



Islamabad POST

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France calls for 'immediate and durable' Gaza truce

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CM Naqvi orders tough crack-down on encroachers

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Alcaraz suffers setback ahead of 2024 AO

Detailed News On Page-06



No truce sans end of war Israel faces calls for truce after killing of hostages

Hamis says it has informed all sides mediating talks between the Palestinian resistance group and Israel that it will engage in no discussions on a prisoner-for-abductee swap unless the occupying regime completely ends its onslaught on Gaza Strip

NEWS DESK

GAZA: Israeli occupation forces (IOF) continue their brutal aggression on the Gaza Strip for the 72nd consecutive day Sunday, through dozens of airstrikes, artillery shelling, fire belts, and the perpetration of massacres against civilians, as part of the genocide and ethnic cleansing operations, amidst a catastrophic humanitarian situation resulting from the siege and the displacement of more than 90% of the population. Hamas says it has informed all sides mediating talks between the Palestinian resistance group and Israel that it will engage in no discussions on a prisoner-for-abductee swap unless the occupying regime completely ends its onslaught on the Gaza Strip. "Hamas reaffirms its stance not to conduct any negotiations to exchange prisoners unless the Zionist aggression against our people stops once and for all," the movement said in a statement on Sunday, adding that it had "conveyed this position to all mediators."

Israel waged the brutal war on Gaza on October 7 after Hamas carried out Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the usurping entity in retaliation for its intensified atrocities against the Palestinian people. Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, unveiled a new video entitled: "Time is running out... the choice is yours, either in coffins or alive." The video demonstrated scenes of Israeli individuals held captive in Gaza, killed by an Israeli airstrike on Gaza. After the video, a direct message from the spokesman of the Al-Qassam

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WHO describes Al-Shifa as "bloodbath"

FOREIGN DESK

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported alarming conditions at Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest medical center in Gaza, describing its emergency department as a "bloodbath." The hospital is overwhelmed with hundreds of injured patients, WHO said, as new cases are arriving every minute. Trauma patients are being treated on the floor due to the lack of space, and pain management options are limited. "The emergency department is so crowded that health workers must exercise caution not to step on patients on the floor. Critical patients are being transferred to Al-Ahli Arab Hospital for necessary surgeries," it said. Tens of thousands of displaced people have sought refuge in and around the hospital premises,

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Day of mourning in Pak on demise of Kuwait's Emir

PM Kakar to visit Kuwait today

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will observe a day of mourning on Monday (tomorrow) over the demise of Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah. Interim Prime Minister (PM) Anwaarul Haq Kakar accorded his approval for observing a day of mourning in the country on Monday (Dec 8), on the demise of Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad. According to a statement, the day of mourning will be observed as an expression of fraternal solidarity on behalf of the people and government of Pakistan, with the royal family, the government, and people of Kuwait. The national flag shall fly at half-mast throughout the country on the day. On the other hand, PM Anwaarul Haq Kakar will head to Kuwait today (Monday) on a one-day trip to offer condolences on the death of Emir.

Continued on Page 06



PERTH: Australian players celebrating win against Pakistan in the Test match. - DNA

New Captain fails to deliver

Australia thrash Pakistan by 360 runs in first Test

Australia dismissed a struggling Pakistan for a mere 89, securing a resounding 360-run victory in the opening Test at Perth

SPORTS DESK

PERTH: Nathan Lyon took his 500th Test wicket on Sunday as Australia dismissed a rattled Pakistan for just 89 to post a thumping 360-run win in the opening Test at Perth. Pakistan's unlikely bid to win their first Test in Australia since 1995 was left in tatters by the spin king and the home side's formidable pace attack, who wrapped up the game inside four days. Chasing 450 for victory, the visitors succumbed meekly with Lyon taking 2-18. Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood both grabbed three wickets each. After being left stranded on 499 after Pakistan's first innings, Lyon finally reached the milestone when he trapped Faheem Ashraf lbw but there was an agonising wait as it went to review. He then bowled Aamer Jamal in the same over, joining an elite club of just seven other players, including fellow spinners Muttiah Muralitharan of Sri Lanka and Australia's Shane Warne. Australia declared on day four at 233-5 after Pakistan were dismissed for 271 in their first innings, in reply to the hosts' 487. Skipper Pat Cummins made the call after opener Usman Khawaja was out for a gutsy 90 on a deteriorating pitch after a 126-run partnership with Mitchell Marsh.

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Lyon joins the 500 club

WEB DESK

Lyon, already third on the list of highest wicket-takers for Australia in Tests, has now become the eighth bowler overall to go past 500 Test wickets. The 36-year-old achieved the feat when he trapped Faheem Ashraf in the front to scalp Pakistan's seventh wicket. He then dismissed Aamer Jamal three balls later to claim his 501st wicket. Pakistan, already struggling with an imposing target of 450, did not survive long after that and were dismissed for 89, giving Australia a 360-run win. This is also Australia's second-biggest win margin by runs against Pakistan in Test cricket. Earlier in the day, Australia pushed on despite the wickets of Steve Smith and Travis Head with Usman Khawaja and Mitchell Marsh both raising the bat for half-centuries. The pair accelerated in the middle session, before Khawaja (90) holed out to

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Briefs

PPP won't make alliance with PTI

SAID ALAM KHAN

PESHAWAR: Former President Asif Ali Zardari on Sunday said that the PPP would not make an alliance with the embattled Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). He expressed these views during a meeting with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Ghulam Ali and party leaders at the Governor House. The discussion also touched upon matters concerning the allocation of tickets. The former president asked a prompt resolution of internal party differences. As per sources, the PPP co-chairman Zardari particularly urged party leaders not to form an alliance with Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the upcoming elections.

PPP's Latif Khosa joins Tehreek-i-Insaf

"I have decided this only in the interest of the country and democracy," he says

ABBAS HASHMI

LAHORE: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) disgruntled leader Sardar Latif Khosa on Sunday said he was joining the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) "on the wish" of incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan. "I have decided this only in the interest of the country and democracy," he said in a statement adding that he has decided to raise his voice vigorously for the truth. Later, Khosa announced his decision at a press conference in Lahore, wherein the seasoned politician hoped that the politics of hatred would end.

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ECP resumes training of officials

850 ROs and 144 DROs are currently under training

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has resumed the training of returning officers (ROs) and district returning officers (DROs) across the country following the announcement of the election schedule. According to the commission's spokesperson, 850 ROs and 144

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At airports Judges, spouses exempted from body search

Ministry of Aviation issues notification on the directive of the Supreme Court

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The Ministry of Aviation has exempted the serving judges and their spouses from body search at all airports in Pakistan on the directives of the Supreme Court, it emerged on Sunday. An order in this regard has been issued by the Airport Security Force (ASF) director general on the directive of the aviation secretary. "[...] Secretary Aviation has been pleased to exempt spouses of serving judges and Chief Justice of Supreme Court of Pakistan

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Pakistan needs a charter against corruption

COMMENT

ANSAR M BHATTI

THE impending elections have come into focus following a decisive move by the Supreme Court, characterized as a 'commando action,' wherein it suspended the Lahore High Court's single-bench verdict concerning the appointment of Returning Officers. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) legal team had approached the Lahore High Court, advocating for the appointment of Returning Officers from the Judiciary instead of the district administration. Even to the PTI's surprise, the LHC judge not only suspended the Election Commission's notification but also constituted a larger bench to delve deeper into the case. The CJF Faez Isa was very much within his rights when he questioned the timing and the haste in which the judge had passed the order. "It is truly remarkable that, initially, the judge issued an order without taking into account the verdict of the apex court regarding the February 8 elections. Subsequently, he recommended the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court (LHC) to form a larger bench, and remarkably, assumed the role of the head of the five-member bench himself," as noted by

the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP). In response, the apex court promptly suspended the LHC order, allowing the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to announce the election schedule on the very same day. Despite initial reluctance, the ECP had no choice but to comply with the Supreme Court's directives, leading to the announcement of the schedule on the midnight of December 16, 2023."

As the stage is meticulously set for the upcoming elections, political parties are poised to heighten their election campaigns. The PPP has already launched its extensive mass contact drive, and the PML N is anticipated to follow suit once it concludes the candidate selection process. Notably, political leaders across various parties have echoed their support for a Charter of Economy. While this proposition has been deliberated in the past, tangible progress has remained elusive. The glaring reason behind this stagnation is evident—the pressing need for a singular charter, and that is the Charter against Corruption. Ostensibly, corruption has wrought havoc on the entire system, necessitating urgent and concerted efforts for its eradication. Amnesty International, in its latest report, has unequivocally labeled corruption as the foremost challenge confronting Pakistan. The comprehensive assessment conducted by the organization scrutinized eight key departments, revealing a distressing reality where the police emerged as the most corrupt entity, closely followed by the judiciary at the second position. This corroborates my steadfast belief that corruption stands as the paramount issue plaguing Pakistan. Notably, this isn't the first time that Amnesty International has brought to light

the pervasive issue of corruption within the country. A previous survey conducted by the organization underscored the disconcerting fact that even institutions considered 'prestigious' were not immune to corrupt practices. It is disheartening to observe that despite the consistent release of such damning reports, little to no concrete actions are taken to address the highlighted concerns.

This cycle of revelation without subsequent remedial action raises serious questions about the commitment of authorities to root out corruption from the system. For any meaningful change to transpire, it is imperative that these reports serve as catalysts for genuine reform and stringent measures against corruption, fostering a system where accountability and transparency are non-negotiable principles. The gravity of the situation demands a collective and sustained effort to dismantle the entrenched culture of corruption, ensuring that these reports not only serve as documentation of the problem but as blueprints for a corruption-free future for Pakistan. Intriguingly, no political party has ever endeavored earnestly to tackle this menace head-on. Interestingly, all prime ministers starting from 1988 till date have never completed their five-year term. Every time they were ousted from power on charges of corruption. The military regimes, too, have faced persistent allegations of corruption. During the 11-year rule of Gen Zia Ul Haq from 1979 to 1988, a pervasive atmosphere of financial gain enveloped those in power amid the Afghan Jihad. This period coincided with a surge in sectarian violence in Pakistan, reaching its zenith.

Tragically, the nation witnessed hundreds of thousands of casualties in the brutal clashes between Shia and Sunni factions. The intertwining of political and military interests during this era not only fueled corruption but also exacerbated social tensions, leaving a lasting impact on the fabric of Pakistani society. Benazir Bhutto assumed power following the demise of General Zia in a plane crash, winning the elections that ensued. However, her government faced a tumultuous tenure, marked by allegations of extensive corruption among high-ranking officials. This led to her removal from office within a relatively short span of two and a half years. The subsequent administrations, represented by both the PML N and PPP, similarly faced premature dismissals due to comparable charges of corruption at the highest echelons of power. This pattern of governance challenges highlighted the persistent issue of corruption within the political landscape, shaping the course of successive governments in Pakistan. The takeover by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999 was met with mixed reactions, despite Nawaz Sharif's two-thirds majority in Parliament. The Nawaz-Military face-off was driven by various factors, and the aftermath of his ouster surprised Nawaz Sharif, who acknowledged the unexpected response from the public. People's sentiments seemed to shift unexpectedly; while many expressed support for him verbally, the reality was different. Even Nawaz Sharif himself was taken aback by the lack of tangible support when he was removed. Supporters who had initially encouraged him to proceed

viz a viz his estranged relations with the military, were nowhere to be found when the time came. The disconnect between the verbal assurances and the actual support on the ground left Nawaz Sharif in a challenging situation. The obvious reason perhaps was his disconnect with his electorates and so is the case with other political parties. The PTI, however, presented a unique case. Imran Khan's removal from power triggered an immediate and impassioned public response, underscoring the widespread dissatisfaction with the manner in which he was ousted, despite his government's lackluster performance. His political opponents employed a variety of tactics, yet failed to diminish his popularity. This resilience can be attributed to Imran Khan's decision to confront the situation head-on rather than fleeing the country after striking deals as other leaders did upon their removal from the office. When it comes to addressing corruption, Imran Khan's tenure is unfortunately not an exception. Regrettably, corruption witnessed a significant surge during his time in office. Despite harboring a sincere desire to eradicate corruption from Pakistan, Imran Khan faced challenges that hindered effective action in this regard. The current scenario, as reflected in the statements and speeches of political leaders during public rallies, is disheartening. Sadly, it appears that none of them is genuinely committed to addressing the menace of corruption once in power. If this trend persists, it is inevitable that our nation will face an uncertain future, plagued by ongoing economic distress that will disproportionately impact the well-being of its citizens.

Daniyal offers apology to Nawaz

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Daniyal Aziz on Sunday offered an apology to the former prime minister. Aziz called on PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad. Sources divulged that Nawaz Sharif had expressed his reservations over the attitude of Aziz during the meeting. "Daniyal Aziz Sahab, whatever I saw in the media was disappointing. It would have been better if you addressed your concerns to me directly." Aziz clarified that he could not file an application on time due to the medical treatment. "Ahsan Iqbal, from a young age, is with me. He served the party and country," said Nawaz Sharif.



CM Naqvi orders tough crackdown on encroachers

Decision was taken at a special meeting chaired by the chief minister

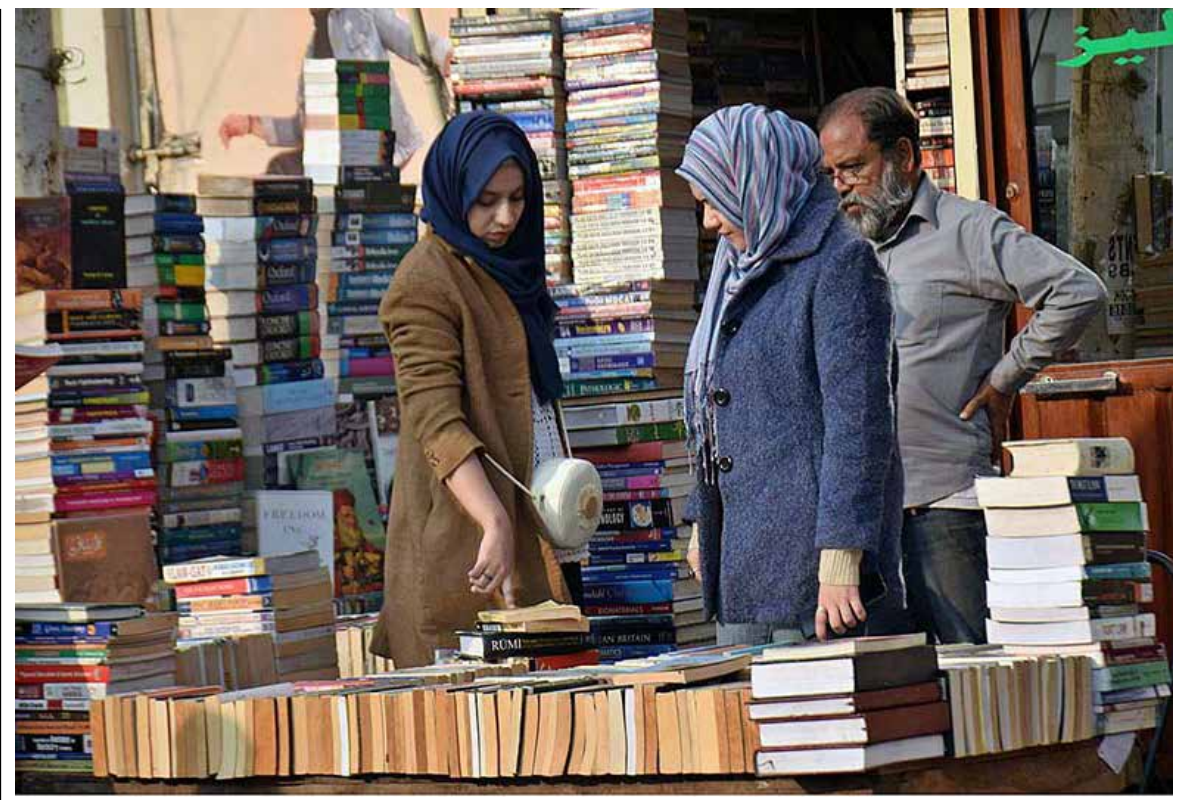
ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Giving a deadline of 48 hours for the removal of encroachments, Punjab Chief Minister (CM) Syed Mohsin Naqvi on Sunday ordered the arrest as well as registration of cases against those not complying with the government orders. The decision was taken at a special meeting chaired by the chief minister. Ordering that there should be a tough crackdown on encroachers, the CM directed the assistant commissioners and other concerned officials to get ready for operations in their respective areas. "No leniency should be shown in this regard," he said, adding, "Removal of encroachments is necessary in order to ensure smooth flow of traffic." He went on to say that in most

Naqvi instructs DC to reduce inter-city transport fares

LAHORE : A big reduction in the price of diesel occurred and inter-city transport fares will also be reduced. Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi has assigned a task to the concerned officials to ensure reduction in the inter-city transport fares in proportion to the reduction in the prices of diesel. CM ordered all the Deputy Commissioners across Punjab to comply on the deadline with regard to carrying out reduction in the prices of fares by tonight. Mohsin Naqvi stated that the benefit in the reduction of petroleum prices should be passed on directly to the people of the province. CM asserted to ensure reduction in the inter-city transport fares so as to provide relief to the common man. Mohsin Naqvi ordered to undertake an indiscriminate action against those transporters who refuse to reduce transport fares by tonight. —DNA

of the areas, encroachments were responsible for traffic congestion. Secretary transport, CCPO, commissioner, deputy commissioner, assistant commissioners and the police officials were in attendance.



LAHORE: People busy in selecting and purchasing old books from roadside setup in Provincial Capital.—DNA

LESCO detects 278 power pilferers

LAHORE : The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) has detected a total of 278 connections from where the customers were pilfering electricity in all its circles of five districts (Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, Kasur and Okara) on the 99th day of grand anti-power theft campaign. The LESCO spokesman told media here Sunday that the company has also submitted FIR applications against 278 electricity thieves, out of which 144 FIRs have been registered in respective police stations, while 13 accused have been arrested. Grand anti-power theft operations against electricity thieves are being conducted on the directives of the Federal Power Division and the LESCO Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Engineer Shahid Haider is supervising these operations. The LESCO chief vowed that the operations would continue without discrimination until the complete end of electricity theft. The electricity pilferers as well as the LESCO officers and employees who facilitate them are also being brought to justice.—APP

Returning of illegal foreigners from KP continued

STAFF REPORT

PESHAWAR :Returning of illegally staying foreigners from Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa continued with 1014 people being sent to Afghanistan via Peshawar, Torkham border, an official of the Home and Tribal Affairs said here Sunday. He said another 92 people were deported from Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 82 more illegal foreigners from Peshawar, Punjab will be deported through the Torkham border, the official of the Home Depart-

ment said. He said a total of 6452 migrants were sent to Afghanistan and a total of 5249 migrants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 125 from Islamabad, 1045 from Punjab, and 34 from Azad Kashmir were sent to Afghanistan. Likewise, a total of 260,909 people have been deported from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Afghanistan through Peshawar, Torkham border. He said, efforts are being made to send migrants to Afghanistan from Peshawar, other borders, Angoor Adda and Kharlachi and similarly a total of 3648 people were sent to Afghanistan

through Angoor Adda border while 698 people were sent to Afghanistan from the Kharlachi border. The official of the Home and Tribal Affairs said that 265,256 people have been sent to Afghanistan from the three borders of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and according to the latest survey by Deputy Commissioners, Peshawar, 871 illegal foreigners are still living in various districts. According to Peshawar, government policy, no illegal foreigner can live and do business in any part of Pakistan with all relevant agencies committed to ensuring the safe return of illegal aliens.

Dengue on the wane in Punjab

LAHORE: The number of dengue cases is decreasing in Punjab as only 18 new cases were reported in on Sunday. The latest Health Department data reveals a total of 15,047 confirmed dengue cases across 36 districts in Punjab this year. However, the battle against the fever persists with Lahore leading the unfortunate tally at 6,948 cases, followed by Rawalpindi with 2,654, Gujranwala with 1,584, Multan with 1,444 and Faisalabad with 912 cases. Lahore, with an additional 10 cases, continues to grapple with the fever, Gujranwala with 2, Multan with 1 and Faisalabad with 9 new cases. Meanwhile, Sheikhupura, Okara and Narowal each reported 1 case each of dengue within 24 hours. Currently, 32 patients are undergoing treatment in various hospitals across Punjab, with 16 of them in Lahore district hospitals. Punjab Health Secretary Ali Jaan Khan urged people to maintain clean and dry surroundings as a preventive measure against dengue. He also called for cooperation with health department teams that are working tirelessly to combat it. For those in need of dengue treatment, information, or wishing to register complaints, a free helpline is available through the health department at 1033.—APP

Police campaign against underage drivers continues

RAWALPINDI : Rawalpindi District Police registered 474 FIRs against underage drivers during the last three days, said a police spokesman here on Sunday. He informed that police, on the directive of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Hamdani, were taking action by the law against underage drivers. A total of 3445 FIRs had been registered against underage drivers, he added. He informed that City Police Officer Rawalpindi had directed the City Traffic Police officers to take solid steps to control traffic rule violations.—APP

Northern areas see winter tourism boom: Report

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Winter tourism got a high boom in Swat and other northern areas of the country, and snowfall in Malam Jabba and Kalam valleys drew a substantial number of tourists from across the country to enjoy snowball games and skiing. In winter, the scenic valleys transform into white wonderlands, offering tourists multiple opportunities for adventure coming from all across the country, according to a report aired by a private news channel. Swat, Malam Jabba, Gabin Jabba, Miandam, Matiltan, Kalam, Utror, Gabral, Matiltan, Mahodand, and Loye Sar are some of the mountain resorts where tourists have been plan-

ning to spend their upcoming winter vacations, said a local in Swat. "Today my dream came true after seeing my first snowfall in my favorite tourists' destination of Swat, where the snow-covered valleys and mountain peaks attract visitors in droves these days," said a tourist with family. A local of Swat Valley advises tourists that they should come fully equipped with proper shoes and jackets if they plan on visiting the valley during the winter. "We had heard about the enchanting beauty of Malam Jabba from our friends. We find it to be different from other snow resorts," said a tourist who came from Punjab. "The Majestic Valley of Swat is my favorite winter destination due to its diverse features, easy accessibility, pollution-free cool weather, and trout

fish amid snowfall," said a female tourist. "It is very cool here at Kalam, but I cannot simply keep myself away from the falling snow, said a foreign tourist, adding, "This is amazing." "Swat is a hundred times better than what we had imagined; it is like we have come to heaven, and the people here are amazing; they are very cooperative also," a tourist group added. "The winter school holidays have become a good window for tourist arrivals. The feedback we have gotten from our guests makes us hopeful for a better winter season, PTDC officials claimed. "Kalam is a perfect spot for adventure, and authorities must focus on tapping its potential in order to promote winter tourism," another foreign tourist commented.

KP to include skills as subject in contemporary education

The participants of the meeting agreed with the proposal and gave their useful feedback. In the meeting, Secretary of Higher Education Arshad Khan said that with the success of this proposed plan, graduates of contemporary studies

PESHAWAR : Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Technical Education, Industries, Commerce and Tribal Affairs, Dr Aamer Abdullah has agreed with the proposal to equip the students with various technical schools and courses during their academic period as feasible, said a press release issued here on Sunday. He has further directed the furnishing of a feasible proposal for the pilot project, with a possible partnership between higher education and technical education with clear possibilities of the success and usefulness of the project. In this regard, a meeting was held here at Civil Secretariat Peshawar with the Caretaker Minister for Technical Education, Industries, Commerce, and Tribal Affairs, Dr Aamer Abdullah, in the chair. Besides, Secretary of Higher Education Arshad Khan Secretary of Industries and Commerce, Syed Zulfikar Ali Shah and Director (Finance), Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), Munir Gul, Chief Economist Department of Industry Basit Khalil also attended the meeting. Keeping in view, the importance of technical skills, skilled education, and training in the modern era, the meeting also discussed the inclusion of vocational training courses along with contemporary education and the possibilities of the departments of Technical Education and Higher Education in this regard. The participants of the meeting agreed with the proposal and gave their useful feedback. In the meeting, Secretary of Higher Education Arshad Khan said that with the success of this proposed plan, graduates of contemporary studies and secondary and higher secondary certificates as well as students with skills will not remain unemployed, saying such educated youth will be able to find their jobs in the market and will also be able to find decent employment. The provincial caretaker minister for technical education termed the proposal useful and asked that the Department of Higher Education and Industries and Technical Education jointly present a feasible and better plan along with the identification of the responsibilities of both departments. In this connection, he further directed the formation of a cluster of allocated colleges to implement it as a pilot project.—DNA

CM urges NGOs to work in healthcare

Sindh CM said that the healthcare needs of Karachi are growing at a very fast pace, and the addition of hospitals by non-government organizations will help ease the burden of patients

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI :The Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (Retd), Maqbool Baqar, has said that the healthcare needs of Karachi are growing at a very fast pace, and the addition of hospitals by non-government organizations will help ease the burden of patients in government hospitals. This he said while speaking at a gathering organized to raise funds for the University Medical Complex being established in Karachi. Those who spoke on the occasion include Sohail Mahdi, Dr Dilbar A. Saeed, and others. Baqar said that the establishment of a university medical complex marked

a significant milestone in our commitment to advancing healthcare and ensuring the well-being of the people of this city. "The healthcare needs of our metropolis are growing at a very fast pace, and the addition of this hospital will help to ease the burden of patients on the existing hospitals," he said. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the visionary healthcare leaders, dedicated professionals, and all those who were tirelessly working to turn the dream into a reality. "The establishment of this hospital would reflect a collective dedication to the health and prosperity of the people of Karachi," he said, adding that the establishment of the Uni-

versity Medical Complex would be a noble project for the people of the city in particular and the people of the whole province of Sindh and Balochistan in general. The CM said that in a world that constantly presented us with new challenges, a hospital was not merely a structure of bricks and mortar but a symbol of hope, compassion, and healing. He added that the UMC hospital would stand tall as a testament to our unwavering commitment to providing world-class healthcare services to our people, embracing the latest advancements in medical science and technology. "This hospital will be established with the technical and financial col-

laboration of medical and healthcare professionals, along with the support of the philanthropic community," he said. The health care professionals play a pivotal role in the well-being of any society, the CM said, adding that it is not just about treating illnesses but about fostering a culture of prevention, education, and wellness. Medics International, with a history of serving the people over the last 30 years beyond caste, creed, or religion, has played a pivotal role in delivering especially to the underprivileged members of our society, the CM said, adding that they managed and run more than two dozen clinics and healthcare setups across Pakistan in different cities.



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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

Hotels & Restaurants



Serena Hotel.....111 133 133
Marriott.....051-2826121
Monal.....0334-5421812



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

Rescue (Police).....15
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



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PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi.....5555489
CAA.....9281092



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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

CDA.....9221334-43
CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Serena Hotels organized Behbud's fund raising event

This initiative seeks to raise funds for Behbud's ambitious project aimed at establishing a Maternal and Children Hospital with a capacity of 100 beds in the heart of Rawalpindi. This endeavor is a seamless extension of Behbud's enduring mission and unwavering commitment to uplift underprivileged women, addressing not only their healthcare needs but also fostering empowerment through initiatives encompassing skills development, education, and overall well-being.

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Serena Hotels hosted the Behbud Association of Pakistan's fund-raising event, 'Melodies of Hope,' aimed to raise funds for Behbud Maternal and Children Hospital.

The event under the Cultural Diplomacy initiative by Serena Hotels was illuminated by the soulful performance of the internationally renowned Sufi singer, Areeb Azhar. The event witnessed a significant presence of dignitaries, official representatives from the corporate sector, members of the business community, and media personnels. This initiative seeks to raise funds for Behbud's ambitious project aimed at establishing a Maternal and Children Hospital with a capacity of 100 beds in the heart of Rawalpindi. This endeavor is a seamless extension of Behbud's enduring mission and unwavering commitment to uplift underprivileged women, addressing not only their healthcare needs but also fostering empowerment through initiatives encompassing skills development, education, and overall well-being. Lt. Gen-



eral (ret.) Nigar Johar Khan was the guest of honor at the event. While addressing the audience she highly appreciated Behbud for their unwavering commitment to empowering underprivileged women in multifaceted dimensions—ranging from skills development to education and health. She also said that the opening of this hospital stands as a testament to their dedication to creating a lasting impact on the community's well-being. CEO Serena Hotels Aziz Bool-

ani said, "Being an integral part of initiatives dedicated to women's empowerment resonates deeply with Serena's core values. Serena Hotels believes in creating opportunities, providing resources, and cultivating an environment where women can thrive, both personally and professionally. To collaborate with and support organizations like Behbud in their pursuit of empowering underprivileged women is not just a privilege but a moral imperative".

Policeman and his son martyred in confrontation with dacoits

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police faced a grim encounter in the area of Ramana police station, resulting in the martyrdom of Head Constable Muhammad Ashraf and his son. Policeman Muhammad Ashraf was going along with his son when they observed dacoits attempting to commit a dacoity, police spokesperson said. Upon bravely confronting the intruders, the Head Constable Ashraf and his son were met with gunfire from the assailants and they succumbed to their injuries. Senior officers, accompanied by a substantial police contingent, swiftly responded to the scene. A rigorous search operation is underway to apprehend the culprits responsible for this tragic incident. IGP Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, taking cognizance of the situation, has issued directives for the immediate arrest of the perpetrators. Funeral prayers for the martyred Head Constable Ashraf and his son were held at the Police Lines Headquarters, attended by police personnel, district administration officials, and members of the public. The bodies, draped in the national flag, have been transported to their ancestral village for burial with full state honors. IGP Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan has extended heartfelt condolences to the grieving families and assured full cooperation and support for the relatives of the martyred Head Constable during this difficult time.—APP

CPEC's HPPs three projects get ADB's financial support

DNA

ISLAMABAD: An agreement valued at \$250 million has been signed with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as part of the Power Transmission Strengthening Project (PTSP). This initiative aims to facilitate the procurement of power transmission equipment, essential for efficiently harnessing affordable and environmentally friendly power generated by four major projects in the northern region. Three of these projects are integral components of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Gwadar Pro reported on Saturday. The agreement was signed by

ADB, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and National Transmission and Despatch Company Limited (NTDC) under PTSP to power infrastructure enhancement to ensure National Grid stability, energy security, climate resilience, and increased transmission capacity to deploy sufficient, reliable clean and cost-effective energy for sustainable economic growth. As per the official statement of NTDC, the said infrastructure development financing will be utilized for the procurement of power transmission equipment for the expansion of the transmission network, especially in the North region of Pakistan for the evacuation of cheap

and environment-friendly energy from 800 MW Mohmand Dam, 884 MW Suki Kinari, 700.7 MW Azad Pattan and 1124 MW Kohala hydropower projects. Moreover, high voltage transmission operations and maintenance works in Lahore are also a part of this financing by ADB. PTSP will also support gender mainstreaming, institutional and financial management, climate resilient system planning and operation, and project management capacity of NTDC. Suki Kinari, an 884 MW hydropower project in Mansehra, KP, is 70% complete since achieving Financial Close (FC) in February 2017, according

to CPEC's official website. Azad Pattan, a 700.7 MW hydropower project on the Jhelum River in AJK/Punjab, with China Gezhouba Group Company as a sponsor, is in the land acquisition phase, progressing toward FC. Kohala, a 1124 MW hydropower project near Muzaffarabad on the Jhelum River, has initiated land acquisition, with FC in progress. Mohmand, an 800 MW hydropower project by WAPDA, is under construction at 12 key sites. Expected to be completed in 2026, it aims to control floods, generate 800 MW of eco-friendly electricity, and provide 300 million gallons per day of drinking water to Peshawar.

Opening ceremony of CNS shooting championship

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Opening Ceremony of 7th CNS Open Shooting Championship 2023 held at Pakistan Navy Shooting Range, Karachi. Commander Karachi Rear Admiral Muhammad Saleem graced the occasion as Chief Guest. About 400 shooters from Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Air Force, FRA, SRA, PRA, BRA, HEC, WAPDA, Pakistan Police, SSU, RSS Club, KGSSR Club, and PNSR Members Club are participating in the competition. During the Championship, 24 events will be contested in Pistol, Rifle and Shotgun categories. Event matches are being contested under the umbrella of National Rifle Association of Pakistan (NAP) as per International Sports Shooting Federation (ISSF) latest rules and regulations. Four events of Big Bore Pistol, 50M and 0.22 Open Sight Categories are included in schedule of events as festival matches. Furthermore, apart from 10 events in men category, 05 events for women and 04 for youth in Pistol and Rifle categories are also part of Championship.



China and Pakistan sign MOU to boost textile cooperation

ISLAMABAD: China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textiles (CCCT) and All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) signed an MOU, at the "China Pakistan Textile & Apparel Executive Summit" to boost textile cooperation between the two countries. Pakistan's Federal Minister for Commerce & Industries, Dr Gohar Ejaz participated in the summit and said this MOU will pave the way for deeper collaboration, knowledge sharing, and joint ventures. "This MOU signifies Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and reinforces the strategic economic partnership. His collaboration will unlock significant potential for our textile industries, propelling them to even greater heights," he said, according to a report carried by Gwadar Pro. He stated that "attending this esteemed gathering presents a unique opportunity to explore avenues for enprivate-sector cooperation, solidifying the textile industry as a cornerstone of our bilateral economic partnership." "Through insightful discussions and dedicated business meetings, we aim to unlock new frontiers in trade, innovation, and sustainability, paving the way for a mutually prosperous future. Together, the two nations work for a stronger, more resilient textile landscape that benefits our economies and communities alike," he added. Addressing on the occasion, Zhang Xinmin, Vice Chairman, China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Textiles (CCCT) expressed appreciation for cooperation between the two countries.—DNA

Expert stresses awareness about 'cardiac arrest'

ISLAMABAD: Renowned Cardiologist Maj-Gen (ret) Dr. Azhar Mahmood Kayani on Sunday stressed to raise public awareness at grass-roots level about the importance of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to save lives in emergencies such as heart attacks, drowning or choking and provide life-saving care. Talking to PTV news channel, he explained that educating the public about CPR is important because in cardiac arrest, every second counts and so quick CPR before emergency professionals arrive at the scene can double or even triple a victim's chance of survival. Learning these skill is important as many cardiac arrests happen outside a hospital such as at home, work or elsewhere, he said, adding, furthermore, cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death and hands-only CPR can save people's lives. To perform hands-only CPR, the person should continue pushing hard and fast in the centre of the chest 100 to 120 times per minute until help arrives, he mentioned. Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are one of the common causes of deaths in winters, he said, adding, out of the hospital, Cardiac arrest is a major cardiovascular event which requires public awareness. We need to talk about sudden cardiac arrests and understand that if we all learn CPR, we will be able to save a precious life, he mentioned. "It is vital that we maintain good heart health and adopt a holistic approach towards health incorporating balanced diet and exercise however, in the proximity of someone suffering from cardiac arrest, if one is trained in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation technique, it will enable us to save lives", he added. By providing widespread CPR training, medical institutions should collectively play a crucial role in promoting public safety.—APP

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Briefs

Special Kashmir advisory committee to be formed soon

ISLAMABAD: Special Assistant to Prime Minister for Human Rights and Women Empowerment, Mushaal Hussein Mullick Sunday announced that a special Kashmir advisory committee would be constituted soon on every district level to mobilize and for peaceful solution of Kashmir cause. Talking to PTV news channel, she said that a multi-faceted board comprising top national and international diplomatic experts would play their active role for this advisory committee on Kashmir issue, adding, the committee would offer comprehensive recommendations to the Government in response to the Indian Supreme Court's decision. She also urged youth to tap modern tools of IT to help influence the world against war crimes and human right violation of Kashmiris, adding, youth should devote their time and energies for the promotion of Kashmir cause and raise their voice for the oppressed and subjugated people of Indian Illegally Occupied & Kashmir (IIOJ&K). She said the innocent people of Kashmir had been made alien in their own homeland where occupation forces were killing, torturing and maiming the youth, while the women were being dishonored. She asked students to intensify their political, diplomatic and moral support to their brothers and sisters in IIOJ&K, who were struggling for their inherent right to self-determination, adding, overseas youth should send online petitions against Indian government who are busy in demographic changes in Kashmir. She also demanded international organization to pay attention and demilitarize Kashmir under UN's resolution, adding, —APP

IRSA releases 85,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 85,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 37,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1478.85 feet and was 78.85 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 19,900 cusecs and 45,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1161.40 feet, which was 111.40 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,800 cusecs and 26,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 61,800, 32,900, 28,000 and 1,800 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 7,100 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 2,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

AC City swooped down on alms seekers, 16 netted

ISLAMABAD: In a swift operation, the Assistant Commissioner City swooped down on professional beggars plaguing Islamabad's posh sectors F-6 and F-7 neighborhoods on Sunday. Sixteen individuals were apprehended and whisked away to Kohsar Police Station, leaving the swanky streets temporarily beggar-free, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabasum said. He said that this action wasn't just about cleaning up the cityscape from professional beggars. While adult beggars faced legal proceedings, any accompanying minors were compassionately sent to the Edhi Center, ensuring their well-being while dismantling the beggar networks that exploit them. "This is just the latest operation in an ongoing city-wide campaign, spearheaded by Assistant Commissioners, to tackle the issue of professional begging head-on," he added.—APP

Serena Hotel hosts reception for children of three schools

The General Manager of the Islamabad Serena Hotel, Mr. Otto Kurzendorfer expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to make a positive impact on the local community, emphasizing the hotel's ongoing dedication to meaningful effort to promote and support education for children



DNA

ISLAMABAD: In the true spirit of this Festive Season, Islamabad Serena Hotel

demonstrated its commitment to community's well-being by hosting a Hi-tea for children from the three charity schools i.e., Holy Help School, Master Ayub

School, and Mashal School. The children got an opportunity to visit the Festive wonderland, be a part of the season's festivities. They were served a delightful hi-

tea filled with delectable treats. Santa Claus made a surprise entry with the gifts for the children, which made the evening magical and unforgettable for them.

The General Manager of the Islamabad Serena Hotel, Mr. Otto Kurzendorfer expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to make a positive impact on the local

community, emphasizing the hotel's ongoing dedication to meaningful effort to promote and support education for children. The success of this event highlights Islamabad Serena

Hotel's dedication to fostering a sense of giving back to community and creating a joyous experience for those in need. —Photo by Mudassar Raja

Mould-breaking book refutes Afghan narrative on Durand Line

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Durand Line Agreement, international law, historical evidence, and the original maps exchanged at the time of the accord establish the present status of the Durand Line as an international border. As such, the Durand Line issue is political and geostrategic, and its status as an internationally recognized border is indisputable. This was observed during the book launch of 'Revisiting the Durand Line: Historical and Legal Perspectives', authored by historian and researcher Dr Lutfur Rehman. The event was co-organized by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad. The session was addressed by Khalid Rahman,



chairman, IPS, Ambassador (r) Abrar Hussain, former ambassador to Afghanistan and vice chairman, IPS, Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, director and professor SPIR, QAU, Dr Razia Sultana, member Public Service Commission, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Dr Lutfur Rehman, while Faheemullah Khan, lecturer, SPIR, acted

as moderator. The speakers said the book dispels the misconceptions through evidence-based research and citing international laws and principles. As further evidence, it also contains all the original maps exchanged in Kabul in November 1893 following the border agreement between the ruler of Afghan-

istan Ameer Abdur Rahman Khan and British Indian official Mortimer Durand. Dr Lutfur Rehman debunked misconceptions about the Durand Line Agreement by centering his account on evidence and international law. Regarding one of the major misconceptions that the agreement was meant for one century.

Over 5m SMEs receive mere 7% of private sector credit

ISLAMABAD: Despite the significant importance, over 5 million SMEs has been facing a huge credit gap, receiving only 7% of private sector credit, far below neighboring countries like Bangladesh (25%) and India (18%), with the State Bank committing to increase SME credit share to 17% by 2023. To achieve this, we must advocate for targeted and fixed SME allocations in concessional financing schemes, particularly those aimed at the export-oriented sector. These views were expressed by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industries' Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar. He proposed the SBP to allocate at least 25 percent of concessional financing, including the Export Finance Scheme, exclusively to SMEs in the export sector. This strategic allocation will not only boost SME sector's growth but also promote a more inclusive and resilient economy. Mian Anjum Nisar, who is also SAARC Chamber vice president and the FPCCI former president, suggested the central bank to review its credit policies by fixing a special quota to finance the small and medium enterprises, as only the large industries have been availing government's all major concessional export loaning facilities, with very limited financing is left for the SMEs which are the backbone of the economy, contributing around 40 percent to the national gross domestic product (GDP). Mian Anjum Nisar said that the State Bank of Pakistan has launched various policies for the promotion of SME finance, but the required results were still awaited. It was unfortunate that banks were always reluctant to provide financing to SMEs as their financing continued to show negative growth.—DNA

Railways ask officials to recover outstanding dues from federal, provincial deptts

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has asked its officials concerned to initiate the procedure to recover outstanding dues from the federal and provincial departments for using its land and services. The Ministry of Railways has asked the federal and provincial departments to pay their outstanding dues worth billions of rupees on account of using its land and other services, within the least possible time as the department was facing economic issues, an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. About the amount payable against the different departments, the official said that over Rs 8,375 million (over 8 billion) are payable by different departments on account of using its land and various services. He said the federal departments had to pay an amount of Rs 709.084 million, provincial departments Rs1980.217 million and autonomous and private bodies Rs 5685.736 million. To a question, he said Pakistan Railways has upgraded as many as 181 vulnerable un-manned level crossings to manned level crossings, out of 550 which are identified by the department over the entire railway network. "The relevant provincial government provided the finances to Pakistan Railways for the upgradation of un-manned level crossings in the country," he added. He said the department was taking several steps including the up-gradation of un-manned and vulnerable railway level crossings across the country in collaboration with respective provincial governments.—APP

Pakzon Electric Motors and Faisal Bank up for eco-Friendly bikes

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Environment-friendly and cost-effective electric bikes will now also be available to customers in installments. In this regard, an agreement has been signed between Pakzon Electric Motors (Pvt) Ltd. and Faisal Bank. Under the agreement, customers will be able to get bikes in their name in installments of three months without paying the down payment. Apart from this, the facility of getting bikes in easy installments will also be available under one year, two year and three year plans. Pakzon Electric Motors Chief Executive Officer Dr. Mohammad Amjad and Faisal Bank's Head of Consumer Finance Aneeq Malik signed on the agreement. Also, in attendance, Pakzon Electric Managing Director Shahzaib Amjad and Faisal Bank Head of Unsecured Business and Cards Feroz Khan. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Muhammad Amjad said that the trend of electric vehicles should be promoted to combat climate change. By using electric bikes, we can reduce air pollution in the country. Aneeq Malik said that reiterating Faisal Bank's commitment to promote environment-friendly initiatives.



ISLAMABAD: People are taking interest in Gem stones on stall during Gems Jewelry Show at Pak China Friendship Center, in Federal Capital.—ONLINE

Drug abuse among young students in education institutions

It is imperative for society to recognize the significance of investing in the future of our youth by prioritizing drug prevention within the educational landscape

Ms SABAHAT ALI



Drug abuse among young students is a growing concern in contemporary society, with substantial impacts on academic perfor-

mance, mental health, and overall well-being. This article explores the importance of implementing drug prevention strategies within educational settings to mitigate risks and foster a healthy environment for students. Understanding the Scope of the Issue: Presenting recent data on drug abuse among students, including the prevalence of substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs. Examining the correlation between substance abuse and academic achievements, as well as increased dropout rates. Factors Contributing to Drug Abuse Among Students: Analyzing the role of peer pressure in students' decisions

to experiment with drugs and discussing strategies to address peer influence. Exploring the connection between academic stress and substance abuse, proposing stress management programs and counseling services within educational institutions. Comprehensive Drug Prevention Programs: Advocating for comprehensive drug education programs and emphasizing early intervention with age-appropriate curriculum development. Highlighting the crucial role of parents in preventing drug abuse and suggesting ways to foster open communication between parents and children. Stressing the significance of integrating counseling services

within educational institutions. Implementing a Multi-Faceted Approach: Discussing the necessity of clear and strict anti-drug policies, exploring the role of disciplinary measures in deterring substance abuse. Advocating for collaboration between educational institutions and local communities, proposing community-based events and awareness campaigns to address drug abuse. Case Studies and Success Stories: Showcasing examples of educational institutions with effective drug prevention strategies and analyzing key components of successful prevention initiatives. Challenges and Roadblocks: Discussing the challenges ed-

ucational institutions face in implementing comprehensive drug prevention programs and proposing solutions for resource constraints. Addressing the stigma associated with drug abuse within educational settings and advocating for increased awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behavior. Future Directions and Recommendations: Proposing ongoing research to understand evolving trends in substance abuse and encouraging the integration of innovative approaches in drug prevention programs. Emphasizing the importance of supportive policies at national and local levels,

calling for increased advocacy to prioritize substance abuse prevention in educational settings. Conclusion: Addressing drug prevention among young students at educational institutions requires a holistic and collaborative approach. By combining educational initiatives, parental involvement, counseling services, and community engagement, we can create an environment that nurtures student well-being and mitigates the risks of substance abuse. It is imperative for society to recognize the significance of investing in the future of our youth by prioritizing drug prevention within the educational landscape.

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Washington urged to halt Israel's Palestinian punishment

Washington's unquestioning support of Israel has emboldened Tel Aviv to intensify its military operations against Hamas, which UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned risks "complete collapse" of the territory's humanitarian system and civil order. Guterres has been outspoken on both the Hamas attacks on Israel and the very high death toll of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. But despite his calls for an immediate cease-fire and the mounting opposition and pressure from the world community, US President Joe Biden continues to push for more US aid to Israel, turning a blind eye to the fact that Israel's military operation has killed more than 18,000 Palestinians since Oct 7. The US has long deemed Israel to be its most important ally in the Middle East and it has unswervingly thrown its weight behind the country. Not least by repeatedly using its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to block resolutions calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and humanitarian assistance for Palestinian civilians, despite the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave continuing to worsen. Guterres has made no bones about how he views the situation, saying at a forum in Doha on Dec 10 that "the preeminent forum for the peaceful resolution of international disputes is paralyzed by geostrategic divisions". It was a sentiment echoed by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the first meeting of the China-Saudi Arabia-Iran trilateral joint committee on Friday in Beijing. Speaking at the dialogue mechanism established to support the normalization of Iran and Saudi Arabia's relations, Wang Yi said the Middle East should no longer be a venue for geopolitical competition between big powers. Wang said that the most urgent task is to promote a ceasefire in Gaza, to stop the war, to promote humanitarian assistance, and to resume the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. The Israel-Palestine conflict is not limited to Gaza. It has already spilled over to other parts of the region, involving more players there. Several world shipping giants announced over the weekend that they were suspending crossings of the Red Sea as commercial ships were increasingly the targets of missile attacks. It seems that only the US has the leverage to rein in Israel at this stage so that a cease-fire can be brokered. But Biden's strongest rebuke to Israel so far has been the acknowledgment of its "indiscriminate bombing" of Gaza. Standing unconditionally behind Israel, the US has lost any claim to the moral high ground and it has even been vilified as being complicit in ethnic cleansing. In the face of the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza, the US should put aside its selfish strategic calculations and fulfill its obligation to uphold and fully implement the UN General Assembly resolution passed during the special emergency session on Dec 12.



'Bedrock' of cooperation being undermined

The US-China Science and Technology Agreement, which was signed in 1979 and has been renewed every five years or so ever since, has facilitated cooperation to the benefit of both sides. But it has become the subject of controversy, with some Republican lawmakers adamant that it should be scrapped. They claim that it aids China's technological and military rise and has failed to ensure a reciprocal relationship. To mollify those opposing another renewal of the deal, the Joe Biden administration is seeking to renegotiate it with Beijing. In a speech at the Brookings Institution on Friday, US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns said that he met with the Chinese minister of science and technology a couple of weeks ago in Beijing and the two sides had begun a discussion on whether or not to have a new agreement, and "what would be the issues involved". Despite admitting the agreement was "the bedrock" of Sino-US cooperation, Burns said the negotiations would be complicated as the agreement did not account for the latest science and technology advances. "It's not a given that we are going to agree" on its renewal, he concluded. Those in the US who oppose any new agreement claim that China exploits the agreement to carry out industrial espionage and the theft of the US' scientific and commercial achievements. But such claims have been heard before and never been substantiated. Not to mention that it is the US that has been repeatedly caught engaging in such activities. But to the prejudiced critics of the agreement it is China that is guilty of such skulduggery, to the extent that it has been the sole beneficiary of the deal. Yet the fact is that by establishing a set of principles for scientific exchanges and cooperative programs the agreement has been mutually beneficial. That the Biden administration is trying to renegotiate the deal rather than simply scrap it proves that, whatever the paranoid and hysterical voices in Congress may claim, the US has also gained from the agreement, and those of a more rational mind do not want to ditch cooperation in all technology and science-related areas with China. Nor does the Biden administration want to spoil the upturn in ties generated by the recent talks between the leaders of the two countries in San Francisco, which has helped stabilize relations between the two sides to some degree. At that meeting, the two leaders agreed that an intergovernmental dialogue mechanism on artificial intelligence should be established. No doubt such a mechanism could be put in place for other areas in which the two sides have concerns. It is important that an agreement is reached as it is clear that with many in Washington lack a correct understanding of China and unwilling to look at the country's development objectively, the "bedrock" of the agreement is needed more than ever. Not just to ensure the two countries can continue to cooperate but to inject some more needed confidence that the world is still heading in the right direction.

Overview of the procurement of tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan

Zia uddin



The region, likewise, offers a primitive cultural diversity and a superior tradition of hospitality to the tourism sector. It boasts five ethnic groups and five ethnic languages with thirty-six dialects, Seven Asia Pacific Heritage Conservation, Twenty-three Historical Forts, Seventy-five Polo grounds, Sixty-five Archeological sites, more than thirty-nine thousand Rock carvings

Once Cesare Pavese said that "If you wish to travel far and fast, travel light take off all your envies, jealousies, unforgiveness selfishness and fears" HISTORICALLY, people are, with their own beliefs, interconnected manifoldly around the globe. Tourism is a joyous process wherein people ever tend to happen to have their senses been alerted to be engrossed by nature. Additionally, it is the process wherein people mostly tend to get their attentions and efforts paid to see the actual beauty of nature, which in turn, gives perceived satisfaction and is a major source of mental equilibrium. In the same way, it is a licit act of travelling or sightseeing in which tourists are awfully bound to follow the code of conduct. Gilgit-Baltistan, a rustic and heart a-luring region, is one of the most prominent and popular tourist spots which attracts thousands of tourists every year. Tourists are attracted to the – natural eye-catching panorama which includes the landmass, the hills, and an air that touches the soul in a mirthful environment, and above all, the area which is rich in fresh organic food, dairy products and fruits. The department of tourism under the government of Gilgit-Baltistan, has never left any stone unturned to capture tourists' attentions. Similarly, the government has been heading towards the proximity with China so that the tourism related products can be imported. Moreover, and especially, the region has been approved tax free for the sake of tourism. What is more, people, too, are very keen to get their services rendered for the tourism development and not a day goes by that they forget to promote tourism industry. People in Gilgit-Baltistan, most will be surprised to hear, are as united to support tourism as are the pillars in a building. Furthermore, for the prosperity of tourism industry they have been working under the base

of solidarity and cohesion. Therefore, the region has super superior image, and it is well-known in terms of tourism. Likewise, data, as awfully, was required to be included, shows that during the last eleven months, 1.72 million tourists have visited Gilgit-Baltistan, thus marking a massive growth as compared to 0.5 million tourists who visited during the corresponding period last year, and above all, it brought a Rs.300 million revenues to the local economy during the earlier couple of years. In the same way, local government urges to have a relentless flow of tourism toward the region, and promoting it the Assistant Director, GB Tourism Department, says that "if the tourism-related facilities are ensured in a most effective way with true spirit, the GB region has potential to generate local business worth Rs.1 billion, each year." So, to allow the influx of more tourists, the GB government has been looking up for practical and most effective steps such as conducting regional and national level exhibitions.

The region, likewise, offers a primitive cultural diversity and a superior tradition of hospitality to the tourism sector. It boasts five ethnic groups and five ethnic languages with thirty-six dialects, Seven Asia Pacific Heritage Conservation, Twenty-three Historical Forts, Seventy-five Polo grounds, Sixty-five Archeological sites, more than thirty-nine thousand Rock carvings and inscriptions, Indigenous music, and centuries old culture of hospitality and acceptance of visitors. Furthermore, the GB offers unique landscape and pristine nature which play a vital role in enhancing the competitive advantage of the tourism industry. The most valued offerings include the World's Most Famous Mountain Ranges - The Himalayas, Karakorum & Hindukush. Among these terrains lay K2, world's second highest peak, 5 peaks over 8000 meters, 101

Peaks over 7000 meters, 5100 glaciers, and 119 lakes. It really is astonishing that GB, as well, has a wide-ranging environment linked to the biodiversity in Wildlife and high Altitude Forests that consists of 4 National Parks, 9 Game reserves, 3 wildlife sanctuaries, 230 species of Birds, 54 species of mammals, 23 species of Reptiles, 6 classes of Amphibians, 20 species of fresh water Fish, and 6592 Sq. KM of Forests, which constitutes 9.1 % of the total area. In the earlier decades, tourists have been visiting the region over and over again because they received a great deal of hospitality from the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. In addition, tourists have always been welcomed in to the region with open arms. They are facilitated to the best and have never been jeopardized to leave the region.

The activities which have been undertaken by the people of Gilgit-Baltistan for tourism sectors are met by the perceived expectations of tourists. It is worth saying that the people here are modest, they really have a sense of brotherhood and empathy. It is evident that, to promote tourism, we should put in our best efforts for the development of industry, so that the captivating region having the heterogeneous blessings within can be discovered easily. Moreover, infrastructure of the region should be the priority of the local government, and likewise, we should declare our loyalty to the region we live in. It is also recommended that tourist facilitation centers should be established at every entry point of GB, development of Rest Areas for tourists along the KKH and provision of interest-free loan schemes to private sector for the development of tourist accommodation. This, further, will enhance the tourism influx in Gilgit-Baltistan in the days to come.

The writer is Student of Karakorum University Gilgit

Women's Health and osteoporosis prevention

Seerat Fatima



When the balance of bone resorption and bone formation in the body is disturbed, it leads to a serious condition called osteoporosis. In osteoporosis, bones lose more mass than they replace with the formation of new bone cells. It is a serious condition that causes low bone density and strength. An illustration of osteoporosis is often likened to bricks in a building gradually being removed. Due to the excessive loss of bone mass, bones become weak and brittle; thus, even

Bones provide the greatest strength to the human body. They are mainly composed of a protein matrix and are mineralized by calcium, phosphate, and magnesium. The protein present in bones is primarily responsible for providing a matrix or framework, while the minerals in bones provide the greatest strength and density. Due to their specific and mineralized composition, bones are hard and stable in the body. Bones constantly undergo a process in which older bone tissues are broken down, and new tissues are formed. This process is specifically called remodeling, in which bones replace their older tissues with new ones. Osteoclasts are bone cells responsible for bone resorption; they release specific enzymes and acids that break down older or damaged tissues. When older tissues clear away during osteoporosis, cell-forming cells play a significant role in forming new bone tissues. Osteoblasts are considered essential in producing collagen, protein, and minerals, most importantly calcium, which forms a new bone matrix. This process of bone resorption and bone formation is not only crucial for repairing bone microdamage but is also a continuous process held inside our bodies, providing great strength and stability.

When the balance of bone resorption and bone formation in the body is disturbed, it leads to a serious condition called osteoporosis. In osteoporosis, bones lose more mass than they replace with the formation of new bone cells. It is a serious condition that causes low bone density and strength. An illustration of osteoporosis is often likened to bricks in a building gradually being removed. Due to the excessive loss of bone mass, bones become weak and brittle; thus, even a minor fall or stress on the bone can easily cause a fracture, which is quite dangerous. Patients with osteoporosis often exhibit porous bones resembling honeycomb structures. Weakened bones are more prone to fractures, especially in areas of the body that bear the most weight and stress, including the spine (vertebrae), hip (femur), and wrist (radius). Many factors contribute greatly to declining bone health and the development of osteoporosis. Age is a significant factor in bone health decline. As we get older, our bones lose density over time. Aging also brings about hormonal changes in our bodies, which have a substantial impact on body functioning. These hormonal changes occur in both men and women, so both genders need to pay particular attention to their bone health. In women, estrogen plays a significant role in protecting bones, but during menopause, there is a rapid loss of estrogen levels, which affects bone health and reduc-

es density. Conversely, in men, testosterone levels decrease with age, which also affects bone health. Global data on osteoporosis prevalence clearly shows that osteoporosis is more common in women compared to men. According to the World Osteoporosis Day Survey 2023 by the International Osteoporosis Foundation, nearly 43% of women experience fractures due to minor falls after the age of fifty. This percentage is notably high in countries like Japan and the United Kingdom. Surprisingly, almost 32% of individuals do not undergo the scanning process for diagnosing osteoporosis. Moreover, statistics indicate that 45% of women do not receive proper treatment for osteoporosis. This continuous, nonchalant attitude increases health risks. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that approximately 8.9 million fractures occur due to osteoporosis almost every year worldwide. In Pakistan, 7 million women face serious issues related to osteoporosis, while in men, the numbers are significantly lower, with almost 2 million men suffering from osteoporosis. Women have lower bone mass and thinner bones compared to men. Women also have smaller bones, which is a significant reason for the higher occurrence of osteoporosis in women. Moreover, during pregnancy, significant changes occur in a woman's body to support the development and nourishment of the baby. The growth of the baby during pregnancy requires a substantial amount of calcium. Pregnant women are advised to consume an adequate amount of calcium through their diet to ensure proper growth and nourishment of the baby. However, in cases where women do not consume enough calcium through their diet, the baby's calcium requirements are met by absorbing the necessary amount from the mother's bones, resulting in bone weakness and bone loss. Both breastfeeding and pregnancy place physical stress on women's bodies, which can lead to weakened bones. Special care is needed for women, especially pregnant and lactating women, regarding their nutritional requirements. Genetics can also play a role in the development of osteoporosis. Some individuals may have genetic variations that cause low bone mass, making them more susceptible to osteoporosis. If all family members of an individual naturally have smaller bones, there is a greater risk that the same individual will also have smaller bones. Genetic variations can also affect the efficiency of calcium absorption in bones, potentially leading to osteoporosis in affected individuals.

Osteoporosis can be prevented or even treated with the right nutrition. Nutritionists recommend that osteoporosis patients consume a diet rich in calcium and

vitamin D. Calcium is a major component of bones, providing hardness and strength. It plays a significant role in maintaining and building bones. Adequate calcium intake through the diet helps prevent the risk of bone loss and protects bones from fractures. Excellent sources of calcium include dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cream. Another prominent source of calcium is leafy vegetables, specifically spinach, which contributes to bone strength. Vitamin D, while not directly involved in treating osteoporosis, plays an influential role in the absorption of calcium in bones, which is crucial for maintaining bone health. It is commonly known that sunlight is a major source of vitamin D as it triggers vitamin D synthesis in the skin. Additionally, vitamin D can be obtained through diet. Fatty fish are natural sources of vitamin D, and egg yolks contain a small amount of vitamin D. Many fortified products, like orange juice and cereals, also contain added vitamin D.

To reduce the risk of osteoporosis, it is essential to quit smoking. Smoking not only has adverse effects on overall health but also decreases calcium absorption in bones. Smoking can lead to hormonal changes in the body, causing a decrease in estrogen levels in women, which impacts bone health and reduces bone density. Smoking negatively affects bones by causing inflammation and reducing bone density. Toxic chemicals found in tobacco, such as lead and cadmium, interfere with normal bone development, reducing bone density and the maintenance and building processes of bones. Similarly, excessive alcohol consumption can have detrimental effects on bone health. Alcohol reduces calcium absorption in bones, causes hormonal changes, and leads to nutrient depletion. The liver plays a vital role in metabolizing vitamin D and producing proteins for bone formation. Excessive alcohol consumption can damage the liver, affecting bone health and maintenance. It is important to avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption for better health and disease prevention. Osteoporosis, often referred to as a silent disease, is common in women and can significantly affect their health. Nowadays, there is a lack of seriousness about women's health, especially in rural areas, and it is essential to educate people about women's health. Raising awareness about health issues and their prevention or treatment is crucial, and social media is a powerful platform for this purpose. Healthcare professionals should take the lead in discussing protective care and educating the public.

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Briefs

Israel faces calls for truce after...

FROM PAGE 01
Brigades, Abu Obaida, stated, "The enemy continues to gamble with the lives of its soldiers held captive by the resistance, indifferent to the feelings of their families. Yesterday, it deliberately executed three of them, choosing to kill them rather than release them. This is the same blatant criminal behavior it has practiced and continues to do so against its captives in Gaza, in a desperate attempt to rid itself of the burden of this issue and its well-known obligations." The families of Israeli prisoners held by the resistance in the Gaza Strip have called on the Israeli government to "stop the fighting and start negotiations" with the Palestinian movement Hamas to secure their release. Noam Perry, the daughter of captive Hayim Perry, said, "We only receive bodies. We want you to stop the fighting and start negotiations." She made these remarks during a gathering in Tel Aviv on Saturday evening, following the Israeli army's announcement that three Israeli prisoners held during a military operation in the Gaza Strip had been killed "by mistake." Ruby Chen, the father of 19-year-old captive Itay Chen, said, "It seems like a game of Russian roulette: who will be the next one to find out about the death of a family member? We want to know what proposal is on the government's table."

WHO describes Al-Shifa...

FROM PAGE 01
highlighting the urgent need for a comprehensive humanitarian response to provide them with essential resources such as food, water, and shelter. The humanitarian crisis is further exacerbated by severe shortages of food and safe water for health workers, patients, and displaced individuals at Al-Shifa Hospital. The WHO said it was committed to strengthening Al-Shifa Hospital in the coming weeks to restore at least basic functionality, ensuring it can continue providing critical life-saving services during this crucial time. Activation of up to 20 operating theatres, along with post-operative care services, is contingent upon a consistent supply of fuel, oxygen, medicines, food, and water, the organization said. Urgent requirements include additional specialized medical, nursing, and support staff, including emergency medical teams. Currently, Al-Ahli Arab Hospital is the only partially functional hospital in northern Gaza, accompanied by three minimally functional hospitals - Al-Shifa, Al Awda, and Al Sahaba Medical Complex - a stark decline from the 24 hospitals operating before the start of the Israeli aggression.

PPP's Latif Khosa joins Tehreek...

FROM PAGE 01
He said the country's Constitution is a civil agreement that has the characteristics of all welfare states. Khosa said the state and the country suffered whenever the Constitution was deviated from. "The motherland can become prosperous, if we follow the Constitution. The Constitution has a solution for everything if it is implemented in its true spirit," he said. He said the idea of Pakistan was given by a lawyer, Barrister Muhammad Iqbal, and it was completed by Barrister Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The seasoned politician said the duty of the armed forces is not only to protect the borders but also to assist the state if required during an emergency situation such as floods or in providing security for holding elections. "I have dedicated my services to PTI. I am free to join party of my choosing," Khosa said adding that he would not talk about what he lost or gained in the PPP. Khosa also called for ending "oppression" of the PTI founder, who has been incarcerated since August this year in several cases.

Shan and Hafeez criticize Pak hesitant batting display

Reflecting on the team's performance, Shan Masood expressed disappointment, stating that although facing one of the best bowling attacks globally, Pakistan could have batted more aggressively

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

SYDNEY: Pakistan captain Shan Masood and team director Mohammad Hafeez criticized Pakistan's passive batting approach in the first innings, which ultimately led to a resounding 360-run victory for Australia in the opening Test at Perth. The visitors, chasing a target of 450, crumbled for a mere 89 runs, with Nathan Lyon claiming 2-18 and Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood each securing three wickets. Reflecting on the team's performance, Shan Masood expressed disappointment, stating that although facing one of the best bowling attacks globally, Pakistan could have batted more aggressively. "When you come here, you look for progress. If you told us at the start of the Test that Australia would play 110 overs and we would play 100 overs, I'd take that as a batting unit. Even though we were playing one of the best attacks in the world, we could have batted a bit quicker. We probably missed out on 60 or 70 runs which could have minimized the lead," Masood said in post-match presentation. Similarly, Hafeez revealed that certain tactical errors and a lack of application from the players contributed to the team's inability to dominate crucial situations. "We couldn't execute our skills. We made



Australian bowlers bowled the Pakistan team for a meagre 89 runs in the second innings after setting a mammoth target of 450 runs to register a dominant victory. - DNA

the plans for the team but unfortunately, as a team, we couldn't execute our plans. Obviously the guys wanted to, but they never applied themselves, to be honest. As a team, we made a couple of tactical errors. There were certain situations where we could have dominated. We were prepared but our execution wasn't great," Hafeez said in post-match press conference. In the first innings, after dismissing Aus-

tralia for 487, Pakistan's openers, Abdullah Shafique and Imam-ul-Haq, approached the innings cautiously, adding 74 runs at a rate of two runs per over to negotiate the new ball. However, their slow start saw Pakistan bat for 53 overs on day two, concluding with a score of 132 for 2 at stumps. In contrast, Shan Masood stood out with his aggressive intent, scoring 30 runs off 43 balls in the first innings. Hafeez stressed the fact that

the management cannot drop a player over the performance of just one match. "Yes, he didn't perform up to expectations as a batsman and keeper. But this doesn't mean that we should start doubting someone's skill and saying they can only play in certain conditions," he concluded.

Notably, Australia are currently leading the Test series 1-0 after thumping Pakistan by a huge margin of 360 runs in the first Test match at Perth Stadium. Australian all-rounder Mitchell Marsh was adjudged man-of-the-match for his brilliant performance in both innings with scores of 90 and 63* as well as one wicket in the first innings.

Pakistan and Australia will square off in the second Test match of the three-match Test series at Melbourne Cricket Ground, which is scheduled to start on December 26.

Pakistan Test squad: Shan Masood (c), Aamir Jamal, Abdullah Shafiq, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Khuram Shahzad, Mir Hamza, Mohammad Rizwan, Mohamud Wasim Jr, Nauman Ali, Saim Ayub, Salman Ali Agha, Shaheen Afridi, Saud Shakeel, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Sajid Khan

Young hits century as NZ edge BD in first ODI

DUNEDIN: Opener Will Young cracked a rapid century as New Zealand recovered from a dreadful start to beat Bangladesh by 44 runs on Sunday in the rain-affected first ODI match. The match was shortened to 30 overs each after three rain delays to New Zealand's innings in Dunedin. The home side burst into life in the final stages to post an imposing 239-7. Needing an adjusted target of 245 to win the first ODI of the three-match series, Bangladesh were restricted to 200-9 in a chase that lost momentum. New Zealand bounced back after losing two wickets in the game's opening over when Bangladesh seamer Shoriful Islam had Rachin Ravindra and Henry Nicholls both caught without scoring. A brilliant 171-run stand for the third wicket between Young, who hit 105 off 84 balls, and captain Tom Latham, who finished with 92 runs, handed the advantage back to the



hosts in a match played in overcast conditions throughout. Their stand straddled two stoppages, which reduced the innings from 46 overs to 40 and then to 30. The pair hit out in brutal

fashion over the last 10-4 overs, when the hosts chalked up a remarkable 131 runs. Latham fell short of his eighth ODI century, bowled by off-spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz, but

Young forged on to reach three figures for the third time in the 50-over format before being run out in the final over. Young said his first priority was to steady the innings after its disastrous start. "Tommy and I set up a nice partnership although it was on and off with the rain," Young said. "We came back on with 10 overs to go and we thought why not have a crack? And it came off today. It was nice to get a few out of the middle at the end and it's the icing on the cake to finish with a win." Shoriful was comfortably Bangladesh's best bowler, taking 2-28 off six overs. The chase began brightly, with opener Anamul Haque reaching 43, supported by Towhid Hridoy (33) and Liton Das (22), who all scored at better than a run a ball. However, the pursuit tailed off when Afif Hossain fell for a hard-hit 38 in the 24th over, with his team still needing 80 runs. - Agencies

Ramiz exposes Pakistan's flaws during Perth Test

SYDNEY: Former chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Ramiz Raja exposed Pakistan's weaknesses during the first Test against Australia which they lost by a whopping 360 runs in Perth on Sunday. Raja, who served the PCB for almost two years, stated that intent and technique were missing from Pakistan's disposal as they fumbled on day four. "Intent and technique were both missing from Pak's 'resistance menu'. Blown away in just 31 overs in the second knock was disappointing. Aussies were on another level..." Raja posted on X, formerly Twitter. Pakistani batters failed miserably during the second innings and were all out in just 30.2 overs. It must be noted that during their chase of 450-run target, Pakistan were dismissed for a mere 89 runs, Saud Shakeel top scored for the dismantled visitors' side with 24 runs. Pakistan's improbable attempt to claim their first Test win in Australia since 1995 was shattered by the Nathan Lyon and the home team's formidable pace attack, swiftly concluding the game within four days. Not a single batter could stay against the fierce Australian pace attack consisting of Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins, and Josh Hazlewood. In pursuit of 450 for victory, the visitors surrendered meekly with Lyon claiming 2-18. Starc and Hazlewood also secured three wickets each. Australia declared on the fourth day at 233-5 after Pakistan were dismissed for 271 in their first innings, responding to the hosts' 487. Captain Cummins made the decision after opener Usman Khawaja departed for a resilient 90 on a worsening pitch, following a 126-run partnership with Mitchell Marsh. Marsh remained unbeaten at 63 as Pakistan managed to dismiss Steve Smith and Travis Head early in the day, momentarily sparking hope that quickly faded away. - Agencies

ICC accepts Pakistan's demand regarding CT 2025

DUBAI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) has granted hosting rights for the Champions Trophy 2025, slated for February-March, to Pakistan. The plans so far solely involve holding matches within Pakistan. However, given the anticipated reluctance of the Indian government to permit the BCCI to send the Indian team to Pakistan, a decision on this matter will be taken in due course. Zaka Ashraf, the head of the PCB management committee, recently held discussions with Khalid Al Zarooni, the Vice Chairman of the Emirates Cricket Board, through the Champions Trophy was not specifically addressed during their meeting. Despite this, the UAE has expressed unwavering cooperation with Pakistan. Sources indicate that if India opts not to send its team, the possibility of relocating some Champions Trophy matches to the UAE can't be ruled out. Nevertheless, the ICC would need to bear the additional expenses, and a modification to the tournament format may become necessary. It is noteworthy that while the ICC had previously awarded Pakistan the hosting rights for the Champions Trophy, the formal agreement was only signed this past Friday, following a prolonged impasse. - Agencies

Alcaraz suffers setback ahead of 2024 AO

PARIS: Carlos Alcaraz faced a major setback ahead of the much-anticipated Australian Open 2024 as his coach, Juan Carlos Ferrero, will not be able to travel with him, reported Spanish news outlet MARCA on Sunday. Alcaraz, 20, emerged as one of the best players in the world and already has two Grand Slams - US Open and Wimbledon - to his name. The Spaniard would be aiming for his first major in Australia but the setback he suffered today could create problems for him. Ferrero is recovering from an arthroscopy on his left knee due to which he will not be able to travel alongside the rising star. He is to remain on the sidelines and will join Alcaraz in the Masters 1000 in Indiana Wells from March 6 to 17. Alcaraz, accompanied by his agent Alberto Molina, is set to participate in

an exhibition in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. However, a change in coaching personnel is on the horizon as Samuel Lopez is expected to take on the role of coach for the Australian Open. While Lopez is currently coaching Pablo Carreno, he has previously worked with Alcaraz during the Queen's Open 500, where the young talent clinched the title. During the South American tour in February, Antonio Martínez Cascales will step in as Alcaraz's coach for the tournaments in Buenos Aires (February 12 to 18) and Rio de Janeiro (February 19 to 25). This strategic coaching adjustment aims to provide optimal support for Alcaraz as he navigates through these crucial tournaments. The dynamic changes in Alcaraz's coaching team reflect a thoughtful approach to enhance his



performance on the international tennis stage, showcasing a strategic and adaptive mindset as he continues to make waves in the tennis world. Alcaraz is scheduled to undergo training sessions next week alongside Flavio Cobolli, the Italian player currently ranked 101. Additionally, on Thursday, the 21st, Alcaraz will undergo a height assessment in preparation for his participation in the Ferrero Tennis Academy, where he will join Janik Sinner for pre-season training in Alicante. - Agencies

Bangladesh clinch maiden U19 Asia Cup title

Rahman Shibli's 129 followed by the combined bowling efforts by Bangladesh bowlers helped them thump the UAE by 195 runs

SPORTS DESK

DUBAI: Ashiqur Rahman Shibli's 129 followed by the combined bowling efforts by Bangladesh bowlers helped them thump the United Arab Emirates (UAE) by 195 runs and win the ACC Men's U19 Asia Cup 2023 for the first time. After being invited to bat, Bangladesh U19 lost their first wicket in five overs with only 14 runs on the board. Ashiqur Rahman Shibli was then joined by Chowdhur Md Rizwan and together they knitted a solid 125-run partnership for the second wicket. Dhruv Parashar dismissed Rizwan (60) to break the partnership at a total of 135. Shibli was then involved in a partnership with Ariful Islam, scoring 86 runs from 76 balls for the fourth wicket Ayman Ahamed removed the latter. Ariful Islam departed after scoring 50 off 40, with the help of six boundaries. Ashiqur Rahman Shibli waged a lone war from his end, while UAE bowlers kept picking wickets at regular intervals from the other end. Bangladesh skipper Mah-

fuzur Rahman Rabby was the only notable contributor from the lower order with a cameo of 21 off 11. Shibli played a brilliant innings of 129 runs from 149 balls, laced with 12 bound-



aries and one six, which came to an end in the final over bowled by Ahamed. Bangladesh U19 finished their innings at 282-8. Ayman Ahamed topped the bowling charts for UAE with the figures of 4-52, while Omid Rehman picked two wickets. In response, UAE failed to get the start they wanted to chase a 283-run target as they slipped to 39-4 inside ten overs courtesy of brilliant bowling by Maruf Mridha and Rohanat Doullah Borson. Dhruv Parashar was the only batter who showed resistance against Bangladesh bowlers, but he could not get support from the other end as the wickets kept tumbling at an alarming rate. Bangladesh bowlers bowled exceptionally well to bundle the UAE team for a meagre total of 87 inside 25 overs. Parashar remained unbeaten with the top score of 25 off 40 with the help of two boundaries. Akshat Rai was the only other UAE batter to cross the double figures with 11 runs from 22 balls. Mridha and Borson led the destruction by Bangladesh bowlers, picking three wickets each, whereas Iqbal Hossain Emon and Sheikh Paveez Jibon picked two each. Ashiqur Rahman Shibli was adjudged the man of the match as well as the man of the tournament as he scored the most runs (255) in the tournament.

ECP resumes training of officials

FROM PAGE 01

DROs are currently under training by senior ECP officers. The training is expected to be completed by December 19. In the federal capital, a letter has been sent by DC Islamabad, in his capacity as a DRO, to the Federal Directorate of Education instructing that no staff be allowed to go on leave. Authorities have also been asked not to grant leaves to government employees, with maternity and medical leaves exempted from the order. Concerned staff responsible for supervising electoral activities has been ordered to remain in the city where they have been posted till the February 8 polls.

Australia thrash Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 01

Marsh remained unbeaten on 63 after Pakistan had removed Steve Smith and Travis Head early in the day to give themselves hope, which quickly evaporated. Facing a daunting chase, they got off to a horror start with Abdullah Shafique out for two in the first over, nicking an unplayable Starc ball to Alex Carey behind the stumps. Captain Shan Masood, in his first Test in charge, did not last much longer, edging to Carey off Hazlewood to leave Pakistan in dire straits at 17-2. Starc also accounted for Imamul Haq, trapping him lbw for 10, before Babar Azam and Saud Shakeel put up some resistance. But that crumbled when Azam got an edge to Cummins on 14, with Carey again collecting.

Lyon joins the 500 club

FROM PAGE 01

Babar Azam in the deep while on the attack. Captain Pat Cummins made the declaration for Australia after the dismissal, meaning Marsh finished on 63* from 68 balls. Nathan Lyon's calf injury wasn't quite a case of paving paradise. But in the last three Ashes Tests, Australia got a glimpse into what life will look like once Lyon is gone - and it wasn't pretty. And as he claimed a monumental 500th Test wicket, in his first match on return, becoming just the eighth man in history to do so and only the second off-spinner behind Muthiah Muralidaran, it was not lost on anyone just how much he means to this Australian team.

Day of mourning...

FROM PAGE 01

Sheikh Nawaf had died on Saturday, aged 86, according to the royal court, just over three years after assuming power. The cause of his death was not immediately disclosed. He was admitted to a hospital late last month due to what the state news agency described at the time as an emergency health problem but said he was in a stable condition. Crown Prince Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah, 83, who has been Kuwait's de facto ruler since 2021, when the frail emir handed over most of his duties, was named as Sheikh Nawaf's successor.

Judges, spouses...

FROM PAGE 01

from body search at all airports," read a notification issued by the Ministry of Aviation on October 12. On December 16, The News reported that Pakistan was in talks with a UAE company for installing eGates at the Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad airports for self-immigration services similar to developed countries. Airport sources had said the installation of eGates at Karachi's Jinnah International Airport, Lahore's Allama Iqbal Airport and Islamabad International Airport was under consideration to expedite the immigration service for passengers of developed countries. Like the airports of Birmingham, Edinburgh, Dubai and other developed countries, passengers at the three major airports of Pakistan would be able to avoid the hassle of queues and will be able to easily sail through the automated self-service immigration barriers.

Briefs

Australia
on
alert: cyclone
Jasper
approaches

SYDNEY : A tropical cyclone was building strength as it rolled towards northeastern Australia, with authorities warning "life-threatening" floods could swamp coastal regions for days. Tropical Cyclone Jasper was expected to make landfall on Wednesday but forecasters said gale-force winds were already pummeling some towns. Some 8,000 homes are already without power, the Queensland state government said, while police have started closing major roads expected to be hit by flooding. Meteorologists said Jasper was "strengthening" into a Category Two storm as it churned towards the mainland across the Coral Sea. It was likely to bring flash flooding and winds of up to 140 kilometres (87 miles) per hour, said forecaster Laura Boekel from the government Bureau of Meteorology. "We've already started to see the impacts of this cyclone and that will get worse as we move through today," she said. "The major risk for today is flash flooding." The tourist cities of Cairns and Port Douglas — both gateways to the Great Barrier Reef — are in the path of the storm. Deputy Premier Steven Miles said some parts of the state were already seeing "cyclonic conditions". He said "dangerous and life-threatening" floods could linger for "days to come". —APP

Tensions run
high as DRC
approaches
election

KINSHASA : The Democratic Republic of Congo gears up for elections on Wednesday that could consolidate its democracy or unleash fresh violence as political tensions threaten to boil over. About 100,000 people are standing in the four votes, with President Felix Tshisekedi seeking another term after winning a disputed election in 2018. The sheer size of the DRC, which is roughly the size of continental western Europe, means staging elections is a logistical nightmare. The country is also one of the world's poorest and has little high-quality infrastructure, with the CENI electoral commission still struggling to distribute voting material to more than 175,000 polling booths. Political scientist Gaucher Kizito Mbusa told AFP that voting should go smoothly in the more densely populated zones but would be difficult in rural areas due to insecurity and poor roads. The UN Security Council on Friday approved a government request that the outgoing peacekeeping mission in the country, MONUSCO, provide logistical support beyond the three violence-wracked eastern provinces where it is deployed. A diplomat told AFP that not all voting stations will open on December 20 due to a lack of equipment, saying some may operate a day or two after or even later. In a report published on Saturday, Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned of electoral violence that "risks compromising the holding of the vote". The NGO says it has documented clashes between supporters of rival parties. —Agencies

Erdogan visits Hungary,
seeks roadmap for trade

Erdogan, who will travel with Cabinet members, will meet with Hungary's President Katalin Novak as well as Prime Minister Victor Orban

Ankara : President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is expected to visit Hungary's capital, Budapest, today to mark the 100th anniversary of the Türkiye-Hungary Friendship Agreement of 1923 and discuss bilateral cooperation in areas including culture, trade and diplomacy. Besides the political agenda, the two countries are expected to work on a road map to increase the bilateral trade volume, which stands at \$3.3 billion (TL 95.64 billion) so far this year, to \$6 billion. Diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Hungary, interrupted after World War I, were re-established with the Treaty of Friendship signed in Istanbul on Dec. 18, 1923.

Erdogan, who will travel with Cabinet members, will meet with Hungary's President Katalin Novak as well as Prime Minister Victor Orban.



The High-Level Strategic Council Meeting will also be held. Ministers of the two countries will evaluate all relations aspects and sign new agreements. Türkiye exports various products to Hungary, from cotton textiles to iron and steel goods, especially motor vehicles, machinery and electronic devices. Among the products

imported from this country, machines and devices, boilers, plastic and plastic-made goods, motor vehicles and organic chemical preparations stand out. Important agreements are also being signed between the two countries in the energy field. This year, the Turkish Petroleum Pipeline Corporation (BOTAS) and Hungarian public natural gas company MVM signed a natural gas export agreement this year. According to the agreement, Türkiye plans to export natural gas to Hungary starting next year. The two countries are also expected to cooperate on using Türkiye's liquefied natural gas infrastructure and natural gas storage facilities. On the other hand, the two countries will discuss cooperation with third-world countries and entities. Türkiye and Hungary cooperate with the European Union and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). Africa is expected to be on the agenda as another field for cooperation. Speaking to Anadolu Agency (AA), Türkiye's Ambassador to Budapest, Gülşen Karanis Ekşio lu, said that the "2024 Türkiye-Hungary Culture Year" will be launched within the scope of Erdoğan's meaningful

visits. "We will raise our relations from the 'strategic partnership' level to the enhanced strategic partnership level. Energy, economic and commercial relations, defense industry and cultural fields stand out as priority areas for the development of cooperation." Relations between Türkiye and Hungary were elevated to the level of strategic partnership in 2013 after establishing the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council. "In particular, 2023 was a year in which our bilateral relations gained momentum with mutual contacts and visits at the highest level. "This is the most concrete indicator of the importance we attach to our mutual relations," the ambassador added. Ekşio lu reiterated that Novak, Orban and Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto paid visits to Türkiye.

Japan to
allocate \$54
billion for
defense

ISTANBUL : Japan is gearing up to strengthen its national defense by allocating 7.7 trillion yen (\$54 billion) to the defense budget for fiscal year 2024, according to media reports. The country aims to bolster its national defense amid increasing security concerns in the Asia-Pacific region and regional threats. Japan is considering the budget that will be in effect from April 2024 to March 2025, said Tokyo-based Kyodo News. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's Cabinet is expected to approve the allocation later this week. If the budget is formally approved, it will be recorded as the highest-volume defense budget allocation to date. The record-breaking budget will facilitate expenditures for the national production of long-range missiles capable of striking enemy bases. The focus of the budget includes the production of land-to-sea guided missiles, the design of a new fighter jet and research of innovative defense equipment. —APP

Philippines initiates S.China
sea energy exploration

WEB DESK

MANILA : President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. of the Philippines has expressed the nation's intention to address "exploration challenges" in the South China Sea, aiming to initiate fresh energy exploration initiatives in the abundant region to meet the country's energy requirements.

Marcos, in an interview with Japanese media on Saturday, said tensions in the South China Sea have "increased rather than diminished" in recent months, warning that a "more assertive China" posed a "real challenge" to its Asian neighbors. The Philippines and China have resumed discussions about jointly exploring oil and gas resources in the South China Sea, where the two nations



have sparred for decades over sovereign rights to develop natural resources in the strategic waterway. But "very little progress" has been made about the talks, Marcos said, according to a press release from his office as he attends a Tokyo summit of Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). "We are still at a deadlock right now," Marcos said as he emphasized his country's right to exploit energy reserves in the West

Philippines Sea when the Philippines wants to reduce its reliance on fossil fuel and coal and transition to liquefied natural gas. Manila refers to the portion of the South China Sea that is within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as the West Philippine Sea. Efforts to find a legally viable way to cooperate on energy exploration have stalled repeatedly, with the previous administration abandoning talks in June last year, citing constitutional constraints and issues of sovereignty. A week ago, Manila and Beijing traded accusations over a collision of their vessels near a disputed shoal in the South China Sea as tensions over claims in the vital waterway escalated. In addition to the Philippines, ASEAN members Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei claim

parts of the South China Sea disputed by China, which claims almost all of the sea, a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 said China's claims had no legal basis, a ruling the United States supports but Beijing rejects. "I'm afraid we'll have to be able to say that tensions have increased rather than diminished for the past months or the past years," Marcos said as he underlined the need to resolve issues peacefully. The challenge that China posed required "new solutions," said Marcos, who has vowed to defend his country's rights in the South China Sea after the collision, which Manila has described as a "serious escalation."

Serbian voters head
to polls to shape
nation's future

BELGRADE : Serbia Serbians are heading to the polls on Sunday to choose new members of the country's 250-seat parliament, 120-member Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and municipal councils. Polling stations opened at 7 a.m. local time and will close at 8 p.m. for around 6.5 million eligible voters. Voting will be cast in 8,273 election centers in Serbia and 81 election centers in 35 countries. A total of 2,817 candidates are competing on 18 lists and 126 seats are needed for a majority in the Assembly. The newly-elected president and the new government will need to deal with major issues that Serbia is facing. One is in the breakaway region of Kosovo, which declared independence in February 2008. But Belgrade claims it is a breakaway province. Serbia has also refused to impose sanctions on Russia for the Ukraine war. The government is facing pressure from the European Union and the US to recognize Kosovo's independence and impose sanctions on Russia. Serbs living in Kosovo will not be able to vote in the Serbian general elections, according to the Election Committee. Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti said earlier that they need a special agreement with Serbia so that members of the Serbian community in Kosovo who have dual citizenship can vote in Serbian parliamentary elections on the territory of Kosovo. But Anadolu reported earlier that Serbs in Kosovo will not be able to vote, according to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic. Vucic's remarks came when Anadolu asked if NATO would take additional security measures for Serbs in Kosovo for the Dec.17 snap general elections. He claimed that Serbs are going to be barred from their basic right due to Kurti's involvement in the electoral process. Serbs living in Kosovo were not allowed by Kosovar authorities to participate in the last Serbian elections in 2020 when the alliance led by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) that was headed by Vucic came to power. Following these developments, Kosovo Serbs will be taken to Serbia by bus to vote, as in the 2022 elections. Major runners At the top of the list is "Aleksandar Vucic - Serbia must not stop," formed by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which has been in power since 2012 and its coalition partners. Vucic announced in April that he stepped down as leader of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) but party representatives believe he is still their face and leader. He also addressed the public by attending SNS rallies during the 45-day election campaign. "I think we will gain the absolute majority in the parliament on our own. This is the goal. We will not be happy with the opposite situation. I wish the victory of the SNS in all the cities that the opposition claims to win," said Vucic. Second is the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), which was once chaired by former President Slobodan Milosevic, who died while his trial was being conducted at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for crimes he committed during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia Herzegovina. Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, who is on the list, is competing under the slogan: "Prime Minister of New Serbia." —APP

Japan
scientists
generate AI
images from
brain

TOKYO : Japanese scientists have succeeded in creating the world's first mental images of objects and landscapes from human brain activities by using artificial intelligence (AI) technology, local media reported. The team of scientists from the National Institutes for Quantum Science and Technology (QST) and other organizations was able to produce rough images of a leopard, with a recognizable mouth, ears and spotted pattern, as well as objects like an airplane with red lights on its wings, Kyodo News reported Saturday. The technology, dubbed "brain decoding," enables the visualization of perceptual contents based on brain activity, and could be applied to the medical and welfare fields, the report said. During research, participants were shown 1,200 images of objects and landscapes, with their brain signals and the images analyzed and quantified using functional magnetic resonance imaging, or fMRI. —Agencies

SA visa woes
strain economy,
spark concerns

CAPE TOWN : The South African economy is grappling with a significant visa bottleneck, as tens of thousands of foreign executives, engineers and other key workers face a prolonged one-year visa wait, which business groups warn is costing investment and jeopardizing the country's standing as a continental hub. Already suffering from lackluster growth and high unemployment, the government has acknowledged that a skill shortage is throttling development. And a huge backlog in visa processing has worsened the problem. Long visa waits are common in much of the world, but South Africa has some of the biggest jams, business groups say. "We have various cases of people who have been waiting for more than a year," said Pamina Bohrer, secretary-general of the Italian-South African Chamber of Trade and Industries. Besides the "psychological stress" caused to families whose lives are put on hold, firms are suspending or scrapping expansion plans in the country, she said. "The backlog is staggering," Busisiwe Mavuso, head of Business Leadership South Africa, which groups dozens of international companies, including BP, Nestle and Unilever, wrote in a newsletter in November. "The fact that companies can't fill the positions means they can't invest and expand." "Critical" skills backlog committee in September that severe understaffing meant 74,000 applications for all types of visas were awaiting processing. The ministry did not reply to a request for comment on the latest figures. However, concerns have surged since the coronavirus pandemic. In 2021, only 3,047 critical skills visas were processed, down 45% from 2019, according to official figures. About two-thirds were rejected. At a time when South Africa badly needs skilled workers, its vetting is cumbersome and erratic, experts say. Applicants have to provide medical reports, criminal records and travel plans. Business groups complain about inconsistent decision-making. Some applications are processed in weeks while others languish, they said. In some cases, applicants get a permit, but their spouses do not. Some are refused for minor issues like a missing phone number. "Uncertainty" a team tasked by President Cyril Ramaphosa to investigate visa delays said South Africa needs engineers, information technology experts and managers. But getting a work visa can take 48 weeks or longer, it said. Waiting times in Nigeria and Kenya were more than four times shorter. An entrepreneur replying to an anonymous survey by the EU Chamber of Commerce in South Africa last year said the visa quagmire pushed his firm to choose Ghana for a new Africa market office. —DNA

Myanmar
ethnic
fighters
capture town
from military

BANGKOK, Thailand: Ethnic minority fighters battling Myanmar's junta said that they seized a trading hub in Shan state, days after China said it had mediated a temporary cease-fire. Clashes have raged across Myanmar's northern Shan state since the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) launched a joint offensive late October. The three allied groups — known as the Three Brotherhood Alliance — say they have captured military positions and border hubs vital for trade with China, posing what analysts say is the biggest military challenge to the junta since it seized power in 2021. On Thursday, Beijing announced a temporary cease-fire between the alliance and the Myanmar military. There have been peaceful spells in MNDAA-held areas, but clashes have continued in areas controlled by the TNLA and the AA. Ta'ang National Liberation Army fighters prepare their weapons amid clashes with Myanmar's military in Namsan town, in the northern Shan State, on December 13, 2023. (AFP)—APP

Türkiye urges US, Germany to act swiftly on F-16, Eurofighter deals

Türkiye announced last month it was in talks with Britain and Spain to buy 40 Eurofighter jets, though Germany has objected to the idea

FOREIGN DESK


ANKARA : Türkiye said that it expects prompt and tangible steps from the United States on the F-16 fighter jet deal while also urging Germany to show a stance aligning with the NATO spirit regarding its request to buy Eurofighter Typhoon warplanes. Ankara has been frustrated by the prolonged process of its request to acquire F-16 jets from the U.S. it seeks to refresh its air force. This prompted it to begin discussing buying Eurofighters, produced by a consortium involving Germany, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom. Türkiye announced last month it was in talks with Britain and Spain to buy 40 Euro-

fighter jets, though Germany has objected to the idea. National Defense Minister Yaşar Güler said "technical meetings" regarding the procurement of F-16 has been completed, stressing that Türkiye expects "positive and solid steps" from the U.S. "We expect the process to start with positive and concrete steps as soon as possible," Güler told journalists in the Turkish capital of Ankara at a year-end evaluation meeting. In October 2021, Türkiye requested to buy 40 Lockheed Martin F-16 fighters and 79 modernization kits for its existing warplanes. U.S. President Joe Biden's administration has repeatedly promised to move forward with the \$20-billion (TL 580-billion) sale. Still, there have been objections

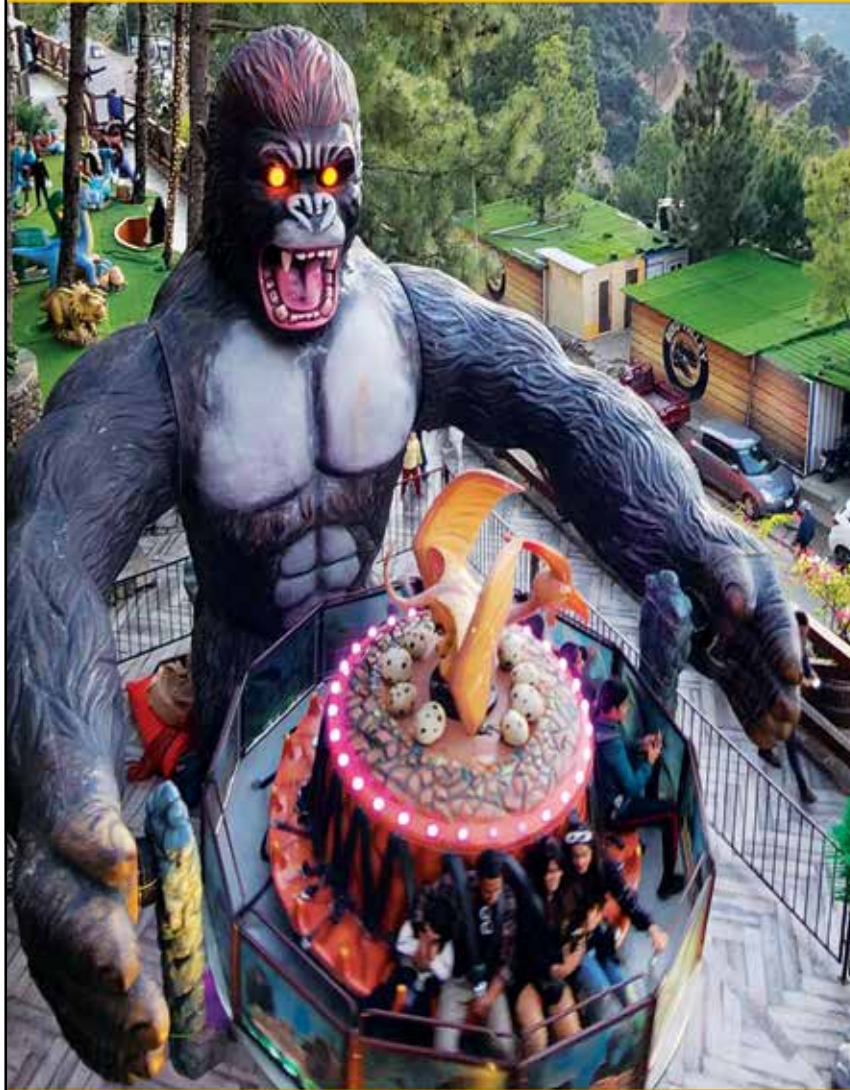
in the U.S. Congress over Türkiye's delaying Sweden's bid to join the NATO alliance. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on Friday that Biden was approaching the issue of selling F-16s and modernization kits positively but that Washington's main issue was the ratification of Sweden's NATO bid. Developments regarding the deal "made up the main points" of Erdoğan's call with Biden a day earlier, he said. "Biden said he has a positive approach and that he is ready to make all sorts of proposals to Congress about this," Erdoğan noted. Erdoğan earlier this month signaled that the Turkish Parliament will only act on Sweden if the U.S. Congress approves Türkiye's request. Türkiye's request aims to replace the aging F-16 fleet

in the inventory of the Air Forces Command, which is planned to be phased out starting in the 2030s. The project was launched in 2016. Türkiye sought to purchase Lockheed Martin's more advanced F-35 fighter jets, but the U.S. removed it from the multinational program to buy and help build the warplane in 2019 after it acquired S-400 air missile defense systems from Russia. Pointing out that the most important issue in the procurement process is sanctions, Güler said they always express that "allies should understand Türkiye's global and regional function well and therefore immediately give up such restriction practices." "We emphasize that a strong Türkiye and a strong Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) mean a strong NATO and a strong alli-

ance, and a strong fight against terrorism," he noted. He said Türkiye sees Eurofighter jets as the best alternative. He said there are plans to purchase 40 Eurofighters, 20 in the first phase and 20 later, the highest version. Ankara has repeatedly criticized Germany for not approving its request to acquire the jets. Güler said they expect a German response aligning with the "spirit of (NATO) alliance." "The U.K.'s support and approach on this issue is important as it sets an example for other allies. Spain also provides similar support to us. Regarding Germany's objections, it would be the right approach to take options and decisions in line with the common security perspective, based on the spirit of alliance."



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Briefs

PPP poised to form next govt in centre

NAZIR SYAL

KARACHI: As general elections draw near, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Murad Ali Shah on Sunday said that the party is well poised to form the next government in the Centre. Speaking to a private news channel, the former Sindh chief executive ruled out any 'competition' for PPP in Sindh while noting that the party has secured majority in Balochistan too. Referring to PML-N surpemo Nawaz Sharif visit to Balochistan, Murad Ali Shah said that the former premier did not even leave the hotel during his stay and held meetings in the room. "[PPP leadership] Asif Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto visited individuals' homes in Balochistan," he added. Furthermore, the PPP leader said the party would also secure seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). "We are targeting to get enough seats to form PPP's government in the Centre," he added. The former Sindh CM further said that Bilawal Bhutto would be the candidate for prime ministership. "PPP would soon bring its own prime minister and provide relief to common man by introducing necessary reforms," he added. In apparent reference to PTI, Murad said a political party, which demanded immediate election, hatched conspiracy to delay the polls. He also hailed the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) for 'foiling the conspiracy to delay the elections'.

Body of late Kuwaiti Emir laid to rest

DNA

DUBAI: The body of late Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah was laid to rest at the Sulaibikhat Cemetery on Sunday following a prayer service. The emir passed away on Saturday aged 86. Sheikh Nawaf, whose casket was draped in Kuwait's flag, was buried alongside his kin, after prayers at Bilal bin Rabah mosque. The late Emir's funeral was attended by members of the Al Sabah family and speaker of Kuwait's parliament, according to state news agency KUNA. His successor, Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Sabah, was seen shedding a tear at the prayer service. Sheikh Mishal and the royal family will personally receive the condolences of people at the Diwan of Al-Sabah Family at Bayan Palace on Monday and Tuesday. Dignitaries from around the world paid respects to Sheikh Nawaf, whose six decades in public service included minister of defence, interior, labour and deputy chief of the national guard.

Afghan interim govt is arming TTP, other terror groups

The situation reached the boiling point in October when the administration in Islamabad announced a deportation drive to send all "illegal migrants," mostly Afghans, back to their countries while citing security reasons

NEWS REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The evidence of foreign weapons smuggled from Afghanistan and being used in terror attacks in Pakistan have emerged as the constant supply of these arms to a terrorist outfit like TTP has serious consequences for regional security. The trend has emerged after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the allied forces left a massive quantity of military hardware in the war-torn country at a time when Pakistani armed forces have been busy in fighting the TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) for the last two decades. Meanwhile, it isn't just the TTP with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) too used the US weapons in its attacks on Frontier Corps (FC) camps at Noshki and Panjgur. Details show that the TTP members armed with US-made weapons had targeted the Zhob garrison, two border posts in Chitral. Similarly, US weapons were recovered from the terrorists carrying out attacks in Tank as well as targeting the Mianwali airbase. Meanwhile, the attackers in the recent terror hit in the Daraban area of Dera Ismail Khan were not only equipped with the US

weapons but also night-vision gear. On the other hand, the Pakistani authorities seized Customs officials and security forces seized a large quantity of US-made weapons at Pakistan-Afghanistan border earlier this week on Dec 12. A variety of weapons - including military-grade assault rifles like M4, night vision equipment, laser devices and thousands of rounds - were among the items recovered from a vehicle which was seemingly transporting onions. It is now clear that the haphazard US withdrawal resulted in enhancing the TTP's capabilities of carrying out cross-border attacks from Afghan soil. Meanwhile, it is not just Pakistan but also international media which has highlighted this fact, as the Eurasian Times reported that the TTP was using US-made weapons in terror attacks across Pakistan. The seriousness of this issue can be gauged by the figures shared by the Pentagon, which show the United States supplied a total of 427,300 weapons - \$18.6 billion in value - to the Afghan forces from 2005 to August 2021. And 300,000 were left behind after the US withdrawal, resulting in a sharp increase in terrorism in the region since then. These developments a proof that the

Taliban regime in Afghanistan has not only been arming the TTP but also providing an opportunity to other terrorist outfits. Hence, the claims made by the interim Afghan government about not allowing its territory to be used against Pakistan are meaningless as the cross-border arms trafficking means that the innocent citizens and the security forces remain a constant target of the heavily-armed TTP. Meanwhile, A prominent Pakistani religious politician will visit Kabul ahead of the next general elections in February, his party confirmed on Saturday, after receiving a formal invitation from the Afghan envoy amid strained bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries. Faced with a sharp spike in militant violence and suicide bombings, Pakistan has blamed Afghanistan for not doing enough to prevent cross-border attacks by armed factions like the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) whose leadership is said to be based in the neighboring state. The situation reached the boiling point in October when the administration in Islamabad announced a deportation drive to send all "illegal migrants," mostly Afghans, back to their countries while citing security rea-

sons. Maulana Fazlur Rehman, leader of the Jamaat-e-Ulama-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) party, who has been invited by the Afghan administration, was also attacked by militants when his public rally was targeted by a suicide bomber in the Bajaur tribal district on July 30 in which 63 people were killed. Rehman, who wants to win maximum seats from the northwestern tribal belt and the rest of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, has raised security concerns in the area where JUI-F has been finding it increasingly difficult to run its election campaign. "The trip [of Maulana Fazlur Rehman] is not taking place under any specific agenda but he has been officially invited to visit Kabul," his party spokesman, Aslam Ghauri, told Arab News. "There is no date fixed but his trip will take place after the filing of the nomination papers for the upcoming elections." Pakistan's national polls are scheduled to be held on Feb. 8, 2024. Earlier in the day, a statement released by the JUI-F said Afghanistan's interim envoy, Sardar Ahmad Shakib, had met its leader in Islamabad on behalf of the Taliban administration. Last month, Rehman had expressed his reservations over the deportation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

JI rejects alliance with PML-N, PPP

DNA

LAHORE: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Ameer SirajulHaq declared that his party will not form an alliance with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in the upcoming elections. Emphasizing the commitment to fight on the manifesto of peace, progress, and prosperity, SirajulHaq outlined key priorities for the future on Sunday. He said his party aims to conclude the construction of Governor Houses and Commissioner Houses on 8,000 acres and optimize financial management and fund utilization. Additionally, the implementation of an emergency plan in the education and healthcare sectors has been pledged. SirajulHaq expressed the intention to establish rehabilitation training centres for the unemployed and deliver a message of real change to the people. The JI chief criticized the PML-N and PPP, accusing them of bringing destruction to the country. The announcement firmly states that there will be no alliance with these two major political parties in the upcoming elections.

60 migrants feared drowned off Libya

DNA

TRIPOLI: More than 60 migrants are believed to have drowned in a shipwreck off the coast of Libya, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said. Citing survivors, the UN agency said on Saturday the vessel left the city of Zuwara with around 86 people on board. It said high waves swamped the boat and that 61 migrants, including children, were missing and presumed dead. Libya is among the main departure points for migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean and enter Europe. The IOM estimates that more than 2,200 people have drowned while attempting the crossing this year alone, making it one of the most dangerous migration routes in the world. The agency said most of the victims of the latest incident were from Nigeria, Gambia, and other African countries, the AFP news agency reports.



KARACHI: The participants of a 'Christmas Aman Rally' seen on a vehicle while passing through Jackup line Road. - APP

France calls for 'immediate and durable' Gaza truce

TEL AVIV: France has called for an "immediate and durable truce" in the Israel-Hamas war, saying that it is deeply concerned about the situation in Gaza. French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna arrived in Israel Sunday where she was due to press for an "immediate and durable" truce in the war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Colonna will meet her Israeli counterpart Eli Cohen in Tel Aviv, as Israel presses on with its military offensive after the October 7 attacks that has left much of Gaza in ruins and sent tensions spiralling across the region. Paris on Saturday condemned an Israeli strike in Gaza that killed a French foreign ministry employee, demanding that "light be shed" on the circumstances. Colonna is also due to meet the families of French hostages still held in Gaza and to call for an "immediate and durable new humanitarian truce," according to a foreign ministry statement. The truce should lead to a lasting cease-fire with the aim of releasing all hostages and delivering aid to Gaza, it said. Israel has come under increasing international pressure for a cease-fire in Gaza, where its offensive against Hamas militants has killed at least 18,800 people, mostly women and children, according to the territory's Hamas government. The offensive comes in response to Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attacks in southern Israel in which about 1,140 people were killed, mostly civilians, and about 250 taken hostage, according to latest Israeli figures. The French top diplomat will also meet her Palestinian counterpart Riyad Al-Maliki in the occupied West Bank. Shortly before her arrival in Israel, Colonna condemned increasing attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians in the West Bank. - Agencies

Biden's Muslim nominee judge faces 'Islamophobic' questions

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Various organisations and senators have lashed out at three Republican senators for posing hostile questions to President Joe Biden's historic judicial nominee Adeel Mangi during his recent confirmation hearing. He is the first Muslim-American nominee for the federal appellate court. During the Wednesday hearing by the Senate judiciary body, Senators Tom Cotton, Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley rudely questioned AdeelMangi to express his views on the 9/11 World Trade Centre towers attack and the October 7 attack in Israel as well as Tel Aviv's position in the Palestine issue, reported HuffPost. If confirmed, he will become the first Muslim American appeals court judge and third federal judge. The US president nominated Mangi to the US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in Philadelphia. Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Deputy Director Edward Ahmed Mitchell condemned the senators "for subjecting MrMangi to irrelevant, hostile questions about Israel and Palestine". He said: "Singling out a Muslim judicial nominee and forcing him to answer 'gotcha questions' about the Middle East simply

because of faith or because of his tangential connections to Muslims who comment on the Middle East is Islamophobic and un-American. So is raising the hateful trope that presumptively assumes that Muslims are antisemitic." The CAIR deputy director called on all senators "to reject this nonsense and start assessing Muslim American judicial nominees based on their expertise and qualifications, like all other nominees". To a query, AdeelMangi replied, "Any act of antisemitism or any bigotry including anti-Muslim bigotry on college campuses is abhorred. My children will be going to universities. I want them to feel safe and I want the children of my Jewish friends and colleagues to feel safe." Cruz constantly tried to press Mangi to express if he felt any justification for the Hamas attack on Israel, to which the latter repeatedly condemned terrorism. "I have no patience none for any attempts to justify or defend those events," Mangi said of the October 7 attacks. At one moment, the senator's grilling became so hostile that Senator Dick Durbin, the committee chair, had to intervene. Hawley asked the Muslim nominee if in his opinion Israel was a colonial state. Mangi said neither the question was relevant to his confirmation for the position nor he was an expert on the issue.



Russia wants to improve ties with NATO, not fight: Vladimir Putin

Moscow has no fundamental disputes with Western countries, but they insist on confrontation, the president has said

FOREIGN DESK

RUSSIA does not have the slightest reason to attack NATO, President Vladimir Putin has said, adding that the US-led military bloc is well aware that Moscow has no plans to do so. In an interview with Russian journalist Pavel Zarubin aired on Sunday, Putin was asked to comment on remarks by US President Joe Biden, who said earlier this month that Moscow might attack the alliance if it prevails in the Ukraine conflict. The Russian leader dismissed his American counterpart's speculation as "nonsense." "I think that President Biden understands that this is just a figure of speech to justify his misguided Russian policy," he said, explaining that he does not believe Moscow's "strategic defeat" would be in the interests of the US. Putin went on to say that the presi-



Hungary threatens to block Bulgaria's Schengen bid

SOFIA: Hungary will block Bulgaria's entry into the EU's passport-free Schengen area unless Sofia lifts its transit tax on Russian gas, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto warned in a video posted on Facebook on Saturday. According to Szijarto, Budapest will use its veto power in the European Council if necessary. "We have made it clear to the Bulgarians that if they keep this in place for long, if they jeopardize the safety of Hungary's energy supply for long, then we will veto their Schengen entry," he said, calling Bulgaria's tax "scandalous and hostile," and "completely contrary to European legislation," as it risks stopping gas supplies to Hungary and other EU nations which receive Russian gas through Bulgaria. Sofia imposed an additional tax of 20 Bulgarian lev (\$10.76) per megawatt-hour of Russian natural gas entering Bulgaria in October. Hungary, which relies on Russia for most of its gas needs, called the measure "unacceptable," saying it poses a threat to Hungary's energy security. Budapest has been pressuring Sofia to cancel it ever since. - Agencies

dent of the United States - which he called the "master" of NATO - surely knows that "Russia has no interest... geopolitically, economically or militarily... in waging war against NATO." Moscow, he added, has no claims on the territory of the bloc's member states and only seeks to improve ties with them. However, the West's political course is making this increasingly difficult, Putin noted, citing the example of Finland, which applied to join NATO after the start of the Ukraine conflict and became a full-fledged member in April. Russia has no disputes with its Nordic neighbor, Putin said, noting that the last territorial claims were settled after the end of WWII.

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