the 168-hour non-stop test and has officially been put into operation, according to the statement. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), innovative reactors produce up to 70 times more energy, increase the sustainability of nuclear power, and help reduce the volume, toxicity, and lifespan of radioactive waste. "China has reached the world's leading level in the research, development and application of fourth-generation nuclear power technologies," the NEA said, adding that the commissioning of the NPP will help promote the safe development of nuclear power and improve China's scientific and technological innovation capabilities. The chief designer of the HTGR nuclear power plant program, Zhang Zuoyi, told Xinhua that "safety" is its key feature, noting that "the reactor can maintain a safe state and steer away from a meltdown or leak of radioactive materials." He added that even in the event of a total loss of cooling capacity, the reactor would be able to maintain this capability without any intervention. In March 2002, China Huaneng began preliminary work on the NPP demonstration project with China Nuclear Engineering and Tsinghua University. The implementation plan was approved in March 2011 but was postponed after the radiation accident at the Fukushima NPP in Japan occurred the same month as a result of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami. In December 2012, the Shidaowan project was officially launched with the first power being generated nine years later. - Agencies

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