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Detailed News On Page-08

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Detailed News On Page-08



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Detailed News On Page-06



Israel continues Gaza attack amid ceasefire calls

The Red Crescent said that one of its ambulance centers in Jabalia in northern Gaza is under tight siege by the Israeli army, pointing out that there are 127 people inside it, including displaced families, wounded civilians and employees

NEWS DESK

GAZA: Arab media reported on Wednesday that head of Hamas's political office Ismail Haniyeh was in Egypt's Cairo, "in what could signal a new phase of possible truce negotiations". More information on Haniyeh's presence in Cairo, or ceasefire talks was not yet available. Earlier, the head of Hamas's political bureau says the Palestinian resistance stands "firm on the battlefield" despite two and a half months of Israeli war crimes in the besieged Gaza Strip. In a meeting with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in the Qatari capital Doha on Wednesday, Ismail Haniyeh said the volume of the Israeli military's aerial, naval, and ground attacks on the besieged Gaza has been unprecedented. "The Zionist regime and its allies thought that they could eliminate the resistance this way and force it to raise the white flag," he noted. "The resistance, however, has still stood firm and steadfast on the battlefield and inflicted heavy damage on the Zionist regime after 75 days of Israeli crimes and mass murders as part of its scorched-earth policy." As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 75 on Wednesday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound and level whole blocks and homes and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. According to local sources, a large number of martyrs and wounded civilians were reported in the morning in the Abu Khalifa area behind the Hira Mosque, while their neighbors are unable to reach them because of the intensity of the Israeli bombardment.

Continued on Page 06

Lavrov accuses 'external forces' of sabotaging ceasefire

FOREIGN DESK

RABAT: During a plenary session of the Russian-Arab Cooperation Forum in Morocco, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pointed fingers at unnamed "external forces" on Wednesday for trying to take advantage of the war on Gaza to open the door for a wider war. "It has become obvious that some external forces are seeking to exploit this new flare-up in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to further their interests and ignite a regional war," he said, adding that a much bigger conflict will ensue, dragged on by the United States and its allies. Lavrov blamed the West for the two decades of instability in the Middle East, causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands, alongside the displacement of many others. This follows a condemnation by Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia, who declared that the US stands as the sole state opposing a humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

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SWABI: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar inaugurates new building of Girls Hostel at Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology. - DNA

Nepra hikes power tariff by Rs1.15/unit

Hike in the tariff would put an additional financial burden of Rs22.29 billion on consumers

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: In another shock to the already overburdened power consumers, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) on Wednesday increased the electricity tariff by Rs1.15 per unit as part of the quarterly adjustments. The latest hike in the tariff would put an additional financial burden of Rs22.29 billion on the power consumers. The new rate will be applicable from Jan 2024 to Mar 2024. This surge in power tariff is set to impact all consumer categories except Electric Vehicle Charging Stations (EVCS), lifeline consumers, and K-Electric consumers.

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Baku simplifies visa process for Pakistanis

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a move aimed at fostering international tourism and promoting cultural exchange, the government of Azerbaijan has introduced an online service to facilitate the issuance of e-visit visas for citizens of various countries, including Pakistan. This initiative offers Pakistani nationals the opportunity to explore the rich history and diverse landscapes of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's new online service, known as the "ASAN Visa" system, streamlines the visa application process for Pakistani travelers.

Continued on Page 06

Alvi, Raisi for joint efforts to end Gaza carnage

The President reiterated that a just solution to the Palestinian question based on an independent and contiguous Palestinian State with Al-Quds-Al-Sharif as capital



KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: In a telephone call today that lasted almost 45 minutes, President Dr. Arif Alvi of Pakistan and President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran underscored the need for coordinated efforts by the Islamic countries to bring an end to the ongoing massacre and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Continued on Page 06

PM calls brain drain a part of talent hunt

Urges educated class to also debate their political attitudes

SHAMIM SHAHID

SWABI: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq on Wednesday calling the brain drain part of the talent hunt, said those leaving Pakistan for better opportunities would become a strength for the country, which needed to be encouraged. The prime minister, in

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

Imran will contest from three areas

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Incarcerated PTI founding chairman Imran Khan will contest elections from at least three constituencies in the general elections scheduled for February 8 next year, his party announced. Speaking to media outside the Adiala jail in Rawalpindi, PTI Senator Ali Zafar said IHC would announce its Toshakhana reserved verdict soon as the election schedule has already been announced. ECP disqualified ex-premier Imran for five years from holding any public office following the Toshakhana case verdict on August 8 after he was found guilty of "corrupt practices under Section 167 of Elections Act, 2017".

Blast at ex-CJP Saqib Nisar house

DNA

LAHORE: A minor explosion rattled the residence of former Chief Justice of Pakistan, Saqib Nisar. The incident occurred within the confines of the house's garage, resulting in minor injuries to two police officers present at the scene. Preliminary reports suggest that two individuals on motorcycles deliberately placed an explosive device in the garage of the ex-CJP's residence before making a hasty getaway. As a consequence, some vehicles stored in the garage sustained partial damage. Authorities are currently investigating the incident to determine the motives and identity of the perpetrators.

Pakistan eschews bloc politics, COAS tells US think tanks

"Pakistan is a country of consequence both from geopolitical and geoeconomic perspective," says COAS

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir has said that Pakistan eschews bloc politics and seeks to maintain balanced ties with all friendly countries including China and the United States, the military's media wing said on Wednesday. The army chief's remarks came during a candid discussion with members of prominent US think tanks and media in Washington, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement. The COAS said that Pakistan is a country of consequence both from geopolitical and geoeconomic perspectives and wishes to develop itself as a hub of connectivity and a gateway to Central Asia and beyond, however, it eschews bloc politics and believes in maintaining balanced relationships with all friendly countries. Gen Munir, during the interaction, put across Pakistan's

Continued on Page 06

ISI can't trace source of audio leaks, IHC told

AGP says no intelligence agency allowed to tap audio conversation

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday said the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in its report stated it can't trace the source of the audio leaks. Hearing the pleas of former chief justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar's son and former prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi regarding their audio conversation leaks,

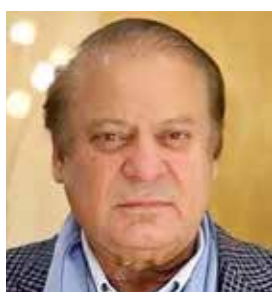
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Nawaz delves into past mistakes which brought country into abyss

The PML-N leader reiterated that everything was done to bring in one person, and now the state country was in was evident to everyone

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif said on Wednesday the country was stuck in a quagmire of challenges and one wonders what had befallen Pakistan. Addressing a session of the PML-N parliamentary board here, the former prime minister asserted, "We need to take matters into our own hands. We ourselves are responsible for the sorry state of affairs in the country." Without naming the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Nawaz associated the challenges facing the country today to putting the former PTI chairman at the helm. "Everything was done to bring in this one person." The former premier mentioned that in 2017, the country was progressing towards prosperity. "There was no inflation or unemployment. People were moving away from the poverty line, and Pakistan was leading in development in the region." He further said that essential commodities were within reach of the



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Lifetime disqualification SC forms larger bench

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has constituted a larger bench to take up the case related to lifetime disqualifications awarded to parliamentarians under Article 62(1)f of the Constitution. According to details, the seven-member larger bench will be headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa. The bench is set to take up the case on Jan 2 next year. The case holds immense significance especially in the backdrop of the lifetime disqualifications of three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif and political heavyweight Jahangir Khan Tareen, the chief of the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party. As former prime minister Nawaz Sharif sees another prime ministerial bid, the only remaining legal obstacle preventing him from participating in the upcoming election on Feb 8 next year is his lifetime disqualification as a

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CM orders land allocation for smart police stations

CM was disclosed that the construction of 40 smart police stations is slated to be completed within the stipulated timeframe

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi has issued directives for the allocation of land dedicated to Smart Police Stations. During a specially convened meeting presided over by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, it was disclosed that the construction of 40 smart police stations is slated to be completed within the stipulated timeframe. The initial phase will witness the establishment of 23 smart police stations in Lahore, while an additional 17 will be strategically located in other districts. Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, in setting a stringent deadline for the Smart Police Station project, emphasized the phased conversion of conventional police stations into smart ones throughout the province. The meeting scrutinized the construction, repair, and rehabilitation initiatives encompassing a total of 737 police stations. A comprehensive review of the progress on the Smart Police Station project and an evaluation of the facilities integrated into these stations took place during the briefing. Chief

Naqvi spurs drug rehab at Data Darbar

LAHORE: Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi chaired a special meeting to assess progress on proposed enhancements for Data Darbar Hospital. During the meeting, deliberations took place regarding the proposition to establish a treatment center for individuals grappling with drug addiction within Data Darbar Hospital. Additionally, the prospect of entrusting the management of Data Darbar Hospital to the Anti-Narcotics Force was under consideration. The management reported that an initial allocation of 50 beds for the drug addiction treatment center in Data Darbar Hospital is underway. Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi emphasized the commitment to delivering optimal medical facilities at Data Darbar Hospital, stating that the objective is to enhance healthcare services for the public. To ensure improved management, Data Darbar Hospital is slated to be handed over to the Primary and Secondary Healthcare department. In attendance were Provincial Minister Azfar Ali Nasir, Chairman Planning and Development, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Secretary Auqaf, Secretary Health, Special Secretary Health, Commissioner Lahore, and other key officials. —DNA

Minister Mohsin Naqvi directed the expeditious allocation of land to every landless police station across the province, stressing the swift completion of the land transfer process. The meeting also addressed the project involving the construction of 313

houses for police officers and employees. In attendance were Inspector General Police, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Additional IG, Secretary Home, Secretary Communication and Works, CCPO, CTO, SSP Admin, and other key police officials.



SAHIWAL: Senate Patrick's Church Additional DC Sahiwal Yasir Farid, eminent scholar Hasan Afzal Rana, Zafar Iqbal, Bishop Daniel John, Raheel Talib Bushra Khan cutting the Christmas cake.—DNA

Lahore bar awards lifetime membership to Imran Riaz

LAHORE: The Lahore Bar Association (LBA) awarded lifetime membership on Wednesday to anchorperson Imran Riaz Khan in recognition of his "bravery... for raising his voice for human rights without worrying for his life". This is the first time a journalist has been granted membership of a lawyers' association. Addressing the LBA, Riaz said, "You can forcefully silence people, but you can never change their thoughts." He said those sitting inside offices don't make decisions, the people make their own decisions. LBA president Rana Intizar Hussain said that Riaz was the first journalist in history to be granted lifetime membership. Read Imran Riaz's pre-arrest bail confirmed after IO fails to establish case

"The judicial system of Pakistan has completely failed in dispensing justice to the public," Hussain maintained. He also demanded resignations from the chief justices (CJs) of the Supreme Court (SC), and the Lahore High Court (LHC) "over their failure to ensure justice for the people". On September 25, Riaz returned home safely after going missing for more than four months. Sialkot police, in a post on social media platform X confirmed the news, saying: "Journalist/anchor Mr Imran Riaz Khan has been safely recovered. He is now with his family." Separately in a post on X, his lawyer Ashfaq said: "By God's special blessing, grace, and mercy, I have brought back my prince." —APP

IG Punjab chaired a high level meeting

The progress of shifting police stations across Punjab to Special Initiative Police Stations protocol was reviewed in the meeting

DNA

LAHORE: According to the sources, Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has said that the upgrading work of Special Initiative Police Stations (SIPS) in all the districts of the province is going on rapidly. Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Syed Mohsin Naqvi will inaugurate Special Initiative Police Stations soon. IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar said that by the end of this month, all the police stations of Punjab will have been transferred to the SIPS protocol. Dr. Usman Anwar said that timelines have been fixed for registration of cases and various stages of investigation in Special Initiative Police Sta-

tions. Under community policing, all police stations are being converted into service delivery and public friendly stations. IG Punjab directed the officers to prepare the front and back ends of the police stations as per the SOPs of the Special Initiative Police Station and according to the culture and individuality of each region, the theme of the police stations should be designed. IG Punjab said that Qmatic machine LED screens, token number counters, separate washrooms for men and women have been provided in the police stations. He expressed these views today while presiding over a high-level meeting at the Punjab Safe Cities Headquarters Qurban Lines. The progress of shifting police

stations across Punjab to Special Initiative Police Stations protocol was reviewed. In the meeting, all the officers gave briefings about the ongoing work of Special Initiative Police Stations in their districts. IG Punjab said that all officers should complete the upgradation work on Special Initiative Protocol under their personal supervision. In the meeting, MD Safe Cities Authority Muhammad Ahsan Younas, DIG Operations Lahore Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, DIG Athar Ismail, DIG Mansoor ul Haq Rana, SSP Mustansir Firoz, CTO Lahore Amara Athar, SSP Operations Lahore Syed Ali Raza and all Divisional SPs, ASPs were present whereas all RPOs, CPOs.

24 new dengue cases reported in Punjab

LAHORE: Twenty-four more dengue cases were reported in Punjab on Wednesday. The latest Health Department data showed a total of 15,102 confirmed dengue cases across Punjab this year. Lahore was leading the unfortunate tally with 6,976 cases, followed closely by Rawalpindi with 2,654 cases, Gujranwala with 1,590, Multan 1,453 and Faisalabad with 914 cases. Lahore, with an additional 10 cases, continues to grapple with the fever, Gujranwala with five and Multan with six new cases. Meanwhile, Kasur, Gujrat and Rahimyar Khan reported one case of dengue each in last 24 hours. Currently, 17 dengue patients are undergoing treatment in various hospitals across Punjab, with eight of them in Lahore district hospitals. Punjab Health Secretary Ali Jaan Khan issued a plea to citizens, urging them to maintain clean and dry surroundings as a preventive measure against dengue fever. He also called for co-operation with the Health Department teams that are working to combat this outbreak. For those in need of dengue treatment, information, or wishing to register complaints, a free helpline is available at 1033.—APP

PFA disposes off 1100 liters adulterated milk

DGKHAN: Punjab Food Authority (PFA) Wednesday raided and disposed off 1100 liters of adulterated milk. According to PFA Spokesperson, the food safety team raided at Multan roads and checked the milk-carrying vehicle. The adulteration of water, fat and less natural ingredients were found in the milk during test through latest Lactoscan machine.—APP

Minister inaugurates newly constructed 'Business Centre'

DNA

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Caretaker Minister for Industries, Commerce, Technical Education and Merged Districts' Affairs, Dr. Aamer Abdullah inaugurated the newly constructed Business Centre at Small Industries Estate here on Wednesday. The construction of the centre has cost about Rs.45 million. The commercial operation of the facility could earn millions of rupees for the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB) every month. The newly constructed Business Centre at Kohat Road, Small Industrial Estate is comprised of display halls and showrooms for the exhibition of the products manufactured by the manufactur-

ers of the estate. Besides, the Managing Director (MD) SIDB, Ghazanfar Ali, Deputy Managing Directors Sahibzada Zulfiqar and Noman Fayyaz and other officers, officials and employees were also present on the occasion. peaking on the occasion, the caretaker minister termed the project as of high importance and directed amendments to the business model of the board for its financial stability, uplift and to bring improvement as per requirements of the modern era. He said that starting a new project is used to be a hard task for any organization. However, he said that with the passage of this phase, the board has made a remarkable achievement. He said that now the sustainable development of the board

should take more such useful measures. He directed the management of the board to take forward the concept of a profitable and business approach and adoption of result-oriented short-term business model to arrest the expenses of the organization in future. The caretaker minister said that this commercial centre will promote prosperity and help earn livelihood for the businessmen. On this occasion, he directed the high-ups of the SIDB to best system of cleanliness in the centre and provision of all best facilities to the users. Meanwhile, the caretaker minister visited SIDB's head office and met with the officers and office bearers of the employees' union. A commendation shield was also presented to him on the occasion.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Secretary for Interior Aftab Durrani presenting souvenir to the Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Saeed Ahmad Al-Malki.—DNA

Provision of quality health facilities to people our motto

Secretary Health Balochistan said that the majority of people in rural areas are dependent on government hospitals and no compromise in the provision of medical facilities

DNA

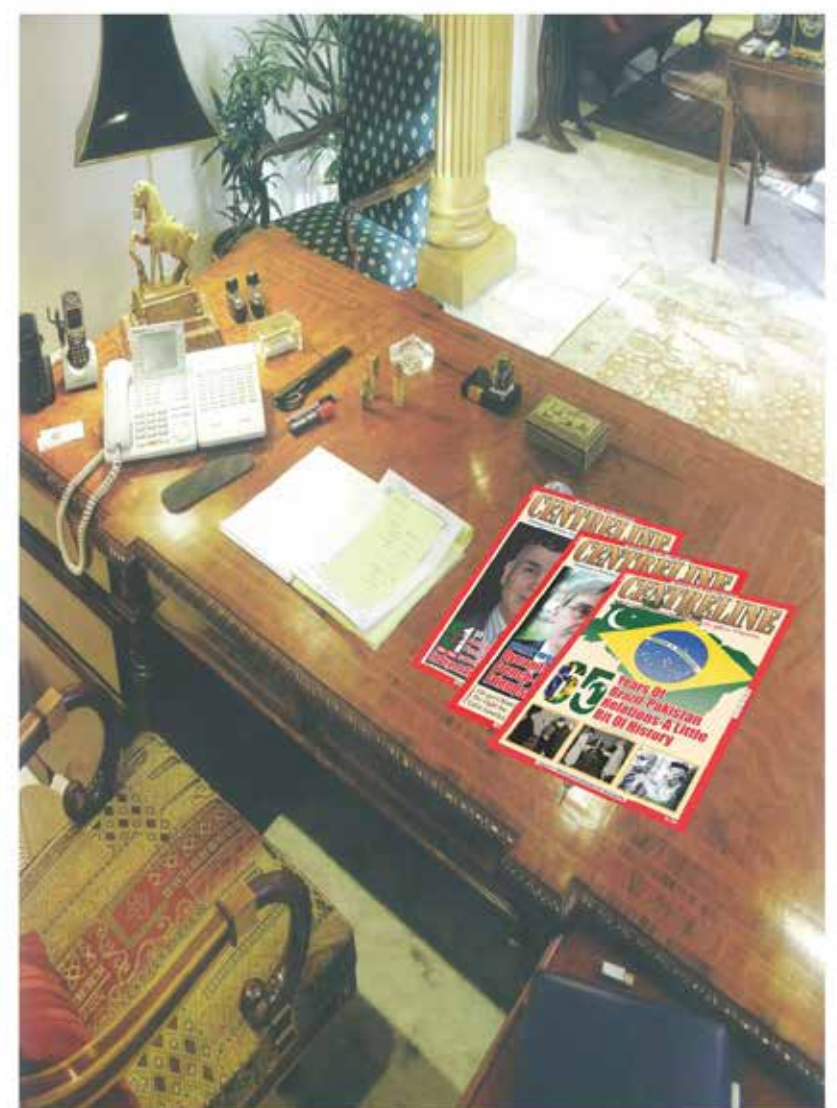
QUETTA: Balochistan Secretary Health Department Abdullah Khan on Wednesday said that the provision of quality health facilities to people is our motto and we all have to work in the spirit of human service by making better use of the same available resources. He expressed these views while chairing a Zoom meeting here. The meeting was attended by Divisional Directors, District Health Officers (DHOs), MSs from across Balochistan, Special Secretary Health Mujib-ur Rehman Qamrani, Direc-

tor General Health Services Balochistan Quetta Dr. Arif Khan, Additional Secretary Health Hameed Zehri, Section Officer Tahoor Khan, Director Safe Blood Transfusion Professor Dr. Hanif Mengal, Director Emergency and Monitoring Dr. Faheem Khan, Additional Director MSD Dr. Shuaib Akram, Staff Officer Secretary Health Shaukat Zehri and other assistants. Secretary Health Balochistan Abdullah Khan said that the majority of people in rural areas are dependent on government hospitals and no compromise in

the provision of medical facilities including medicines would be tolerated. Mr. Abdullah Khan said that all doctors, and paramedics perform their duties diligently. Primary health care structure is of key importance, responsibilities need to be redefined and understood. He said that we have to change the attitude of not working, along with the process of accountability at the government level, each organization must hold itself accountable saying that improvements were being made in all the districts by utilizing the available re-

sources in the health sector and all the problems were being solved gradually. He said that special attention was being paid to Primary Care Health for the first time Balochistan Health Department and PPH were on one page for planning MCH, EPI, nutrition, and health facility delivery at the primary level. The performance of DHOs and MSs in the districts will be monitored by the Emergency and Health Response Unit, he said. He also appreciated the performance of District Pishin Monitoring Officer Najib and directed other monitoring officers

to improve their performance. The Secretary said that the performance of DHOs and MSs would be monitored to provide quality health facilities to poor people across Balochistan. There will be no compromise on healthcare delivery at the primary level, by streamlining and improving the primary healthcare structure, the burden on tertiary care hospitals can be reduced, he noted. He said that the provision of quality health facilities is our motto and we all have to work in the spirit of human service by making better use of the same available resources.



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

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Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
Motorway Police.....9266044
Motorway Police.9270601-20
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CAA.....9281092



Hospitals

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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



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

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

The best of CPEC is yet to come: Mushahid Sayed

DNA

ISLAMABAD: "When we talk of the next round, I think the best of CPEC is yet to come," said Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Chairman, the Senate Defense Committee and Pakistan-China Institute, at the 8th CPEC Media Forum on Wednesday. The Forum, themed "Next decade of CPEC: Opportunities & learning from past decade", was hosted by the Embassy of China in Pakistan, and co-organized by China Economic Net and Pakistan-China Institute on Dec 20 in Beijing, Islamabad and Gwadar both online and offline, Gwadar Pro reported. In the forum, Mushahid Hussain Sayed reviewed the achievements of CPEC in the past decade and clarified the smears of the West against CPEC. He noted the achievements of CPEC by referring to the \$25.4 billion of direct investment in Pakistan, 236,000 jobs generated, 8,000 megawatts of electricity, and 510 kilometers of highways by the end of 2022. "28,000 Pakistani students are studying in China and 8,000 of them are doing their doctorate in China. So this is, I think, a very important aspect of the whole development," he added. He said the ML-1 project in the next round of CPEC is going to bring a big transformation in Pakistan's railway infrastructure. He said the further development of special economic zones, agriculture including new seed technology and new irrigation technology, and efforts in reclaiming the deserts are all extremely important for Pakistan. Mushahid Hussain Sayed also mentioned that the challenges such as fake news from the West should be solved, by quoting two contrasting narra-



Federal Information Minister Murtaza Solangi, Ambassador of China Jiang Zaidong, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed and others posing for a picture on the occasion of a seminar titled 'Next Decade of CPEC: Opportunities and Learning from Past Decade' organized by the Pakistan-China Institute.— Photo Mudassar Raja

tives respectively regarding China and the US. "In the last 10 years, China invested nearly \$1 trillion in the Belt and Road Initiative in more than 3,000 projects, lifting 40 million out of poverty in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe. While in the last 20 years, in the so-called war on terror, the United States squandered \$6.5 trillion in fighting wars in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Somalia and Yemen," he said. "China talks of modern-

ization, while the US talks of militarization of international relations. China talks of building bridges with Iran, and Saudi Arabia and is trying to solve the issue of Palestine, while the US builds barriers, tariffs, and protectionism. China focuses on cooperation and connectivity through the Belt and Road Initiative, while the US talks of conflict, confrontation, a new cold war," he added. "We stand on the right side of history. We stand with China because China stands with

Pakistan on all our core interests, and that is the key element," he said, adding "because this is a mutually reinforcing relationship." He also appreciated the important role of the CPEC Media Forum in countering fake news. He said that for 2024, the US Congress has allocated \$400 million for what is called the counting China influence fund, which is shorthand for propaganda, information warfare, fake news, and disinformation.

Decked Christmas tree always becomes centerpiece of joy

ISLAMABAD: With only a few days left in the commencement of the celebrations of the grand festival of Christmas, the Christian community in the federal capital like other parts of the country has started decorating the Christmas tree which is the centerpiece of the festive joy. The Christmas tree is the main symbol of the Christmas celebrations to welcome the arrival of Santa Claus and creates more attraction to the occasion of Christmas with its colourful decorative look. The members of the Christian community have started decorating the evergreen coniferous tree, real or artificial, as a tradition associated with the celebration of Christmas. The tree is usually decked with different ornaments including baubles, small bells painted gold or silver, stars of different shapes and sizes, pine cones, apples, candies, tinsel and balloons made from glass, metal, wood and ceramic. An angel and star are often placed at the top of the tree representing the host of angels. "I have started the ornamentation of my Christmas tree before the time and I am excited because all my friends are visiting my home to see the colourful tree", said Asiya Yusuf, a youngster. She said, "Decorating Christmas tree is the main hallmark of this festival, "our festival remains incomplete without bringing this tree". Amir Masih, who is a father of four-kids, "My kids are always more enthusiastic towards decorating Christmas Tree before the start of the festival so that they have pictures of the decked tree on their social media platforms to get likes". He said that Christmas is the time to share happiness with each other and pray for our country's progress and prosperity. The festival of Christmas also brings good business to the sweet sellers, gift shops as well as the sellers of ornaments for Christmas tree. Talking to APP, Ali Nawaz, a decorative items seller said that people mostly use colourful candles and electric lights (fairy lights) to decorate their small-sized trees as these are easily available here while many people also decorate outdoor trees with lights and some other ornaments. He said the festival would also give us the opportunity to sell these ornaments and earn good business. In various cultures, the Christmas tree is traditionally brought into the home and decorated with Christmas lights (originally candles), ornaments, garlands, tinsel, and candy canes during the days around Christmas. The earliest accounts of decorating an evergreen tree at Christmas were recorded in Livonia (roughly modern territory of Estonia and Latvia) in 15th century. The Christian community is finalizing its preparations for celebrating the Christmas festival with more enthusiasm and renewed spirit, feeling the echo of church bells that announce the birth of Jesus. Christmas is the occasion when all young and old take a keen interest in decorating Christmas trees and buying Christmas gifts to show their love to their family and friends and celebrate the occasion by distributing gifts among children, singing hymns and prayers, and arranging family gatherings. The festival will be marked through different activities ranging from official gatherings to cake-cutting ceremonies in small communities. The joyous occasion will fill the atmosphere with colours, symbols and traditions of Christmas that mainly include Christmas Tree, Santa Claus, Carols and Christmas gifts.—DNA

SAPM for collaboration with Saudi Arabia

ISLAMABAD: The Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Mr. Jawad Sohrab Malik, held a significant meeting with Mr. Gilbert Hounbo, the Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), on the sidelines of the Global Labour Market Conference (GLMC) in Riyadh. The discussions centered around aligning Pakistan's workforce development strategies with ILO's global standards and initiatives. The meeting was a significant step towards fostering international collaboration to enhance the skills and employability of the Pakistani workforce in line with the ILO's best practices. Both parties acknowledged the importance of aligning national policies with global standards to ensure the welfare and prosperity of the workforce. Mr. Gilbert Hounbo, Director-General of ILO, implored the global community to support and create employment opportunities for Pakistani youth. Recognizing the demographic dividend that Pakistan possesses, he emphasized the need for concerted efforts to harness the potential of the youth population.—APP

ECP refutes false reports on Hafizabad delimitation decision date

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday dismissed media misinformation about Hafizabad constituency delimitation, stating the official decision by a two-member bench was declared on November 26 and promptly posted on the ECP's website for public awareness. An ECP spokesperson explained that a subsequent order regarding the delimitation of Hafizabad district was issued on December 8, following the intervention of the Islamabad High Court (IHC). The guidelines for constituencies are explicitly outlined in the Election Act of 2017 and its corresponding Rules, as explained below. According to Election Rules 8(1), the population of the province is divided among the seats designated for the province under Article 106, Section 51 of the Constitution, after which the quota for each seat is established. In the second phase, the quota calculated under Rules 8 (2) to determine district seats is divided by the district's population, establishing the number of seats for that district. If the remaining population after seat allocation is less than 0.5, the district is ignored. However, if the remaining population is 0.50 or more, the district is granted one seat. For instance, if a district's seat share is 4.49 based on its population, it is allocated 4 seats. On the other hand, if its seat share is 4.52, the district is allotted 5 seats. Provided that no other district has a higher fraction, for instance, 4.56, it is essential to clarify that the allocation of seats begins with the district having the highest fraction, such as 4.80, 4.75, 4.70, 4.70, 4.66, and so on, until the last seat. This process ensures that if there is an available seat in the province, a district may secure a seat at 4.50. However, once seats are filled, the focus shifts to fractions, and those with 4.51 or more are ignored. The procedure for determining votes is outlined in Section 18 of the Elections Act, 2017, and Section 18 of the Elections Rules, which cannot be altered by the Election Commission. The entire Commission, comprising the Chief Election Commissioner and four members, is responsible for this task. However, due to the numerous objections to the initial constituencies, the Election Commission addresses them through two or three-member benches. The Commission emphasizes that the population of Hafizabad District is 1,319,909, with a quota for one National Assembly seat set at 905,595 (1.46) under Rules 8(2), warranting the allocation of one seat due to the remaining population being less than 0.5 percent.—DNA

RWMC organizes awareness seminar against corruption

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) on Wednesday organized a seminar and walk to create awareness against corruption. Speaking at the seminar, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) RWMC Rana Sajid Sajid said that the golden principles of Islam including speedy justice and self-accountability were the guarantors of the eradication of corruption in the society. He urged for collective efforts to control the epidemic of corruption, adding maturity of character was indispensable for eradicating corruption. "If we educate people to live their lives according to the guiding principles of Islam, it will help in curbing the growing trend of corruption." Rana Sajid said that social evils can be removed by ensuring the implementation of laws.—APP

Pakistan Army Youth Talent Hunt

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Army Youth Talent Volleyball trials will be held from January 3, 2024 under the aegis of the Directorate General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Director General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Abdul Nasir Mohmand said Wednesday. Talking to media, he said the trials were earlier scheduled in December but now would be organized from January 3, 2024. He said in collaboration with the Pakistan Army and the Directorate General of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Inter-Regional Championship in connection with the talent hunt program 2023-24 will start from January 3 at the Peshawar Sports Complex, in which the Directorate of Sports including all regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will participate. He said players of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Volleyball Academy will also participate. DG Sports Abdul Nasir Mohmand said that on the special instructions of Corps Commander Peshawar Lt. Gen Hasan Azhar Hayat, Talent Hunt Program 2023-24 is being organized in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.—APP

PIDE launched the report on "The State of Commerce in Pak International and Domestic"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) launched its latest research report, "The State of Commerce in Pakistan - International and Domestic" at the P-Block Auditorium, Pakistan Secretariat. The report explores the challenges and opportunities shaping the landscape of Pakistan's commerce sector. It sheds light on the current state of commerce in the country. As a premier institution dedicated to fostering economic development, PIDE's report serves as an invaluable source of information and statistics on the state of commerce in Pakistan. In his opening remarks, Dr. Na-deem ul Haque, Vice Chancellor of the Pakistan Institute of PIDE, has developed this report for the Ministry of Commerce & Industries to fill the comprehensive report,

and explore into all facets of internal and external trade in Pakistan. The primary objective is to gain a profound understanding of markets, growth and international and domestic trade. He emphasized that despite the sector being vibrant it faces challenges stemming from the various governments' indifference, regulatory problems,

and various other problems. He highlighted the growth potential of several entities within sectors such as construction, retail, chain stores, food, franchises, and transport. Dr Haque said that PIDE's research shows that the government's footprint on the economy is at over 70% of the economy, with heavy-handed government involve-

ment in trade and markets, stifling market development and growth. The cost of regulation, estimated at over 60% of the GDP, particularly affects segments larger than 50% of the GDP, turning regulation agencies into a burgeoning industry in Pakistan. Our current approach is to fragment out the markets and segment ourselves from the global

value chain. PIDE has presented proposals to the government for deregulation, specifically targeting markets such as real estate, and improvements in tax documentation to foster the creation of large multinational businesses. However, the government's preoccupation with borrowing and reliance on lenders to decide policy remains a significant challenge. More specifically the report recommends a broader discussion on an immediate cessation of our absolute policies on import substitute and export promotion could be discontinued. Our Commerce and Industry must develop as part of the global value chain. According to the report, there is a systemic failure to diversify across manufacturing, exports, and domestic markets. Notably, the import substitution policy, exemplified by the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Policy 2020, has fallen short of its targets.



Briefs

Pakistan explores cooperation with China

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Yasar Ayaz, the Director of Pakistan National Center for Artificial Intelligence (NCAI), had a two-week visit to China for exploring cooperation in the field of artificial intelligence (AI).

He visited prominent academic institutions and attended conferences to explore opportunities for Pak-China collaboration in AI. During the visit to Shanghai, Dr. Yasar Ayaz delivered an academic presentation titled Transforming the Future with Artificial Intelligence at Tongji University's Shanghai Autonomous Intelligent Unmanned Systems Science Center and signed a cooperation agreement on industry-academia integration between the center and NCAI. Further cooperations in joint technological research and talent training were established, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. At China University of Mining and Technology (Beijing), Yasar Ayaz introduced significant research advancement of NCAI, including the applications of AI in healthcare, disaster management, crowd monitoring, vehicle recognition systems, and firearm detection systems.

During the interactive session, hot topics in the AI field were discussed, such as AI large-scale models, Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), and innovative applications of AI in the energy and mining sectors. He also witnessed the official launch of a sensor-based integrated mining safety monitoring product by China University of Mining and Technology (Beijing) during the participation in the World 5G Conference and the 5G and Intelligent Mining Forum.—APP

BMPP, UBG alliance gains support

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Khurram Ejaz has stated that the BMPP and UBG Alliance have gained extensive support from Chambers and Associations. Chambers from all provinces of the country have aligned with the alliance, fostering optimism that our candidates will secure a substantial majority in the upcoming Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce (FPCCI) elections. Khurram Ejaz shared these views while addressing participants at the reception hosted by the BMPP and UBG Alliance. Distinguished industrialists, including Zubair Tufail, Mian Zahid, Adeel Siddiqui, Hanif Gohar, Khalid Tawab, Ahmed Chinoy, Mazhar Nasir, BMPP and UBG Alliance candidates for President Atif Ikram Sheikh, Senior Vice President Saqib Fayyaz Maqsood, Vice Presidents Zaki Ejaz, Asif Sakhi, Asif Inam, Aman Paracha, Abdul Moham Khan, Quratul Ain, Zain Iftikhar Chaudhry and voters participated in large numbers.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Jordan Maen Khreasat, Ambassador of Turkiye Mehmet Pacaci and others donating blood during a camp established at the Turkiye embassy. — DNA

PML-N has plans to address economic issues of Pakistan

Nasir Butt said that the business community is the backbone of the economy and PML-N would finalize economic policies by taking them on board to achieve win-win outcomes. He said that Pakistan has great potential to emerge as a strong economy and it only needs visionary leadership and good governments to achieve this goal

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: PML-N leader Nasir Butt said that his party has experienced persons to manage the economy and if voted to power, PML-N has plans to address the key economic issues of Pakistan. He said that the PML-N government had achieved many economic milestones for Pakistan during its previous tenures. If voted to power, it would again

bring Pakistan out of economic trouble and provide relief to the common man. He said this while talking to Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry during his visit to ICCI. Nasir Butt said that the business community is the backbone of the economy and PML-N would finalize economic policies by taking them on board to achieve win-win outcomes. He said that Pakistan has great potential to emerge as a strong economy and it

only needs visionary leadership and good governments to achieve this goal. He said that PML-N's leadership has the ability and experience to resolve issues and deliver up to the expectations of the people. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the two rising economies border Pakistan and it has to catch up with them in terms of economic growth to remain relevant in the world. He emphasized that

all political parties should develop a consensus on a charter of the economy to ensure that economic policies are not disturbed by the regime change. He said that the loss-making SOEs are costing over Rs.1000 billion per year to the national exchequer and stressed that the incoming government should urgently privatize them to avoid further losses. He stressed that the incoming government should focus on cutting interest rates to a single-digit level, reducing high

energy costs, and bringing down dollar rates to create a conducive environment for business and investment activities. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that Pakistan needs direct air links with all major export destinations and stressed that the PIA should be given to private hands for its revival so that it could help connect Pakistan with international markets for promoting trade and exports of the country.

Edible oil, vegetable ghee output grew by 26.80% and 2.95%

ISLAMABAD: Domestic production of edible oil and vegetable ghee during the first four months of current financial year grew by 26.80 percent and 2.95 percent respectively as compared to the output of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-November, 2023 over 206,250 metric tons of cooking oil manufactured locally as compared to the manufacturing of 162,661 metric tons of the same period of last year, according to the data of Large Scale Manufacturing Industries (LSMI) released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. As compared to the month of October, 2021, the output of edible oil grew by 18.39 percent in October 2023 and 51,225 metric tons of cooking oil were produced locally as compared to the production of 43,268 metric tons of same month of last year. Meanwhile, 496,668 metric tons of vegetable ghee manufactured in the last four months as compared to the production of 482,445 metric tons, which was up by 2.95 percent when compared with production of the same period of last year, it added.—APP

Unpopular decisions affected people

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Wednesday that the unpopular and harsh decisions of the government and the central bank have made life very difficult for the people and the business community. However, these decisions helped restore the confidence of international institutions, while the pressure on foreign exchange reserves, the rupee has eased and the current account deficit has come down, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that a surplus of nine million dollars in the current account in November is a good development. This achievement was made possible due to the tight monetary policy, which reduced demand. Talking

to the business community, the veteran business leader said that in addition to the central bank's initiatives, imports were also controlled, which positively impacted foreign exchange reserves and proved that the country could survive in the absence or lack of many imports. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that the current account deficit for the first five months of this year is \$1.16 billion, which was \$3.26 billion in the first five months of last year. This deficit reduction is a great achievement, and if there is no indiscriminate increase in spending after the election, the annual deficit will not exceed four and a half billion dollars, which will be a great success for policymakers. The business leader said that a strict policy is also necessary because, despite the IMF program, the expected capital is not coming to the country. Apart from this, remittances are decreasing, while the situation of

exports is also not satisfactory due to an increase in production costs. After possible foreign investment under SIFC, the central bank may consider easing monetary policy while easing imports, but this is not an immediate possibility, he observed. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that economic growth has stopped due to measures to reduce the current account deficit. The business environment has been affected, and new employment opportunities are not being created. Administrative measures have improved the economy, but this is not a long-term solution. He said that to stabilize the economy, exports must be increased, and the reasons for the decrease in remittances must be known, and the confidence of the people living abroad must be restored. Apart from this, there should be a crackdown on the handi business so that the remittances come into the country legally.

Int'l Human Solidarity Day marked to address global challenges

ISLAMABAD: International Human Solidarity Day was marked on Wednesday across the world, including in Pakistan, emphasizing the crucial need for collective unity among human beings to address global challenges. The day serves as a reminder to governments and the international community to uphold commitments to eradicate poverty, hunger, and diseases. On December 22, 2005, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) recognized solidarity as a fundamental and universal value in twenty-first-century relations between peoples. This led to the proclamation of December 20 as International Human Solidarity Day, focusing on people, the planet, and human rights. In a bid to reinforce global commitment, the General Assembly established the World Solidarity Fund on December 20, 2002.—APP

First "Silk Road culture story" creative design competition held in XI'AN

ISLAMABAD: The first "Silk Road Culture Story" Creative Design Competition concluded with a grand award ceremony and an opening ceremony of the winning works exhibition at Xi'An Art Museum, Shaanxi. Khalil Hashmi, Ambassador of Pakistan to China, said in a video message that as early as 2,000 years ago, the Silk Road built a bridge of friendship between Pakistan and China, two ancient civilizations. This competition showcases the unique culture and customs of each country, and promotes mutual understanding through wonderful works, which plays a positive role in promoting people-to-people exchanges under the Belt and Road Initiative," he added. The exhibition of the winning works not only displayed the outstanding Silk Road creative works of this competition, but also present intangible cultural heritage works, Dunhuang cultural creation, and exquisite art works from Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Iran and other countries. According to a report carried by China Economic Net (CEN) on Wednesday, the exhibition reflected the time-honored and diverse culture of the Silk Road, as well as the innovation and integration of modern design. Jiang Wei, Consul General of China in Almaty, Kazakhstan, noted that the competition is another vivid practice of friendly people-to-people exchanges between countries along the Belt and Road. Each work embodies the wisdom and creativity of the author, and realizes the enhancement of friendship and inheritance of friendship through cultural and artistic exchanges, he added.—DNA



Lost and Found

Purchase receipt of CSD scheme number HMC-667621, Honda motor cycle, engine number C747893, chases number CD62983, has been lost during ride between sectors G/11 to F/8 Islamabad. If found please inform: Muhammad Atif s/o Noor Muhammad CNIC 37203-0957454-1, Gangal Shaheed Chowk, Rawalpindi

Indian SC verdict on Article 370 A is nothing but another election gimmick of BJP

Dr. Ashraf Wani further said that very cunningly, a new agenda has been set for the people of IIOJK, people are now entangled in a debate on revocation or restoration of Article 370 A, rather than focusing on their freedom

ISLAMABAD: While deliberating upon the timing of the Indian Supreme Court (SC) Verdict on Article 370 A, Dr. Ashraf Wani, a former freedom fighter hailing from IIOJK said that the timing of the Indian SC verdict is important. To announce it after four years is another BJP trick to ensure a win in the upcoming general elections in 2024. Institute of Regional Studies organized a roundtable discussion with panelist hailing from IIOJK. They all were of the view that Indian SC has given a political decision. Dr. Ashraf Wani further said that very cunningly, a new agenda has been set for the people of IIOJK, people are now entangled in a debate on revocation or restoration of Article 370 A, rather than focusing on their freedom. Dr. Waleed Rasool, another former freedom fighter hailing from IIOJK said that article 370 A had become a security issue of India owing to the freedom movement going on in IIOJK, so they removed this provision unlawfully. Yet, the people of IIOJK have not renounced their movement against the atrocious Indian rule. He said that India has systematically terminated the Muslim population. There were 87% Muslim population and now it's just 57%. The Kashmiris are left with a meagre 7 percent margin to remain as a majority. Mr. Saffdar Gardezi, said that pro India political leaders in IIOJK, who trusted India and supported it, also feel betrayed. Mr. Altaf Wani was of the view that by after unlawfully legitimizing the revocation of Article 370 no space has been left for Kashmiris. They face gruesome suppression, and Indian state is determined to eliminate the entire Kashmiri character from the region. In such bleak scenario, he suggested that Kashmiri diaspora can play a role by voicing for the rights of Kashmiri people in the international arena. Ambassador Nadeem Riyaz concluded with a saying of Quaid e Azam, that Kashmir is the jugular vein of Pakistan, therefore Pakistan will continue to support the right of self-determination of Kashmiri people. Ms Maryam Mastoor, research analyst at IRS moderated the session.—DNA

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EU crossroads: toward new economic perspectives

As last week's fraught summit discussions on Ukraine underlined, the European Union faces daunting and costly challenges in the years ahead. The decision to open membership talks with Kyiv was both a welcome affirmation of continued solidarity and a recognition of the reality that Europe's security is intertwined with Ukraine's resistance to Vladimir Putin's revanchist ambitions. But talks about a new £50bn aid package have had to be prolonged into the new year, following Viktor Orbán's blocking tactics in Brussels. Eventually, some kind of modern Marshall plan will be required to reconstruct a shattered country. That will be a very expensive business. Similarly, achieving the ambition of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 will require a massive injection of public funds. The European Commission estimates that about 700bn a year will need to be invested to meet the EU's green targets. That kind of fiscal firepower will be difficult to sustain after the EU's Covid recovery fund dries up in 2026. A just transition to a green economy will require major spending on retraining and skills. Digitisation of the EU economy, vital to future competitiveness, will be another major financial burden. And all these priorities must be addressed against a backdrop of flat-lining growth, along with a cost of living crisis that is contributing to the rise of nationalist radical-right parties. Such a severely testing context demands a bold economic strategy fit for the times, with a major role for public investment. Instead, the EU is set to return in 2024 to the tight national spending guidelines that were suspended in 2020 when the pandemic took hold. Talks will resume soon on reintroducing a modified version of fiscal rules that limit EU member states' debt to 60% of GDP and their annual budget deficits to 3%. This mistaken drive to go back to the austere principles of the status quo ante is being led by Germany's finance minister, Christian Lindner. Ironically, Germany's Social Democrat-led coalition government itself fell foul of a recent debt ruling by the country's constitutional court, which vetoed the diversion of unspent funds borrowed during the pandemic into an off-budget climate emergency fund. But Mr Lindner, backed by other "frugal" member states, is nevertheless doubling down on his calls for a return to pan-European fiscal consolidation when a far more expansive approach is required. The new version of fiscal rules being discussed may allow more flexibility in discussions over national debt and deficits. But as economies struggle for growth, the EU risks repeating the disastrous mistake of the early 2010s, when Brussels-mandated austerity following the crash made a bad situation significantly worse. One study, by the New Economics Foundation, has judged that reviving the 3% deficit limit would leave only four EU member states with the financial headroom to meet green targets consonant with the 1.5C global heating ceiling. In coming up with groundbreaking schemes such as the Covid recovery fund, Brussels demonstrated the galvanising role of public finance in exceptional times. A deeply challenging future will require more, not less, of the same, and a recognition that state investment at a national level is fundamental to future prosperity. When it comes to security, the green transition and restoring growth, the coming years will be defining ones.



Mud slung at China again fails to stick

In yet another move to demonize China, US intelligence agencies have accused the country of seeking to shape the outcome of specific races in the United States' 2022 midterm elections, which they claim reflects a more aggressive approach by Beijing to try to influence US politics. The declassified assessment, released on Tuesday by the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence, said the Chinese government "tacitly approved efforts to try to influence a handful of midterm races involving members of both US political parties". Yet shooting that argument in the foot, the document also said Beijing believed Congress would remain "adversarial" toward China regardless of which party was in power, leaving people wondering why Beijing would go to so much trouble and risk to bet on something that would not bring any benefit to China. The absurdity of the report is further revealed in the assumption that Chinese officials chose to ramp up operations aimed at shaping US policy last year "because they did not expect the current administration to retaliate as severely as they feared in 2020". This is nonsensical given the hard-line that Congress has taken toward China, which offers little wriggle room for the administration regardless of its stripe. Indeed, the Joe Biden administration has doubled down on its predecessor's tough China stance, continuing the trade war, intensifying the attack on the technological front, and trying to tighten the restraining bonds of its alliance-knotted containment; moves that have already dramatically frayed Sino-US ties. China has rejected the accusation of malign midterm influence, with a spokesman for its embassy in Washington describing the US report as "groundless" and "fabricated out of thin air". The attempts to denigrate China fly in the face of the fact that China has always adhered to the principle of noninterference in any other country's internal affairs. Yet there is no denying the fiction of China sticking its nose into the internal affairs of other countries has become an increasingly popular frightener among some politicians in Western countries. The Scott Morrison administration claimed that Chinese spies sought to fund candidates for Australia's Labor opposition party in the 2022 federal election. The United Kingdom's security agency MI5 issued a warning last year claiming an alleged Chinese agent had infiltrated Parliament to interfere in UK politics. And Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ordered a probe in March into alleged Chinese interference in the country's 2019 and 2021 federal elections. But not one of these accusations targeting China has ever been substantiated. This, however, does not prevent the China hawks in these countries persisting with their give-a-dog-a-bad-name-to-hang-him tricks. No doubt more tall stories will be forthcoming to try and tarnish China's international image and fool people into believing the country poses a serious threat to their countries' national security.

The theory of Neorealism and US foreign policy

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



It is important to distinguish between general realist thinking and neorealist theory, especially since we are focusing on this theory. Neorealism is crucial because it shapes how we build theories and explain things in international relations. These theories play a big role in guiding the actions of countries, especially the United States, in different periods like after World War II, during the

Neorealist theory is the simplest way to understand how countries interact. It's like the basic starting point for studying how nations relate to each other. Almost every other theory in international relations refers back to neorealism to explain their ideas. Realism, which is the oldest way of thinking about international politics, goes way back to the time of Thucydides. But when we talk about realism in this context, we mean it as a theoretical part of international relations, not a philosophy of science. It is important to distinguish between general realist thinking and neorealist theory, especially since we are focusing on this theory. Neorealism is crucial because it shapes how we build theories and explain things in international relations. These theories play a big role in guiding the actions of countries, especially the United States, in different periods like after World War II, during the Cold War and now with emerging powers like China. In the past, figures like Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger shaped American foreign policy based on realist ideas. Neorealism, developed later as a critique of early realism, has also been a significant influence, especially in the U.S. Many discussions about U.S. foreign policy, like the shift from multilateralism to unilateralism in the 1990s, can be understood better by considering neorealist views. Neorealist perspectives are not just theoretical; they help us grasp the thinking behind a lot of today's global politics. Realist thinking focusing on "political power" and the "national interest," was central in international relations (IR) after World War II, especially during the Cold War. However, studies on International Organizations and conflict also played a significant role in IR since the 1950s. Realism dominated IR until the late 1950s and 1960s, when there was a shift towards more fun-

damental research. Comparative studies, using systematic comparison to explain international relations since the 1950s, and the application of game theory to Political Sciences/IR, especially since the 1960s, aimed to find scientific explanations for international relations. In the U.S., decision-making approaches to IR became dominant, focusing on foreign policy studies in the early 1960s. Kenneth Waltz argued against theories focusing on foreign policy, claiming a lack of a genuine international political theory in the discipline. He proposed a system-level theory of IR, developing it in the 1950s and formalizing it in his 1979 book "Theory of International Politics." Waltz believed that international conflict lie at the systemic level, not in individual or state behavior. He aimed to create a general theory that could explain recurrent patterns in international politics, particularly cycles of war and peace and the formation of balances of power among great powers. Waltz's quest for the right theory of international politics set the stage for the development of neorealist theory as a system theory. Neorealism, evolving into a balance of power theory, clarifies the implications of the system-level theory for real-world international politics. The Cold War's bipolar system was the setting when the Theory of International Politics was written. Waltz thought the Cold War was surprisingly stable, even though the superpowers had tense moments. Neorealist theory focuses on how the shift from a multipolar world before 1945 to a bipolar one during the Cold War, and later to a new system after the Cold War, affects the chances of peace and stability. The theory also needs to be understood in the context of the declining power of the U.S. compared to the economic growth of Europe and Japan after the 1970s.

In this system, where power is spread

out among countries, they act in a way that tries to find a balance of power. They might do this by building up their military or making alliances with other countries. This idea mostly applies to the big, powerful countries. Neorealism focuses on these powerful countries because they have the most impact on how things work internationally. Less powerful countries usually join the weaker side in conflicts, not because they want to be the strongest, but because they want to balance power. If they wanted to be the strongest, they would join the stronger side. This approach is based on the belief that in international politics, the structure of the system pushes countries to follow a practical and realistic approach. The system encourages countries to adopt a practical approach called "Realpolitik," where the methods and reasons for foreign policy are influenced by the system's structure. This structural influence explains why certain methods are used repeatedly despite differences in leaders and countries. The idea is that the structure of the international system guides a certain type of politics where a country's interests are the main reason for its actions. The success of a country, defined as preserving and strengthening itself, is the ultimate test of its policies. A balance-of-power theory, which builds on system theory, predicts that countries will behave in ways that lead to balances of power. The dynamics of the system limit the freedom of individual countries, making their behavior and the outcomes more predictable. Under the structural constraints of international politics, countries tend to act in a way that aims for a balance of power. This balance is the result of countries' actions and interactions, shaped by the constraints of the system. In essence, international politics, according to neorealism, is a continuous cycle of war and peace driven by the idea of balancing power.

The two-state solution is dead – and there is no alternative

Osama Al-Sharif

Arab and Muslim leaders also speak of the two-state solution, even though, for the majority of analysts and experts, Israel has long since bulldozed that path, as it fattened illegal settlements and built dozens of new ones. A few days after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, which triggered the ongoing war – one whose death toll has surpassed the civilian casualties of all previous Arab-Israeli wars combined – President Joe Biden and his top aides began to mention the two-state solution again, all while giving Israel the green light to pursue its destructive campaign of the Gaza Strip without setting an end date. The partition of Palestine so it could accommodate Israel and the native

This is probably the worst year for the two-state solution since the UN's 1947 Partition Plan for British Mandate Palestine. One can also add that 2023 is the worst year for delivering an independent Palestinian state since the signing of the Oslo Accords, 30 years ago. And yet, with a two-month-old Israeli war on Gaza going on with no end in sight, with settler rampages against Palestinians out of control and the Israeli occupation army storming Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank on an almost daily basis – resulting in unprecedented destruction of infrastructure while the civilian death count overall is breaking all previous records – US officials and their European counterparts are again talking about the two-state solution.

Arab and Muslim leaders also speak of the two-state solution, even though, for the majority of analysts and experts, Israel has long since bulldozed that path, as it fattened illegal settlements and built dozens of new ones. A few days after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, which triggered the ongoing war – one whose death toll has surpassed the civilian casualties of all previous Arab-Israeli wars combined – President Joe Biden and his top aides began to mention the two-state solution again, all while giving Israel the green light to pursue its destructive campaign of the Gaza Strip without setting an end date. The partition of Palestine so it could accommodate Israel and the native Palestinians was proposed in the 1947 Partition Plan, which the Arabs rejected. Almost two decades later, after the 1967 war and under UN Security Council Resolution 242, Israel was told to withdraw to the June 1967 line, including East Jerusalem. The fate of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank was to be decided later on, although the principle of land-for-peace was stated. Both sides rejected the resolution, for various reasons. And then Jordan's claims to the West Bank, which it had ruled until 1967, came to an end when the Arab League in 1974 recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Jordan finally relinquished all claims, except for the Jerusalem Waqf, in 1988. The 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty spoke of self-rule for the Palestinians and the US restated this position in the 1980s with Ronald Reagan's "Palestinian autonomy and self-government" declaration. The concept of a Palestinian interim self-government in the Occupied Territories was stated in the Oslo I

Accord of 1993, with the final status to be negotiated within five years. Oslo II only succeeded in partitioning the West Bank into areas A, B and C, effectively denying the nascent Palestinian Authority control of more than 60 percent of the remaining territory. All attempts to revive the peace process and reach a final agreement to end the occupation and create a Palestinian state reached a dead end. Both sides blamed the other.

But the important fact to remember is that, while the land-for-peace proposal evolved into what we know today as the two-state solution, it has been eroding ever since Oslo. In the wake of the historic peace agreement between Israel and the PLO, the former unleashed multiple waves of settlement building – not allowed under the accords – so that there were, as of January, 144 Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including 12 in East Jerusalem, and more than 100 illegal outposts. The estimated number of settlers in the West Bank today is nearly 800,000.

Israeli leaders have long since lost the political will to end the occupation or cede any land to a Palestinian state. But aside from the political, logistical and demographic nightmare that creating a contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will present, the reality is that Israeli leaders have long since lost the political will to end the occupation or cede any land to a Palestinian state. The UN Partition Plan would have given the Palestinians about 40 percent of historical Palestine. Implementing Resolution 242 (the two-state solution) would give them less than a third, while Donald Trump's peace plan of 2020 would have given them roughly the same but with major land swaps and no East Jerusalem. Most settlements would remain and the Palestinian areas would be cut off from each other. Israel would annex the Jordan Valley. Both the Palestinians and Jewish settlers rejected it. Benjamin Netanyahu said nothing because he knew Trump's plan would not fly. Today, Netanyahu and his far-right coalition partners openly say that they will not give up an inch of land. Netanyahu last week declared before his Likud party members that he is the only politician who can prevent the creation of a Palestinian state. He said that Israel will not make the Oslo mistake ever again. He also said that Gaza will remain under Israeli security control and that the PA will not be allowed to govern there. Israeli President Isaac Herzog said this is not the time

to discuss the two-state solution. The Hebrew press reported that Israeli officials have asked their American counterparts not to speak of that solution publicly. Fewer Israelis are today willing to accept that concept while the war in Gaza remains inconclusive. The two-state solution is a dud. Its evolution is a perfect example of the law of diminishing returns. Now, it has become a zero-sum game for the Palestinians, while the rest of the world continues to ignore the profound changes that Israeli politics has undergone in the past 20 years. Other options, like full annexation of the Occupied Territories and/or population transfer, are doomsday scenarios. The outcome of the war on Gaza notwithstanding, it is important to note that neither the Biden administration nor its successor will be able to resurrect any solution that will force Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Territories, not to mention allow a Palestinian state to come into existence. In the US, it is a combination of an endemically weak presidency, a divided Congress and a polarized political establishment, with the Zionist lobby having far too much influence on foreign policy. Add to that Iran and its proxies, the role of Russia and China in the Middle East and a divided Europe and you get an idea of why it is impossible for any power to force Israel into giving up its control of Palestinian territory. The Oct. 7 October attack has sent shock waves through Israeli society and opened wounds that will not heal in the near future, while Israel's bloody response in Gaza has radicalized Palestinians even further. The two peoples have never been so far apart. Netanyahu has so far challenged every US position on post-war Gaza. Partitioning Gaza and the creation of buffer zones remain on the agenda. Keeping security control means reoccupation and the forced transfer of Gazans is a strong possibility. In fact, the situation created by the Oct. 7 attack has complicated the conflict in a manner never seen before, at least not since the Second Intifada. So, believing that the two-state solution – now an anachronistic term – could kick in automatically after the war is over is unrealistic and naive. Its demise also stands to rattle the Abraham Accords and their future, not to mention create cracks in older peace treaties. It will put Israel before difficult and polarizing tests once the war is over. It will push Palestinians back to the wall. This is a conflict that is about to get worse, with no hope that it will ever get a chance for a peaceful resolution. —Sourced by Arab News.

Briefs

Israel continues Gaza...

FROM PAGE 01

Casualties were also reported in an Israeli attack on a school housing displaced families in al-Sabra neighborhood in Gaza City. The Red Crescent said that one of its ambulance centers in Jabalia in northern Gaza is under tight siege by the Israeli army, pointing out that there are 127 people inside it, including displaced families, wounded civilians and employees. The Red Crescent added that 12 people, including some of its employees and displaced civilians, were injured at its headquarters in Khan Yunis following Israeli strikes on a nearby area.

Lavrov accuses...

FROM PAGE 01

Nebenzia highlighted the global consensus on the urgent need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and criticized the US for aligning itself against the unanimous stance of the international community. "It would not be an exaggeration to say that there's a consensus in the world about the need to have an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, and the only state which stands against, pitting themselves against the entire international community, is the United States," he emphasized. On December 9, the US vetoed a UNSC resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, "diplomatically" shielding its client.

Nawaz delves...

FROM PAGE 01

common Pakistanis in 2017 and it seemed as if Pakistan would join the ranks of developed nations. But, he regretted, that after four days of progress, the country began to regress. The PML-N leader reiterated that everything was done to bring in one person, and now the state the country was in was evident to everyone. Nawaz stated that he and his daughter Maryam were implicated in false cases and they attended around 150 hearings. The former premier asserted that he was declared ineligible for not accepting a salary from his son. "It is unheard of in the world to remove an elected prime minister."

SC forms larger bench

FROM PAGE 01

parliamentarian by the Supreme Court in the Panama Papers case. IPP chief Jahangir Khan Tareen, who is currently spearheading his party's election campaign in a whirlwind tour of the country, had been disqualified for life for concealing a company he had created outside Pakistan to save his money. In May 2018, a five-member bench of the Supreme Court, led by the then CJM Mian Saqib Nisar, while handing down a verdict, ruled that disqualification of public representatives, Nawaz Sharif and Jahangir Khan Tareen - under Article 62(1)(f) was for life.

Alvi, Raisi for joint...

FROM PAGE 01

President Dr. Arif Alvi voiced deep concern over the dire situation in the occupied Palestine including Gaza as a result of ongoing Israeli aggression and occupation. The President regretted that despite the deaths of over 19,000 Palestinians including women and children, the UN Security Council has failed to impose a ceasefire and bring an end to the unspeakable Israeli atrocities. The President reiterated that a just solution to the Palestinian question based on an independent and contiguous Palestinian State with Al-Quds-Al-Sharif as capital was critical for lasting peace in the Middle East.

Neptra hikes power...

FROM PAGE 01

According to Neptra's notification, the latest rise in power tariff comes after an application filed by the Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) on DISCOs.

Babar regains top spot in ICC ODI Rankings

Gill, who ended Babar Azam's more than two-year reign as the top-ranked ODI batter in November, has only played three ODIs since then

SPORTS DESK

DUBAI: Former Pakistan captain and star batter Babar Azam on Wednesday, reclaimed the coveted top spot in the ICC Men's ODI Batting Rankings, dethroning India's batting prodigy Shubman Gill. Gill, who ended Babar Azam's more than two-year reign as the top-ranked ODI batter in November, has only played three ODIs since then. His last ODI appearance, which came in the ICC World Cup 2023 final against Australia, was forgetful as he fell for a mere four. Gill was then rested from India's three-match away ODI series against South Africa, causing him to lose crucial rating points. As a result, star Pakistan batter Babar Azam leapfrogged him in the rankings by achieving superior rating points (824), 14 clear of Shubman Gill. Gill is closely followed by his compatriot Virat Kohli, who holds the third spot in the ICC Men's ODI Batting Rankings with 775 rating points. Meanwhile, in



T20Is, England's leg-spinner Adil Rashid climbed two places to replace Afghanistan's Rashid Khan from the summit and India's Ravish Bishnoi, who slipped to third. Rashid becomes only the second Englishman to hold the No.1 ranking for

T20I bowlers after legendary off-spinner Graeme Swann held the top spot back more than a decade ago. Suryakumar Yadav extended his lead at the top to a total of 100 rating points at the back of his brisk century in the third

T20I against South Africa, while Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan (second) and South Africa's Aiden Markram (third) his closest rivals. The ICC Test Rankings also saw major shake-ups following Australia's thumping 260-run victory over Pakistan in the Perth Test. Australian opener Usman Khawaja jumped three places to claim the fourth spot, went past Babar Azam at third, and also moved within touching distance to top-ranked Kiwi Kane Williamson. His teammates David Warner (up nine spots to 27th) and Mitchell Marsh (improves 12 places to equal 68th) also make some ground after impressive knocks against Pakistan. Australian bowlers also got the reward of their magnificent performances against Pakistan in the first Test with Pat Cummins (up one place to third), Nathan Lyon (up three spots to fifth), Mitchell Starc (up two places to eighth) and Josh Hazlewood (up two spots to 10th) all making ground inside the Top 10 but India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin continues to hold sway at the top.

Shadab becomes honorary DSP of Punjab Police



DNA

LAHORE: Star Pakistan all-rounder Shadab Khan on Wednesday, became an honorary Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) of Punjab Police. Punjab Police stated that the cricketer was

awarded the coveted rank of Honorary District Superintendent of Police (DSP) by the provincial Inspector General (IG) Dr Usman Anwar and Additional IG Sultan Ahmed Chaudhry. Shadab Khan will serve as the brand ambassador of the force. The star cricketer

was informed about his job responsibilities following his appointment. Shadab Khan said he was proud to serve in the Punjab Police. He urged youth to join government sectors and play their role in the development of the country. "I am honoured to be allowed to

serve in a different way," he said. "We talk about change, let's be the change we want to see. I encourage our next generation to join the government sector to serve the country if possible. Pakistan Zindabad." It is pertinent to mention that Shadab Khan is not the only current Pakistan cricketer to join a police force. Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah are also serving in the Punjab Police and Balochistan Police respectively. Shadab Khan has been sidelined from the team as he is nursing an injury. He will not be part of the side that travels to New Zealand for a five-match T20I side. Shadab Khan opened up on his exclusion from the Pakistan team on the social media application X (formerly Twitter). He wished the best of luck to the selected players for the bilateral series. He added that he was recovering from his injury and would return to playing domestic cricket at short notice. He lamented about people liking players who are not selected and disliking those who are fulfilling national responsibility by playing for the country. He said Pakistan captain Shaheen Afridi and his team should be backed now.

Phil smashes ton as Eng set up decider with WI

LONDON: Phil Salt smashed a superb 119 from just 57 balls as England beat West Indies by 75 runs to level their T20I series 2-2 and set up a decider on Thursday. Led by Salt's aggressive stroke play and swift half-centuries from skipper Jos Buttler and Liam Livingstone, England made a team record of 267 for three in their 20 overs at the Brian Lara Academy. England's tally was second-highest innings score in a match between full member nations and although West Indies made a fast-scoring start they rapidly lost wickets and ended up bowled out for 192 in 15.3 overs. Having trailed 2-0 in this series and having lost the ODI series in the Caribbean, England were facing a demoralising end to their tour but now have the chance to secure the series back at the same venue. Salt had hit an unbeaten ton in England's victory in Grenada on Saturday and carried on where he left off, taking the attack to the hosts from the outset in emphatic fashion after England were put in. Phil Salt and skipper Jos Buttler put on 117 in the opening partnership before the captain was removed for 55 when he was caught in the deep by West Indies captain Rovman Powell off Jason Holder. Will Jacks helped maintain the momentum with 24 from nine balls as part of a rapid 56-run partnership and Liam Livingstone ensured the run-rate never faded with 54 from 21 balls. Salt was finally bowled by Andre Russell in the penultimate over after striking ten sixes and seven fours in his entertaining innings - the highest score by an Englishman in T20 internationals. The West Indies reply started badly with Brandon King removed with the first ball of the innings, edging to Reece Topley at short third man off Moeen Ali. But Nicholas Pooran came in and hammered 20 off the rest of Ali's opening over as the home side showed they were ready for the daunting chase. The runs were flowing but Kyle Mayers was caught by Chris Woakes, at the second attempt, after looping a mis-timed drive off Topley high to mid-on. Shai Hope went for 16 after he top-edged Woakes to the grateful Salt behind the stumps leaving West Indies at 78-4 in just the sixth over. Andre Russell offered a reminder of his power with five sixes in his 51 off 25 balls but England wrapped up the win when Russell was caught by Harry Brook off Topley. Phil Salt's incredible form bodes well for England's hopes in June's T20 World Cup, which will be hosted in the Caribbean and the United States, and he said he was relishing playing in the region. - Agencies

PM calls brain drain a part of...

FROM PAGE 01

an interactive session with the students of Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering, Science and Technology, exemplified the Indian nationals who had left their country and returned as an asset to contribute to their country. Responding to a question about the measures taken by the government to stop the brain drain, he said those leaving the country were not going to vanish rather they would seize better economic opportunities and skills, which should be encouraged. He said after improving their skills and qualifications they would become a valuable product as the world was in search of talent. I consider their journey a part of the talent hunt, he added. He said there was no evidence of any dramatic surge in brain drain in the prevailing circumstances rather it was a continuous process of skilled, semi-skilled, and non-skilled people moving abroad for better economic opportunities.

Pakistan eschews...

FROM PAGE 01

perspective on regional security, transnational terrorism and the importance of maintaining strategic stability in South Asia. The army chief highlighted that Pakistan desires to broaden bilateral engagement with the US through long-term multi-domain partnership. He highlighted that his interactions during the visit to the US with political and military leadership have been very positive and forward-looking for further strengthening the relationship. Pakistan has stood as a bulwark against transnational terrorism for decades for ensuring regional stability and global peace and security, the COAS was quoted as saying by the ISPR. He said the country had made unparalleled contributions and sacrifices in its enduring fight against terrorism "and will continue to fight till the logical end, in line with the aspirations of people of Pakistan".

ISI can't trace...

FROM PAGE 01

IHC's Justice Babar Sattar asked why the ISI filed the report through the Ministry of Defence. At this, Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Usman Awan replied the intelligence agency should have filed the report through the Prime Minister Office. According to the ISI report, the investigation could proceed only after taking assistance from social media platforms, the attorney general added. The report of the PMO regarding the audio leaks was submitted to the court by the attorney general. The AGP said no intelligence agency was allowed to tap audio conversations by the federal government including the ISI, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Intelligence Bureau (IB).

Baku simplifies...

FROM PAGE 01

The three-step process involves applying online, making a secure payment, and downloading the e-visa. This user-friendly system is designed to enhance efficiency and convenience for applicants. For Pakistani nationals planning a visit to Azerbaijan, the government offers two categories of visit visas - Standard and Urgent. The fee for a single-entry 30-day electronic visit visa under the Standard category is \$20, with a consideration period ranging from 3 to 5 days. For those with urgent travel plans, an expedited visa option is available at a fee of \$50. The Urgent category promises a swift processing time of three to five hours, allowing Pakistani citizens to obtain their electronic visa promptly. Azerbaijan, a nation nestled between the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, boasts a unique blend of historical landmarks and modern architecture. The capital city, Baku, is renowned for its medieval walled Inner City, featuring the Palace of the Shirvanshahs dating back to the 15th century, and the iconic Maiden Tower dominating the skyline.

Nottingham Forest appoint Nuno as new manager

LONDON:Nuno Espirito Santo has been appointed as the new manager of Nottingham Forest, the Premier League club announced Wednesday. "Nottingham Forest can today confirm the appointment of Nuno Espirito Santo as first team head coach," said a club statement. "Nuno joins the club on a two-and-a-half-year contract and will take charge of his first match on Saturday when Forest face Bournemouth at The City Ground." The 49-year-old Portuguese coach succeeds Steve Cooper, sacked by Forest on Tuesday after a dismal run of one win in 13 Premier League games left the club just one place, and five points, above the relegation zone. Nuno has been out of work since leaving Saudi Pro League club Al-Hittah in November. But he has now returned to English football following a two-year absence since his departure after an ill-fated four-month spell at Tottenham Hotspur which featured a mere 10 Premier League games. Nuno also had four years in charge of Wolves, guiding the club to promotion from the Championship in his first season in charge. Wolves enjoyed consecutive seventh-place finishes in the Premier League and a run to the Europa League quarter-finals under Nuno's leadership. - Agencies

Azhar Ali in line to get 'key role' at PCB

KARACHI: Former Pakistan captain Azhar Ali is likely sources told Geo News Wednesday. The 38-year-old Academy, as per sources. The former captain is director of the esteemed academy, with discussions currently underway between Ali and PCB regarding Ali's potential appointment is to be currently involved in domestic cricket where he also took part in England's county cricket retirement from Test cricket on December 16, series against England. In an exclusive interview, Ali talked about Pakistan's Test performances drought. "There were matches, where batters unable to bowl Australia out in those matches, had bowled Australia out twice in a match, said. There are only two such incidents wickets against Australia in Australia "People would say that Pakistan was by the time Pakistan's inning started, with an uneven bounce, and knowing was not unexpected," he said. The still make a comeback in the series the larger share of responsibility. He Australia out under 300 if Pakistan dence that Pakistani batters can post tant for Pakistan that the bowlers are bigger total," he said. - Agencies

to get a key role at the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), will have a pivotal role at the National Cricket reportedly being considered for the position sions currently underway between Ali and PCB regarding Ali's potential appointment is to be currently involved in domestic cricket where he also took part in England's county cricket retirement from Test cricket on December 16, series against England. In an exclusive interview, Ali talked about Pakistan's Test performances drought. "There were matches, where batters unable to bowl Australia out in those matches, had bowled Australia out twice in a match, said. There are only two such incidents wickets against Australia in Australia "People would say that Pakistan was by the time Pakistan's inning started, with an uneven bounce, and knowing was not unexpected," he said. The still make a comeback in the series the larger share of responsibility. He Australia out under 300 if Pakistan dence that Pakistani batters can post tant for Pakistan that the bowlers are bigger total," he said. - Agencies

Pakistan suffer injury scare amid Australia Tour Fast bowler Khurram Shahzad complained of discomfort in his left side during the first Test in Perth,' stated PCB

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

MELBOURNE: Pakistan's young right-arm pacer Khurram Shahzad suffered an injury scare following his team's crushing defeat against Australia in the first Test of the three-match series. In an official statement, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) shared that Khurram Shahzad complained of discomfort in his left side during the Perth Test. "Fast bowler Khurram Shahzad complained of discomfort in his left side during the first Test in Perth," stated PCB. "Following his complaint, Khurram was sent for an MRI scan after the match. "Further details will be shared in due course after the medical panel assesses the MRI reports." Khurram Shahzad had a decent start to his Test career as he picked up five wickets on his debut against Australia in Perth. For the unversed, Pakistan succumbed to a 360-run defeat against Australia after their batting lineup unfolded at a mere 89 in the fourth innings while chasing

a mammoth total of 450. The touring side could yield 271 runs in their first innings in reply to Australia's 487. Pakistan, who were at the top of the World Test Championship (WTC) points table with a perfect record, got another blow to their campaign when the International Cricket Council (ICC) pen-

alized them for maintaining a slow over-rate during the Perth Test. Pakistan were fined 10 per cent of their match fee and docked two ICC WTC points. The sanction after a hammering defeat, consequently resulted in them slipping to the second spot with a winning rate of

61.11. Two-time runners-up India benefitted from Pakistan's demotion and reached the summit with a winning percentage of 66.67. Pakistan suffered a heavy loss against Australia in the first game of the three-Test series. After being set a target of 450 in the fourth innings, Pakistan folded for a meagre 89 in 30.2 overs, losing the match by 360 runs. Pakistan will now play a two-day practice match against Victoria from December 22-23. The second Test of the series will be held from December 26-30 at Melbourne Cricket Ground. Australia squad: Pat Cummins (captain), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitch Marsh, Steve Smith, Mitch Starc, David Warner



Pakistan's squad:

Shan Masood (captain), Sarfaraz Ahmed, Imam-ul-Haq, Abdullah Shafique, Babar Azam, Saud Shakeel, Salman Ali Agha, Faheem Ashraf, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Aamir Jamal, Khurram Shahzad, Sajid Khan, Abrar Ahmed.

Briefs

10 dead as heavy rains hit south India

NEW DELHI: At least 10 people were killed in floods after intense rainfall in southern India, local media reported Wednesday, weeks after a cyclone triggered intense flooding in the same areas. Hundreds are stranded in the state of Tamil Nadu as water submerged roads, with the airforce dropping 10 tons of emergency supplies to those stranded. Footage from news agency Press Trust of India showed entire neighborhoods underwater, with rescue teams using boats. Tamil Nadu's chief secretary, Shiv Das Meena, said at least 10 people had died and 12,600 people were forced to flee to safer areas, the Indian Express newspaper reported. The situation was "grim" in districts including Thoothukudi and Tiruvelli, the state governor's office posted on X, previously known as Twitter. Tamil Nadu state chief minister M.K. Stalin said "historically high rain falls had severely impacted the livelihoods of many and caused extensive damage to infrastructure."—APP

Myanmar ethnic armed group seizes another crossing point

NAYPYIDAW : An ethnic armed group in northeastern Myanmar has seized a major crossing point for trade along the Chinese border, residents and media reports have said. The border gate in Laukaing township, the capital of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone in the northern part of Shan state, became the fifth crossing seized by the group since it launched a coordinated offensive on October 27 with two other ethnic armed groups. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), which took control of the crossing, joined with the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army for the offensive that began in October and call themselves the Three Brotherhood Alliance. Laukaing is known for hosting major organised criminal enterprises including cyberscam operations controlled by Chinese investors in cooperation with local Myanmar warlords. The Chinese government in recent weeks has initiated a crackdown on these operations, and thousands of people involved have been repatriated to China. Many of those who were employed there and then held against their will. The MNDAA is a military group of the Kokang minority that is trying to oust a rival Kokang group, backed by the military government, from power in the town.—DNA

Rwandan doctor given 24-year jail sentence

PARIS : A Rwandan doctor was sentenced by a Paris court on Wednesday to 24 years in prison for his role in the 1994 genocide in his home country. After a deliberation lasting nearly 15 hours, Sosthène Munyemana, 68, was found guilty of charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and participation in a conspiracy to prepare those crimes. He has denied any wrongdoing and his lawyers said he would appeal the decision. The six-week-long trial at the Assize Court in Paris came nearly three decades after a complaint was filed against Munyemana in the southwestern French city of Bordeaux in 1995. Munyemana, who was impassive as the verdict was handed down, was immediately jailed. He is the sixth suspect to have faced trial in France over the 1994 massacres in which an estimated 800,000 minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them, were killed over 100 days. At the time, Munyemana was a 38-year-old gynaecologist in Tumba, in Rwanda's southern university district of Butare. He has been accused of co-signing in April 1994 "a motion of support" for the interim government that supervised.—APP

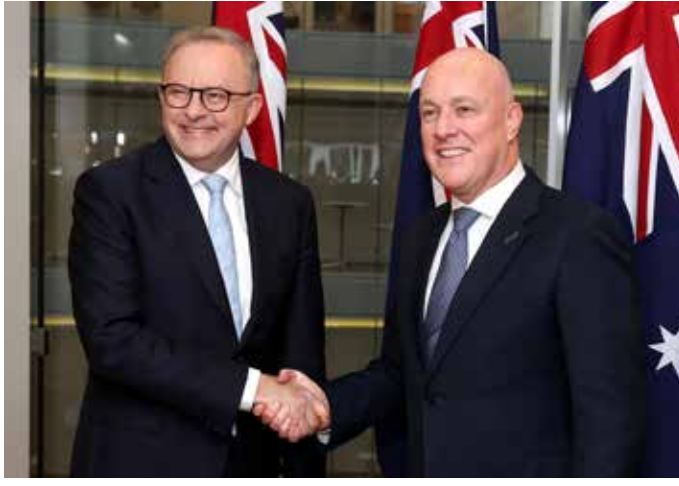
NZ 'interested in exploring' AUKUS opportunities

PM Luxon meets Australia's Albanese on first official trip overseas

NEWS DESK

SYDNEY : New Zealand is "interested in exploring" opportunities presented by the sharing of military technology under the AUKUS security pact, the country's new prime minister told his Australian counterpart in Sydney on Wednesday. Christopher Luxon spoke alongside Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in what was the 53-year-old New Zealand leader's first official trip abroad after his conservative National Party-led coalition was sworn into office in November. Although he did not explicitly mention China, Luxon noted the "contested strategic environment" among challenges in the Pacific, which both countries traditionally see as their sphere of influence. To counter Beijing's rise, Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. formed the tripartite AUKUS alliance in 2021, which will see Australia receive nuclear-powered submarines, in what is called "pillar one" of the agreement. Pillar two, meanwhile, concerns enhancing the partners' joint capabilities and interoperability in several areas including cyber ca-

pabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and hypersonic missiles. Luxon said the pair had discussed New Zealand's potential participation in pillar two, although both leaders refused to be drawn on whether the country of 5 million would join the pact, particularly given its strong anti-nuclear stance, which Luxon said was "nonnegotiable." "From my point of view, we are interested in exploring pillar two in AUKUS, particular new technologies ... and the opportunities that may mean for New Zealand to participate," said Luxon. "We'll work our way through that over the course of next year as we understand it more and think about what the opportunities may be for us." Albanese said the countries would continue to enhance their respective defense forces' interoperability. He said he wasn't pushing his counterpart to join AUKUS. "Prime Minister Luxon leads a sovereign government, so what sovereign governments do is not push each other, they talk through issues and they cooperate and we'll do that and we'll look for opportunities where there are prospects of greater cooperation," Albanese said. Christopher



Luxon speaks to supporters after winning the general election to become New Zealand's prime minister in Auckland. An election win by Luxon's Nationals in October ended six years of rule by the left-leaning Labour Party. Despite their differing political stripes, with Albanese leading Australia's left-of-center Labor Party, the pair said they had a strong personal relationship from their past dealings when Luxon, a business executive who entered politics in 2020, was the head of his country's national airline.

"Christopher and I are perhaps the two leaders of nations who are more than anyone else aviation nerds, having built the relationship when Prime Minister Luxon was the head of Air New Zealand and I was Australia's transport minister," Albanese said. The leaders discussed boosting the countries' already-close economic ties and cooperating to promote "common values" in the Pacific islands, where China's expanding influence has caused concern among the U.S. and its allies. China is both Australia's and New

Zealand's largest trading partner, and the countries' leaders have found themselves walking a tightrope between their economic interests and responding to more assertive behavior by Beijing in the region. Luxon last week denied the government was too scared to call out the economic powerhouse, after a statement from the New Zealand Embassy in Manila, responding to Chinese vessels harassing Philippine ships, did not mention China by name. While Luxon has vowed to bring "new urgency and intensity" to diplomatic efforts, his coalition has spent recent weeks launching their domestic agenda, detailed in a 49-point "blueprint" released in late November. The 100-day plan, says the government, is focused on "rebuilding the economy, easing the cost of living, restoring law and order, and delivering better public services." New Zealand's economy has been "weak for much of the past year," the country's Treasury said on Friday. Gross domestic product fell in three out of the last four quarters, with strong net migration masking underlying weakness in the real economy.

Macron's alliance fractures amid migration law dispute

French President faced cracks within his ruling alliance after parliament passed a toughened immigration bill

DESK NEWS

PARIS : French President Emmanuel Macron faced cracks within his ruling alliance on Wednesday after parliament passed a toughened immigration bill, leaving him needing to find ways to appease left-leaning members. The bill, a compromise between the centrist president's party and the conservative opposition, illustrates a rightward shift in politics in much of Europe as governments try to curb the rise of the far-right by being tougher on immigration. It also showed the difficulties for Macron of governing without a parliamentary majority, which he lost in the June 2022 election after winning a second presidential mandate. The tougher rules - including

migration quotas, making it harder for immigrants' children to become French citizens, and delaying migrants' access to welfare benefits - were added to the bill to win the support of right-wing lawmakers for its passage. The bill makes it easier to expel illegal migrants, while watering down plans to loosen curbs over residency permits for workers in labour-deprived sectors. Those conditions caused unease among Macron's more left-leaning lawmakers, and dozens either abstained or gave it the thumbs-down in a vote on Tuesday, and there were reports of ministers possibly resigning. Brittany lawmaker Jean-Charles Larsonneur told France Bleu radio that he was leaving the centrist Horizons group, part of Macron's alliance, saying the

bill breached "republican values." Even the lower house of parliament's president, Yael Braun-Pivet, who voted in favour of the bill, told BFM TV she was "terribly bothered" by some of its content, in particular delaying access to welfare benefits for migrants with children. The rebels in Macron's party could further weaken his hold on parliament and complicate the rest of his five-year mandate. Just six months before European Parliament elections in which immigration will be key, the adoption of the bill could also boost Marine Le Pen who called the regressed bill "a great ideological victory" for her far-right party. Macron was set to defend the migration law in a TV interview in the evening, and was also likely to try and move on and appease his

camp. Speaking on France Inter radio, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said the bill responded to the French people's worries about security and immigration. She rejected talk of a crisis in Macron's camp. "We've done our job, we wanted a text with useful measures that our citizens were calling for," she said, adding: "Now let's move on." Borne said that the government would ask the Constitutional Council to review the adopted bill. This opens the door to the council striking down some of the tougher measures if it deems them unconstitutional. She denied widespread reports that Health Minister Aurelien Rousseau would have presented his resignation.

Cameron to visit Jordan, Egypt to push for ceasefire

LONDON : British Foreign Secretary David Cameron will visit Jordan and Egypt this week to push for a sustainable ceasefire and further humanitarian pauses in Gaza, where Israeli attacks have killed more than 19,600 Palestinians, displaced most of the population and led to shortages of food, water and medicines. On his second visit to the region, Cameron will travel to the two countries alongside Minister for the Middle East Lord Ahmad, according to a Foreign Office statement on Wednesday. The foreign secretary will discuss the urgent need for "a sustainable ceasefire" involving the release of hostages and an end to rocket fire into Israel. "No one wants to see this conflict go on for a moment longer than necessary. But for a ceasefire to work, it needs to be sustainable," said Cameron, who was in Paris and Rome on Tuesday, ahead of his visit. "If Israel is still facing Hamas in Gaza with rockets and terror tactics, not only will a ceasefire not be sustainable, a two-state solution in the longer term will also not be possible," he added. This comes after a recent policy change from the British government, which had rejected to make any call for a ceasefire, reiterating that Israel had a "right to defend itself." Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had earlier said a "sustainable ceasefire" is needed in Gaza as "too many lives have been lost" under Israeli bombardments. Israel has bombarded the Gaza Strip, imposed a siege, and mounted a ground offensive in retaliation for a cross-border attack by Hamas on Oct. 7. At least 19,667 Palestinians have since been killed and 52,586 injured, according to Gaza's health authorities.—Agencies

Turkish forces neutralize 4 PKK/YPG terrorists

ANKARA : Turkish security forces "neutralised" four PKK/YPG terrorists in northern Syria, the National Defence Ministry has said. The ministry said on Wednesday that the Turkish soldiers "neutralised" the terrorists who were found to be preparing an attack in the Operation Olive Branch area. "We continue to strongly respond to the attack attempted by PKK/YPG terrorists who seek to disturb the peace and security," the ministry said on X. Turkish authorities use the term "neutralised" to imply the terrorists in question surrendered or were killed or captured. PKK/YPG terrorists hide out in northern Syria, near the Turkish border, where they plan and carry out attacks on both locals and nearby settlements in Türkiye. Since 2016, Ankara has launched a trio of successful anti-terror operations across its border in northern Syria to prevent the formation of a terror corridor and enable the peaceful settlement of residents: Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018), and Peace Spring (2019).—APP

Egypt declares impasses in Ethiopia dam negotiations

CAIRO : Egypt has said that the latest talks over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) have failed, but it will closely monitor the process of filling and operating the dam and reserve the right to defend its water. The latest meeting held in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, did not yield any results due to Ethiopia's persistent refusal to accept any of the technical or legal compromise solutions that would safeguard the interests of all three countries, including Sudan, Egypt's Ministry of Irrigation said in a statement on Tuesday. Addis Ababa hit back immediately, accusing Cairo of maintaining "colonial era mentality" during the failed talks. "Egypt maintained colonial era mentality and erected roadblocks against efforts towards convergence," Ethiopian Foreign Ministry said. "Ethiopia remains committed to reach an amicable and negotiated settlement that addresses the interests of the three countries and looks forward to the resumption of the negotiations." Egypt said it has become evident that Ethiopia has elected to continue exploiting the negotiation process as a cover to solidify a fait accompli on the ground while negotiating exclusively for the purpose of obtaining an instrument of approval from downstream countries of unregulated and absolute Ethiopian control of the Blue Nile, in isolation from Ethiopia's obligations under international law.—DNA

UK inflation eases to over 2-year low

LONDON : In November, inflation in the United Kingdom eased to its lowest rate in more than two years, prompting investors to pile further into bets that the Bank of England (BoE) may start cutting interest rates sooner than expected. The annual rate of increase in the consumer prices index (CPI) dropped to 3.9% from 4.6% in October, pushed down partly by petrol prices, for its lowest reading since September 2021, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said Wednesday. The headline inflation reading was below all forecasts in a Reuters poll of economists, which had pointed to a figure of 4.4%. Core and services measures of inflation - closely watched by the BoE - also dropped. Investors moved to price in a BoE rate cut by May 2024 fully. The pound shed almost half a cent against the U.S. dollar, falling from \$1.271 to \$1.266. British government bond yields also fell sharply. British inflation no longer looks like an outlier in international terms, with its headline inflation rate now matching that of France.—Agencies

Deadly blast in Guinea's capital threatens gas shortages

CONAKRY : Residents in Guinea's capital have woken up to rising costs of transportation after authorities closed gas stations as a major explosion and ensuing fire left several dead, hundreds injured and a possible disruption in the supply of gas across the West African nation. At least 18 people were killed, more than 200 injured and hundreds displaced by Monday's blaze that followed an explosion at the country's main fuel depot in the capital, Conakry, ripping through structures mostly in the Coronthie area that is home to some of the country's poorest households. Four more deaths were confirmed on Tuesday, bringing the total death toll to 18, while 85 of the 212 injured people were still receiving treatment in hospitals, government spokesperson Ousmane Gaoual Diallo said on state television, adding that the fire affected 738 households. The fire was contained nearly 24 hours after it started and other countries, including Senegal and Mali, sent teams to assist as authorities investigate the cause of the explosion. Guinea relies on imported petroleum products, most of which are distributed from the destroyed depot, leading to fears of panic buying of the commodity. Authorities have closed most public places and halted operations of all gas stations and tankers while temporary shelters were provided for hundreds of people. Hadja Diariou Diallo, who lived near the destroyed depot of the Guinean Petroleum Company, was forced to flee to safety in the suburbs of Conakry, but that meant leaving everything she had built behind, including the food business that sustained her family of 13.—APP



MEXICO: Ambassador Shozab Abbas called on Mr. Octavio Tripp, DG (Africa, Asia & ME), SRE and discussed about his visit to Pakistan to attend the 6th BPC. DG Tripp expressed his complete satisfaction and enthused to build Pak-Mex relations.

Zelenskyy confident US 'will not betray us'

I am sure that the US will not betray us and that what we agreed on in the US will be fully implemented : Zelenskyy

WEB DESK

KYIV : Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he is certain that the US will not betray Kiev and implement the agreements reached between the two countries on financial aid. "As for financial assistance, we are working very hard on this. I am sure that the US will not betray us and that what we agreed on in the US will be fully implemented," Zelenskyy said during an end-of-year news conference in the capital Kiev. Commenting on the \$54.8 billion aid package for Ukraine by the EU, Zelenskyy said it is "just a matter of time" before a decision is made on it, adding that he

is sure this will be made "in the near future." On Friday, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban announced that his country vetoed EU funding of \$54.8 billion for Ukraine, a day after the European Council decided to open accession talks with Kiev. Zelenskyy said developments regarding the strengthening of Ukraine's air defence capabilities are important, and this winter will be different due to its various challenges. "But we are becoming stronger and more powerful. I had a serious business trip. Several new Patriot systems will be in Ukraine to protect our country in winter. This is a very important result," he further said. Russia "failed" to achieve any results on the front

line during this year, the Ukrainian leader said, as he asserted that it is proven through the Kremlin's unchanged rhetoric regarding the goals of its "special military operation." "There is nothing to talk about defeats. Russia did not achieve any victory. What three



days ... Two years. Our fighters are great, our people are great. I am once again grateful to them for this," he added. Zelenskyy denied that Ukraine would lose the war, even in the case where support from its international partners decreases. He further said that he thinks no one knows the answer to whether the Russia-Ukraine war will end next year, and that their strategy of returning to the borders of 1991 has not changed. Zelenskyy also said that the Ukrainian military proposed to mobilise an additional 450,000 to 500,000 people for the army. "This is a very serious figure. I said that I need more arguments to support this direction, because it is a matter of people first and

foremost," he said, adding that he will not agree on the mobilisation of women. The toll the war is taking on Ukraine's economy was clear in figures published on Tuesday that showed the volume of goods exports through November was 19.3 percent lower than in the same period last year. The drop was due largely to Russia's "blockade of seaports and Russian attacks on our export transport logistics," Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko tweeted. However, a recent uptick in sea exports came after Ukraine created a temporary grain corridor in the Black Sea and introduced a ship insurance mechanism, she said, adding that the growth bodes well for next year.

Briefs

Malaysia imposes docking ban on Israeli ships

FOREIGN DESK

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia barred on Wednesday any Israeli or Israel-bound ships from docking at its ports, as outrage continues to rise over the growing Palestinian death toll in Gaza. Public protests in support of Palestine have been regular in Malaysia since the beginning of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza in October. Health officials in the Palestinian enclave estimate the daily strikes have since killed nearly 20,000 people — most of them women and children. Malaysia's immediate ban on ships from Israeli shipping company ZIM, as well as any vessels bearing Israel's flag, was announced by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. "These sanctions are a response to Israel's actions disregarding basic humanitarian principles and violating international law through continued massacres and atrocities against Palestinians," he said in a statement. "Malaysia also imposes a ban on any ship heading to Israel from loading cargo at Malaysian ports. These restrictions are also with immediate effect." Anwar said ZIM's ships were allowed by the government to dock in Malaysia from 2002 onwards. ZIM is the 10th largest shipping container company in the world, according to a publicly available online record by shipping intelligence provider Alphaliner.

Jordanian king confers 'Order of the Star of Jordan' on CJSC

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, who is on an official visit to Jordan, called on Abdullah II bin Al-Husseini, the king of Jordan, the military's media wing stated on Wednesday. The Jordanian king conferred the medal 'Order of the Star of Jordan' on General Mirza in recognition of his meritorious services. During the meeting, the CJSC and the Jordanian king discussed the various matters of interest, including the bilateral politico-diplomatic, military cooperation and the prevailing regional security situation, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated in a statement. The CJSC also held separate meetings with Major-General Yousef Ahmed Al-Hnaiti, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF), and Brigadier General Muhammad Hyasat, the commander of Jordan's Royal Air Force.

Nomination papers acquiring, submitting process starts

According to the schedule issued by the Election Commission, candidates interested in contesting elections can obtain and submit their nomination papers from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm until December 22

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The acquisition and submission of nomination papers for candidates intending to participate in the National and Provincial Assembly seats in the upcoming 2024 general elections commenced on Wednesday and will persist until Friday (December 22). According to the schedule issued by the Election Commission, candidates interested in contesting elections can obtain and submit their nomination papers from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm until December 22. The initial list of candidates is set to be released on December 23, with the scrutiny of nomination papers scheduled to take place from December 24 to December 30. Electoral symbols will be assigned to candidates on January 13, and the general elections are scheduled to be held on February 8. The cost for acquiring the nomination papers is set at Rs. 100. Each candidate is allowed to submit a maximum of five nomination papers, each with different endorsers. For those contesting a National Assembly seat, the non-refundable fee is Rs. 30,000. Meanwhile, candidates vying for a Provincial Assembly seat are required to pay a non-refundable fee of Rs. 20,000. Candidates must attach their income tax

PTI for avoiding any bid to delay polls

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) spokesperson stressed the need for avoiding any overt or covert attempts to sabotage the scheduled general elections, saying that Bar Councils and Bar Associations' declarations supported and validated the long-standing position of PTI regarding the ECP and Chief Election Commissioner. However, he added that the party would not tolerate any bid to delay the long-awaited general elections even for a single day beyond the fixed February 8, 2024 date. In his reaction to the statements of Bar Councils and Bar Associations raising questions about the impartiality of the CEC, PTI spokesperson said that most of the contents of their declarations fully supported and validated the stance of PTI pertaining to the CEC. He contended that PTI had been highlighting the unconstitutional and illegal decisions of the CEC during the last four years in general and the last two years in particular. PTI spokesperson stated that PTI's stance on the issues ranging from the appointments of members in the ECP to the biases of the CEC and discriminatory actions by the ECP was very clear and unambiguous from day one. He went on to say that Senator Ejaz Ahmed Chaudhary's pending reference in the Supreme Judicial Council against the CEC was a clear proof of PTI stance's stand against him. PTI spokesperson recalled that after the dissolution of the Assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), PTI had been the fiercest critic of all attempts to delay the polls from the constitutionally prescribed time limits in both provinces. He stated that PTI was also taking the lead role in resisting the electoral watchdog's strategy to avoid holding elections within the constitutionally mandated timeframe of 90 days.

return documents from the past three years along with their nomination papers. The fundamental eligibility criteria for candidates include being a citizen of Pakistan and being at least 25 years old. As per the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), individuals contesting National Assembly seats must be registered voters in any location within Pakistan. To vie for a seat in the provincial assembly, the candidate is required to be a voter of the respective province. The nomination papers must include an attested copy of the identity card and vote certificate of both the candidate recommender and endorser. Additionally, a copy of the passport on behalf of the candidate should be attached to the nomination papers. The nomination fee is to be deposited by the candidate directly to the Returning Officer (RO) or through a Bank Draft. Failure to comply with Articles 62 and 63 will result in the disqualification of a candidate. Additionally, the proposer for general seats must be a voter from the relevant constituency. For women and non-Muslim seats in the National and Provincial Assembly, both the proposers and seconders must be voters of the respective province. However, nominators and supporters of candidates for non-Muslim seats in the Assembly can be voters from any part of Pakistan.

Kuwait new Emir rebukes parliament, cabinet

KUWAIT'S new Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah on Wednesday criticised parliament and cabinet for harming national interests as he was formally sworn in before lawmakers as the country's 17th ruler. Officially taking over from his half-brother Sheikh Nawaf, who passed away on Saturday, Sheikh Meshal is faced with the task of pulling the country out of longstanding political paralysis and reforming a bloated public sector that has turned Kuwait into one of the Gulf's most laggard states. "I have stressed in my previous speeches that there are national obligations that must be fulfilled," the 83-year-old ruler told lawmakers after he took the oath of office. But "we have not noticed any change or correction" from parliament and cabinet, he added. Instead, the two entities have "harmed the interests of the people and the country," he said. His predecessor's short-lived rule was marked by a protracted political standoff that saw successive parliament dissolutions and cabinet resignations. — Agencies



ISLAMABAD: UNDP Resident Representative Sam Rizk calls on FM, Jalil Abbas Jilani. — DNA

ADB, Pakistan sign \$1.2 billion loan agreement

World Bank also approves \$350 million in financing for Pakistan

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Asian Development Bank signed a \$1.2 billion loan agreement with Pakistan, the ADB officials confirmed on Wednesday. The agreement, which was signed last Friday (December 15), comprises funding for budget financing and projects focused on domestic resource mobilisation, while a total of six projects will work towards making women financially independent. At least one-third of the funds will be disbursed as budget financing and make way for jammed financing pipelines following a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Economic Affairs Division (EAD) and ADB signed the loan agreements last Friday. An EAD official also confirmed the agreement and highlighted that ADB will allocate \$400 million from the total fund for budget support via two different agreements. Meanwhile, the executive directors' board of the World Bank also approved \$350 million in financing today for the Second Resilient Institutions for Sustainable Economy (RISE-II) Operation to strengthen fiscal management and promote competitiveness for sustained and inclusive economic growth. Najib Benhassine, the World Bank country director for Pakistan, said Pakistan needs urgent fiscal and structural reforms to restore macroeconomic balance and lay the foundations for sustainable growth.

BNA commander surrenders, urges others to follow suit

QUETTA: Sarfraz Ahmed Bungulzai, a commander of the banned militant group Baloch National Army (BNA), announced his surrender on Wednesday alongside 70 of his associates. The announcement was made at a press conference in Quetta, with provincial Information Minister Jan Achakzai also in attendance. During the press conference, Bungulzai said that he thought his armed struggle was for Baloch rights but later realised that the blood of the Baloch was being sacrificed for people's own interests. "India is involved in all these conspiracies [...]. Keeping in mind all this, we have decided to join the national mainstream. Me and 70 of my associates have joined the national mainstream," he said. He further said that in 2014, the blood of 155 innocent Baloch was spilled in Awaran after they refused to pay extortion money. He said that thousands of Baloch had been killed over the past 20 years. "These people are only working on foreign agendas," he said. Referring to last year's helicopter crash in which six Pakistan army officials, including a general, were martyred, he said that it had occurred due to a technical issue but the Baloch-istan Raaji Ajo-R-Sangar (BRAS) had taken responsibility on India's command. "And after taking money from India, they shed the blood of their own Baloch," he said. He urged the youth to follow suit and renounce violence. "My advice to parents is to give your children an education, not guns," he said. Bungulzai thanked the state for welcoming him and his associates, and also urged it to create a path for those who, like him, wanted to integrate into the national mainstream, saying there were many waiting to be accepted by the state. — Agencies

Colorado SC kicks Trump off ballot

COLORADO: Colorado's Supreme Court has ruled that Donald Trump cannot run for president next year in the state, citing a constitutional insurrection clause. The court ruled 4-3 that Mr Trump was not an eligible candidate because he had engaged in an insurrection over the US Capitol riot nearly three years ago. It does not stop Mr Trump running in the other states and his campaign says it will appeal to the US Supreme Court. The decision, they said, was "completely flawed". The ruling only mentions the state's primary election on 5 March, when Republican voters will choose their preferred candidate for president. But it could affect the general election in Colorado next November. It is the first ever use of Section 3 of the US Constitution's 14th Amendment to disqualify a presidential candidate. Tuesday's decision - which has been placed on hold pending appeal until next month - only applies in Colorado. Similar attempts to kick Mr Trump off the ballot in New Hampshire, Minnesota and Michigan have failed. The justices wrote in their ruling: "We do not reach these conclusions lightly. We are mindful of the magnitude and weight of the questions now before us. We are likewise mindful of our solemn duty to apply the law, without fear or favor, and without being swayed by public reaction to the decisions that the law mandates we reach." The decision reverses an earlier one from a Colorado judge, who ruled that the 14th Amendment's insurrection ban did not apply to presidents because the section did not explicitly mention them. — Agencies

Modi breaks silence on US murder plot allegation

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that India will "definitely look into" any evidence provided on its alleged links to an assassination plot in the US. In November, the US charged an Indian man of conspiring to murder a Sikh separatist leader in New York. Mr Modi told the Financial Times that the allegations will not affect ties between India and the US. This is the first time he has spoken publicly about the issue. "If a citizen of ours has done anything good or bad, we are ready to look into it. Our commitment is to the rule of law," the prime minister told the newspaper. The target of the attempted assassination, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, is a dual US-Canadian citizen who is a vocal supporter of the Khalistan movement which advocates for a separate Sikh state. US prosecutors claimed that a man named Nikhil Gupta had paid \$100,000 (£79,000) in cash to a hitman to assassinate Mr Pannun and that he was allegedly directed by an Indian government official. — Agencies

French Parliament passes controversial immigration reform

The French vote came hours before an EU agreement to reform the asylum system across the bloc's 27 member states

FOREIGN DESK

PARIS: The French parliament has passed legislation toughening France's immigration policy after months of political wrangling. The amended bill was backed by both President Emmanuel Macron's centrist Renaissance party and Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN). The vote divided Mr Macron's party, and the health minister Aurelien Rousseau announced he was going to resign. Left-wing parties accused Mr Macron of making concessions to the far right. A previous draft was rejected by parliament last week, by National Rally as well as the left. In response, the government redrafted the bill, making some of its provisions tougher. The new legislation makes it more difficult for migrants to bring family members to France and delays their access to welfare benefits. It also bans detaining minors in detention centres. A controversial provision discriminates between citizens and migrants, even those living in the country legally, in determining eligibility for benefits. The tougher version appealed to right-wing parties, who backed it on Monday.

Ms Le Pen welcomed the amended bill, calling it an "ideological victory" for the far-right. "This is our bill," said Eric Ciotti, the leader of the right-wing Republican party. He called it "firm and courageous". But left-wingers said Mr Macron was enabling the far-right. "History will remember those who betrayed their convictions," Socialist party leader Olivier Faure said. Leaders of at least two left-led areas, Seine-Saint-Denis and Lot, said they would refuse to implement the provisions of the law on benefits for non-citizens. The French vote came hours before an EU agreement to reform the asylum system across the bloc's 27 member states. The new pact, agreed by EU governments and European Parliament members, includes creating border detention centres and enabling the quicker deportation of rejected asylum seekers. Hailed as a landmark agreement by Parliament President Roberta Metsola, the new system allows asylum seekers to be relocated from southern member states, which have the highest numbers of arrivals, to other countries. It still has to be formally approved by the Parliament and member states. The new French legislation exposed divisions

within the governing alliance. 27 MPs voted against while 32 abstained - almost a quarter of pro-Macron MPs. Health Minister Aurelien Rousseau, who was a member of the Communist party in his youth, stepped down in protest at the immigration law. Several other ministers are reportedly on the verge of quitting. "Some measures in the bill make me very uncomfortable," said Yaël Braun-Pivet, the president of the lower house of parliament and a member of Mr Macron's party. The bill would have passed if Ms Le Pen's party had abstained, though not if it had voted against. The government pointed to the size of its majority to argue that it did not depend on National Rally votes. Speaking after the vote, the prime minister accepted some measures in the law might not be constitutional. "We will ask the Constitutional Council," she told French radio, referring to a top court which upholds the constitution's principles. Human rights groups denounced the new reform as the most regressive immigration law for decades. Mr Macron's party lost its majority in parliament in elections in June 2022. Since then, the government has frequently found itself unable to win votes in parliament.

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