



# Islamabad POST

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**EXIM Pak launched to catalyze economic expansion, global trade**

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**China warns Philippines to exercise caution**

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**Usman charged for wearing black armband**

Detailed News On Page-06



## Engagement with Afghans: Pakistan lays down criteria

**Demands UN probe into banned TTP acquiring advanced military equipment**

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has laid down new conditions for any future engagements between the international community and the Afghan Taliban in a clear and significant departure from its earlier stance that would certainly make the Kabul regime's international recognition far more challenging. In what was perceived as a policy announcement, Pakistan's Permanent Representative at the UN on Thursday said any process of engagement with the Afghan interim government should be conducted on the basis of the action it takes against terrorist outfits including the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Munir Akram's statement came at the UN Security Council session during a debate on the current situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan, since the takeover of Kabul in August 2021, urged the international community to engage with the Afghan Taliban. Islamabad believed that the Afghan Taliban were a reality, and there was no other way but to remain engaged with them despite the international community's reservations. However, with tensions simmering between Pakistan and the Afghan government over the attacks carried out by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on Pakistani soil, Islamabad quietly abandoned advocating for the Afghan Taliban a few months ago. The Express Tribune was the first to break the story. Today, Pakistan's Ambassador Munir Akram officially confirmed the policy shift, and conditioned any future engagement with the Afghan Taliban on the actions it will take against terrorist outfits. "Any process of engagement with the Afghan interim government should be conducted on the basis of the action that it takes against these terrorist organizations. Else, we will see the recurrence and proliferation of terrorism from Afghanistan as happened prior to 9/11, threatening not only the region but the entire world," Ambassador Akram warned at the UNSC. He said Pakistan hoped that Ambassador Feridun Sinirlioglu's assessment

Continued on Page 06

## FM reaffirms Pak support to IOM's mandate

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Director General of International Organization for Migration (IOM) Amy Pope on Thursday called on Caretaker Foreign Minister Jilil Abbas Jilani. In the meeting, the foreign minister reaffirmed Pakistan's support to the IOM's mandate. He appreciated IOM's valuable work in Pakistan, especially in areas of migration, and humanitarian support after the 2022 devastating floods. They also exchanged views on IOM's ongoing projects in the country. Earlier, Director General International Organization of Migration (IOM) Amy Pope on Thursday called on Secretary Interior Aftab Akbar Durrani and discussed issues of mutual interest. He thanked the DG International Organization of Immigration for its outstanding support to the Government of Pakistan and assured full cooperation from NADRA, FIA and, Passport and Immigration Departments at various levels. He said that the Ministry of Interior will also need IOM's support in border management in future. Both of them reiterated their commitment to full cooperation. The interior secretary informed DGIMO that the return of foreigners residing illegally in Pakistan will continue and so far,

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ISLAMABAD: Jordanian Ambassador Dr. Maen Khreasat calls on, Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi. - DNA

## 4 Indian soldiers killed in Kashmir

DNA

SRINAGAR: Four soldiers were killed in India-administered Kashmir during a gun battle in the disputed Himalayan territory, the army said Thursday. Two army vehicles were conducting an operation in Rajouri district south of Srinagar, the region's biggest city, when they were fired upon by freedom fighters, a defence spokesperson told international media. "Troops sustained 3 fatal and 3 non-fatal casualties," the spokesperson added. Army operations were continuing in the area and further details of the incident were "being ascertained," they said. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since both countries gained independence in 1947, with each claiming the high-altitude

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## Palestine crisis worries global community

**"International community should play a role for an immediate ceasefire in Palestine," Murtaza Solangi said**

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi said on Thursday that the current situation of Palestine was a cause of concern not only for the Muslim Ummah but also for the civilized nations of the world. During a meeting with Jordanian Ambassador Dr. Maen Khreasat who met with him here, the minister said that peace in Palestine was the responsibility of the whole world. "International community should play a role for an immediate ceasefire in Palestine," Murtaza Solangi said. Besides, ceasefire between Palestine and Israel, coming elections in Pakistan and Jordan, regional security situation, cooperation in the media sectors and other important issues were discussed during the meeting.

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## Prisoner swap talks only after war stops

FOREIGN DESK

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 76 on Thursday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound and level whole blocks and homes and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. Palestinian armed groups reject any talks about any prisoner and captive swaps until after the Israeli "aggression" on Gaza ends, according to a statement published by Hamas. "There is a Palestinian national decision that there should be no talk about prisoners or exchange deals except after a full cessation of aggression,"

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## Briefs

### Elahi fears 'historical crisis'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former Punjab chief minister Chaudhry Parvez Elahi on Thursday warned that the country would face a historical crisis if free and fair general elections were not held. "Let the elections take place and lay the foundation for good thinking as it will ensure a good future for the poor," Elahi, PTI president, said while talking to the media in Islamabad. To a query about a level-playing field in the polls, Elahi - who is behind bars - said what about the "levels" when there's "no field". To another query, he said he backs Barrister Gohar Khan as PTI's chairman.

### 'Will run as independent candidate'

MEHTAB PIRZADA

RAWALPINDI: Former interior minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan on Thursday announced he will run as an independent candidate in the upcoming general elections. According to sources, Chaudhry Nisar, who previously was affiliated with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, would contest for the National Assembly seats from the constituencies of NA-53 and NA-54. Chaudhry Nisar has reportedly obtained nomination papers for the NA-54 constituency through Malik Saeed Nawaz. Sources said that the nomination papers for the former minister were received from the assistant returning officer for Taxila, Aftab Ahmed.

## IHC dismisses Imran's plea for Toshakhana verdict suspension

**Following his conviction in the case, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified the former PM for five years**

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: In another blow for incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan ahead of the upcoming general elections, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday dismissed his plea seeking suspension of the trial court's verdict in the Toshakhana case. The former prime minister had moved the IHC for rectification of its August 28 order, by way of suspension of the judgment on August 5 passed by the trial court. In August, Khan was sentenced to three years in prison and a fine of Rs100,000 by Additional District and Sessions Judge (ADSJ) Humayun Dilawar on August 5, 2023, after the judge found Khan guilty of graft in the Toshakhana case. He has been convicted of misusing his position as prime minister to sell state gifts worth more than Rs140 million (\$490,000) that he received from foreign dignitaries during visits abroad.

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## PML-N seeks extension for filing nomination papers

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) on Thursday sought a two-day extension in the December 22 deadline to file nomination papers for the general elections scheduled for February 8 next year. A day earlier, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl (JUIF) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) also wrote to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), seeking an extension in date for filing nomination papers by three days. In a letter written to the

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## Police crackdown on protesters aimed at avoiding 'catastrophe'

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Following widespread condemnations over the police crackdown against Baloch protesters in Islamabad, the caretaker federal government on Thursday clarified that the force was used to avoid a "catastrophe". Addressing a joint press conference flanked by caretaker ministers Fawad Hasan Fawad and Jamal Shah, Information Minister Murtaza Solangi said that in line with the directions of caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, a committee has been formed to hold talks with



the Baloch protesters. "From the government side, Fawad Hasan Fawad spoke with the protesters," he added. The negotiation committee—headed

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## Use of force against Baloch marchers condemned

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators from Turbat to raise their voice against enforced disappearances in Rawalpindi and subsequently in Islamabad is condemned in the strangest terms.

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## Pakistan to attend conference on Palestine in Tehran on Dec 23

FO said the crimes against humanity in occupied Palestine were a "haunting stain on the conscience of humanity"

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan will participate in a consultative conference on Palestine being held in Iran's capital Tehran on December 23, the Foreign Office said Thursday. "We will continue to support international efforts to bring an end to Israel's ongoing campaign against the Palestinian people," Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said at a weekly press briefing. The FO spokesperson said Pakistan remained deeply concerned over the ongoing campaign of brutality and large-scale massacre unleashed upon the Palestinian people. "We strongly condemn Israel's ongoing war on hospitals and its barbarous bulldozing of tents in the courtyard and vicinity of the Kamal Adwan Hospital in Gaza that crushed to death numerous Palestinians including women, children, and wounded patients under treatment," he said. She said the crimes against humanity in occupied Palestine were a "haunting stain on the conscience of humanity". Bloch said Pakistan called for holding Israel accountable for its actions and the United Nations Security Council to take im-



## UN calls for probe as Israel accused of 'war crimes'

FOREIGN DESK

NEW YORK: The United Nations human rights office has called for an independent inquiry into allegations that Israeli forces "summarily executed" at least 11 Palestinian men in Gaza in what it called "a possible war crime". "The Israeli authorities must immediately institute an independent, thorough and effective investigation into these allegations, and if found to be substantiated, those responsible must be brought to justice and measures implemented to prevent any such serious violations from recurring," said the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in

a statement on Wednesday. Arab media spoke to several witnesses to Tuesday's raid during which Israeli troops allegedly surrounded and stormed a residential building, going floor to floor to separate the men from the women and children, and then shooting dead 11 of the men in front of their family members. The men were in their 20s and 30s, survivors said. "They saw us, men and their wives and children. My brother-in-law tried to speak and explain all in the house are civilians, but they shot him dead," one survivor told Al Jazeera of the attack on families who were sheltering in al-Adwa building in Gaza City's

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"Oslo Accords", reflect the true intentions of the Israeli occupation authorities, their disregard for international law and commitments and rejection of a just resolution of the Palestinian question," she said. The FO spokesperson said Pakistan firmly believed that the only just solution to the Palestin-

ian question was the creation of an independent, viable, sovereign, and contiguous Palestinian State along pre-June 1967 borders with Al-Quds-Al-Sharif as its capital. Baloch said Pakistan's High Commission in New Delhi this month issued 166 visas to Indian Hindu pilgrims for visits to Shree Katar Raj Temples in Punjab and for participation in annual celebrations at Shadani Darbar Hayat Pitafi, Sindh. Pakistan, she said, also issued visas to 3,000 Sikh pilgrims from India on the occasion of the 554th birthday celebrations of Baba Guru Nanak this month to visit Pakistan from November 25-December 4, 2023. "Under the Pakistan-India Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines of 1974, Pakistan welcomes and facilitates thousands of Sikh and Hindu pilgrims from India to visit Pakistan to attend various religious festivals and occasions every year," she said. She said the issuance of pilgrimage visas was in line with Pakistan's commitment to facilitate visits to religious shrines and promote interfaith harmony. This year, 6824 visas were issued to Indian pilgrims visiting Pakistan. On the situation in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, the FO spokesperson said Pakistan would continue to extend political, diplomatic, and moral support to the Kashmiri brothers and sisters for the just and peaceful settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolutions.



# ICCI urges embracing Quaid's vision

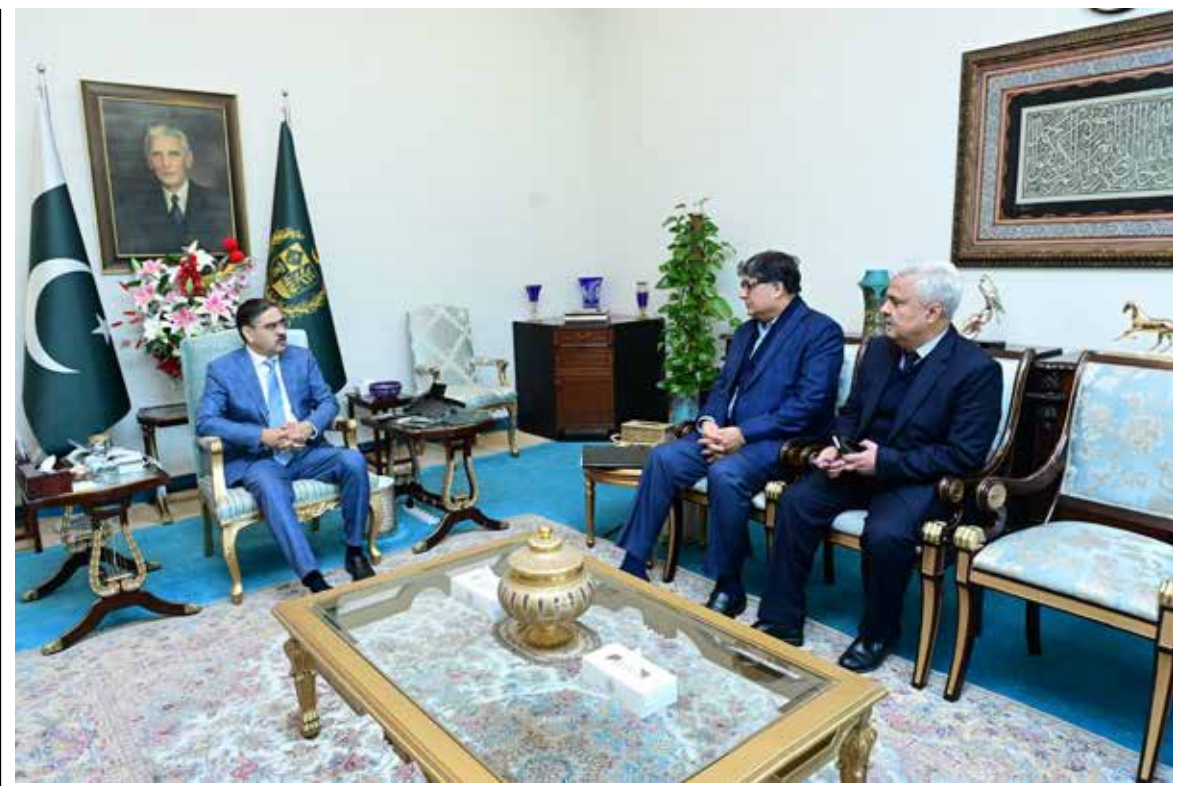
He said that blocking roads and commercial centers to protest is a negation of Quaid's vision

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, Inspector General, Islamabad Police said that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had done a great favor to us by creating an independent country for us and we should develop Pakistan according to his vision. He stressed that the youth should follow Quaid's golden principles of faith, unity, and discipline to play an effective role in the national development of their country. He said that blocking roads and commercial centers to protest is a negation of Quaid's vision. He said that for the last 19 months, Islamabad Police has now allowed anyone to block roads and markets in the federal capital and reiterated that the Islamabad Police will not spare any sacrifice to make the Capital a peaceful city. He said this while addressing as chief

guest a ceremony at Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry to celebrate the Quaid-e-Azam Day. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) said that the birthday of Quaid-e-Azam reminded us to work hard with honesty and dedication in every sphere of life to make Pakistan a rising economy. He stressed that the government should focus on promoting ease of doing business in the country to enable business activities to flourish. He stressed that the government should strictly follow the vision of Quaid-e-Azam to make Pakistan a progressive and prosperous country. A cake was cut on the occasion and the importance of Quaid's guiding principles of unity, faith, and discipline were highlighted. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI said that Quaid-e-Azam had said that no power can undo Pakistan and we

all have to play a role in making Pakistan a strong country. Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar Vice President ICCI said that the ongoing repression of Muslims in India is proof of the fact that the two-nation theory of Pakistan was right. He said that we should work harder for the economic development of Pakistan. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that Quaid-e-Azam had emphasized on promoting discipline in the nation, but unfortunately, our society is devoid of discipline at the moment. He said that the businessmen should be promoted as role models to make Pakistan a strong economy of the region. He said that over 500 books have been written on Quaid and stressed that the youth should study them to know about the importance of Pakistan. Muhammad Naveed Malik former Senior Vice President ICCI, Afraz Begum Sial and others also spoke on the occasion.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Privatisation and Inter-Provincial Coordination Fawad Hassan Fawad calls on the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.—DNA

## DRF introduces Whatsapp Tipline against election disinformation

LAHORE : Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) in collaboration with Meedan and Check has launched the Disinformation Whatsapp Tipline to counter growing gendered disinformation and misinformation during the elections. The WhatsApp Tipline is a move towards documenting instances of growing disinformation which is shaping narratives and reinforcing online harms like hate speech and technology facilitated gender-based violence in Pakistan, particularly during election time. The WhatsApp Tipline is available in both Urdu and English and can be reached at 0301-3249539. Mithu, an interactive bot, greets users at the Tipline and collects content that is false, sexist, and misogynistic in nature which can be in the form of text, pictures, videos and audio. To share content on the Tipline all one needs to do is share links or the content itself on the WhatsApp number and their response will be recorded by Mithu. With the upcoming elections, there will be a rise of disinformation particularly targeting women politicians, journalists and human rights defenders which will translate into offline spaces. The WhatsApp tipline is a step to counter these harmful narratives stemming from social media platforms in such a crucial democratic moment. DRF's Nighat Dad noted, 'We're seeing a rise in harmful content online particularly with respect to gendered disinformation with the use of false information manipulating the masses and the use of sexist and misogynistic narratives that are perpetuating harms. These attacks are well coordinated and planned and seem to be adding to offline harms of individuals, particularly women human rights defenders and journalists. The tipline is one step towards documenting these and ensuring to make Hamara Internet a safer space for all.—APP

## KMU holds seminar on SDGs for child health

PESHAWAR : The Khyber Medical University (KMU) here on Thursday hosted a significant event focusing on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for maternal and child health in the Islamic world. Renowned public health scientist, Prof. Dr. Zulfiqar A. Bhatta was the keynote speaker and chief guest at the seminar. The ceremony attended by Advisor for Health KP Prof. Dr. Riaz Anwar, Vice Chancellor KMU Prof. Dr. Ziaul Haq, Prof. Dr. Hafeezullah (former VC KMU), Registrar KMU Inamullah Khan Wazir, faculty members, administrative officers, dignitaries and large number of students. Addressing the participants, Prof. Dr. Bhatta delivered a thought-provoking lecture on the challenges and op-

portunities associated with the SDGs for maternal and child health in the Islamic world. The aim of this lecture was to shed light on the progress made, identify existing obstacles and explore potential avenues for improvement in achieving the SDGs related to maternal and child health. It was emphasized that fostering positive change was not only a necessity but a shared obligation among the member nations of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The focus was underscored on championing the cause of reproductive, maternal, child and adolescent health, deeming it a pivotal priority for overall development. The speaker stressed the imperative of augmenting resource allocation and en-

sureing financial security to facilitate universal health coverage. Furthermore, the speakers called for robust support, collaborative partnerships and unwavering political commitment to actively diminish the existing equity gap in maternal and child survival. This clarion call, directed at OIC countries, highlighted the urgency of a collective effort to address critical health challenges and underscores the significance of solidarity in achieving meaningful progress. Health Advisor Prof. Dr. Riaz Anwar conveyed sincere appreciation to Prof. Dr. Bhatta for generously sharing invaluable insights concerning the challenges and opportunities associated with attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in maternal and child health.—APP

## Transgender submits nomination papers for general elections

PESHAWAR: For the first time in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sobia Khan, a transgender from Peshawar, on Thursday has submitted nomination papers to participate in the upcoming general elections. Sobia Khan has filed nomination papers for the provincial assembly seat from constituency PK-81. Running her campaign as an independent candidate, Sobia Khan expressed her heartfelt desire to champion the rights of the transgender community, women and children if she secured victory in the elections. Talking to media after filing nomination paper, Sobia Khan said she is determined to be an advocate for transgenders' rights, challenging societal perceptions that undermine their potential contributions to the welfare of society. Her election campaign strategy includes an extensive door-to-door outreach in the constituency, aiming to garner support not only from men but also from women in the area Possessing a Bachelor's degree, Sobia Khan holds the distinction of being the first transgender broadcaster in the province. — DNA



LAHORE : Chief Punjab Mohsin Naqvi is holding a special meeting of the Prime Minister to review the progress on the road project.—DNA

## Dr Nadeem calls for addressing antimicrobial resistance

Dr Nadeem Jan called for galvanizing efforts to deal with the critical issue of addressing and containing antimicrobial resistance in Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Dr Nadeem Jan on Thursday called for galvanizing efforts to deal with the critical issue of addressing and containing antimicrobial resistance in Pakistan. Addressing a closing ceremony of the Fleming Fund Country Grant Pakistan, the minister called for a narrative on antimicrobial resistance which was digestive and palatable to political leaders, health professionals, and communities.

Dr Nadeem said there was a need for revising the National Action Plan on AMR. He added that all stakeholders should be consulted for revising the plan. He requested commitment of all stakeholders in updating the national plan on AMR.

The minister suggested forming a high-level taskforce on AMR, which should serve as the coordination platform for efforts and initiatives on addressing antimicrobial resistance. He said the most crucial factor in containing AMR was the change in behaviour towards the use of antibiotics. In this regard, he recommended a comprehensive communication strategy on AMR. The Fleming Fund is a UK-funded programme focusing on controlling antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in more than 25 countries, including Pakistan, across Africa and Asia. Managed by the UK Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), the Fleming Fund supports governments through country and regional grants and fellowship schemes to implement AMR strategies globally, especially in low-income countries where AMR has a disproportionate impact. Since 2019,

Pakistan has come a long way in terms of addressing AMR under the One Health approach. The Fleming Fund has actively supported the initiatives to implement Pakistan's National Action Plan on AMR. This cooperation at the federal and provincial levels will continue in the second phase of the grant. Dr Qadeer Ahsan, Team Lead of the Fleming Fund, gave an overview of the grant's four-year work in Pakistan. He said the silent threat of AMR should be understood at all levels from the policymakers to the people. He added that the people needed to know how antimicrobial resistance was adversely impacting humans, animals, and the environment. In the phase II, he said the grant in collaboration with the provinces would work on developing legislation on addressing AMR. Dr Arif Azad said AMR was a real,

local, and global threat. However, he added that it was preventable through urgent actions and concerted efforts by political leadership, healthcare leaders in human and animal health, laboratory and microbiological and environmental experts and policymakers and media. Dr Arif termed the education of health workforce crucial for addressing AMR. A documentary, the Fleming Fund and the fight against AMR in Pakistan was screened at ceremony. The ceremony was also addressed by the representatives from the office of Animal Husbandry Commissioner, DG Health Services Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, DG Health Services Sindh, National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Veterinary Laboratory (NVL), National Reference Laboratory Poultry Diseases (NRLPD), and Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM).

## Governor KP highlights rule of law for economic development

PESHAWAR : Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali Thursday said that supremacy of rule of law was prerequisite for economic development of a country and establishing society on firm foundations. He was addressing a ceremony in Centre for Learning Law and Business (CLLB). The ceremony was also attended by Advocate General, Amir Javaid, Secretary Higher Education Regulatory Authority, Sajid Inam, lawyers, students and faculty members. On the occasion, the Governor was informed that the center is affiliated with University of London and the students of CLLB would be issued degree from the University. Addressing the ceremony, the Governor highlighted the significance of rule of law and said that it was the prerequisite for social and economic development. He said that the role of lawyers community in our judicial system could not be undermined and added that law students should also be informed about their role in existing judicial system. He urged the students to further polish their abilities and skills and play role to improve status of country among world nations. Youngsters are assets of the country and they must work in cohesion with a purpose for country's development, he expressed. The KP Governor said that justice, peace, knowledge and conscious were the factors that derive strength from justice and supremacy of law in a society. He also lauded the administration of CLLB for organizing the co-curricular activities and assured his cooperation to faculty members.—APP

## Inter-provincial meeting promotes nationwide gender data strengthening

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) with support from UN Women and the United States, hosted the 21st Inter-Provincial Ministerial Group (IPMG) meeting in Lahore, during which participants discussed how to use data more effectively in efforts to advance gender equality in Pakistan. The meeting showcased stakeholders' dedication and commitment to advancing gender equality and empowering women in Pakistan. The shared vision of a more inclusive society, where every woman can thrive and contribute to the nation's progress, remains at the core of these

collective efforts. The IPMG was established in 2009 to enhance coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment in Pakistan. Nilofar Bakhtiar, Chairperson, NCSW said, "This assembly serves as a crucial platform, fostering collaboration and initiating positive change on the path to gender equality and the empowerment of women in Pakistan. Together, let's unite to construct a society where every woman's voice echoes, and her rights and contributions are valued." Ms. Sharmeela Rassoof, Country Representative of UN Women, stated, "The IPMG functions as an inventive platform for devising tailored solutions that cater to the unique needs of Pakistan. An exemplary

illustration of this is the National Gender Data Portal. Acknowledging the crucial role of data, we recognize its importance in identifying policy gaps and empowering officials to make informed decisions." U.S. Consul General, Lahore, Ms. Kristin Hawkins added, "The National Gender Data Portal, which is financially supported by the United States, is a credible and comprehensive source of gender-related data. Better data collection, analysis, and reporting paves the way for more informed decision making, both by the Government of Pakistan and donors working to eradicate gender-based violence and to empower women."

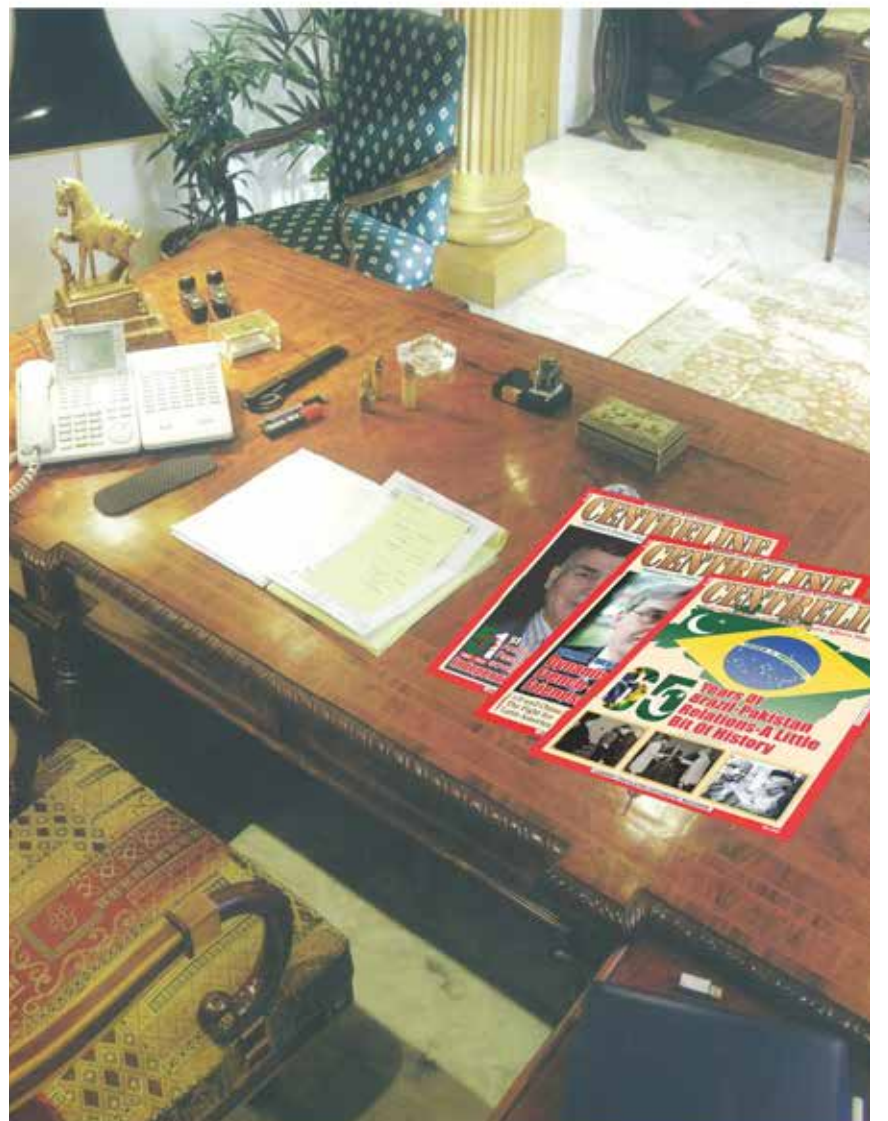
## NIM delegation visits RCCI

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The 34th Senior Management Course delegation of National Institute of Management (NIM) Lahore, visited Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) here on Thursday. The visit was part of the National Institute of Management Course aiming at capacity building and a better understanding of national issues and interacting with the key decision makers and institutions. RCCI President Saqib Rafiq, along with Vice

President Faisal Shahzad welcomed the participants and briefed about the activities of RCCI and explained the Chamber's role and initiatives for enhancing and facilitating the businesses and economy. Saqib Rafiq informed that the chamber serves as a bridge between the private sector and the Government. RCCI constantly keeps a liaison with the government agencies and assists them in the decisions affecting trade and industrial culture. He added that RCCI has played a vital role in the development

of commercial, Industrial and Economic activities in the region. RCCI has also signed MOUs with various chambers local and international, as well as with various Government and private sector organizations of National and International level. He said that the chamber has entered into MoUs with more than 20 universities and colleges aiming to strengthen the industry academia linkages. Later, the group also visited the various departments of RCCI along with the President Saqib Rafiq



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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### DECEMBER

Dec 01/Romania National Day

Dec 02/United Arab Emirates National Day

Dec 02/Laos Republic National Day

Dec 05/Thailand National Day

Dec 06/Finland Independence Day

Dec 07/India Armed Forces Flag Day

Dec 09/Tanzania National Day

Dec 11/Oman Armed Forces Day

Dec 12/Kenya Independence Day

Dec 12/Turkmenistan Neutrality Day

Dec 16/Bahrain National Day

Dec 16/Kazakhstan Independence Day

Dec 18/Qatar National Day

Dec 18/Niger National Day

Dec 23/Philippines Armed Forces Day

Dec 23/Japan National Day

### Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

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



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



### Hospitals

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



### Departments

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

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

## Jordan's new envoy explores initiatives with COMSTECH

In a groundbreaking proposal, CG COMSTECH demanded the establishment of a joint Jordan-Pakistan Water Resource Management Laboratory under COMSTECH's auspices at the Panjwani Hisaar Water Institute (NED University)

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Maen KHREASAT, Jordan's recently appointed Ambassador to Pakistan, had comprehensive meeting with H.E. Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, Coordinator General COMSTECH on Thursday, December 21, 2023, at the COMSTECH headquarters. During the meeting, Prof. Iqbal highlighted the ongoing collaborative efforts between COMSTECH and Jordan, revealing that COMSTECH has spent around \$1.5 million in various active projects with Jordan to date. Dr. Iqbal further briefed the Ambassador existence of two COMSTECH-affiliated organizations in Jordan, namely the Islamic Academy of Sciences (IAS) and the Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management (INWRDAM). In a groundbreaking proposal, CG COMSTECH demanded the establishment of a joint Jordan-Pakistan Water Resource Management Laboratory under COMSTECH's auspices at the Panjwani Hisaar Water Institute (NED University). He also recommended the initiation of a young scientists exchange program between COMSTECH and Jordan, for scientific collaboration and knowledge exchange. Dr. Iqbal also informed the Ambassadors about 500 free scholarships for Palestinian students by COMSTECH and Association of Private Sector Universities of Pakistan (APSUP) Ambassador KHREASAT expressed Jordan's commitment to sustaining cooperation with COMSTECH, emphasizing Jordan's role as a technology hub in the region. He envisioned joint programs with COMSTECH to explore new technological frontiers and enhance higher education initiatives. He appreciated COMSTECH's initiative of 500 scholarships for Palestinian students and offered all kinds of support from



Jordan. The two sides concluded the meeting by affirming their commitment to mutual benefit and the exploration of opportunities for further collaboration. The proposed joint Water Resource Management Center and the young scientists exchange program will stand as witness to the strengthening ties between Jordan and Pakistan under the COMSTECH framework.

as models for emulation. Ambassador Azhar Mazlan highlighted the stark difference in their Hajj quota compared to Pakistan. Prospective Hajj participants in Malaysia, both women and men, face prolonged waiting periods. Malaysia has prioritized providing the new generation access to modern science and achieving economic stability over the years. An independent and robust economy is a fundamental requirement for freedom and decision-making independence, he expressed.

Malaysia's provision of excellent service and facilities to its pilgrims is worthy of emulation, the minister said adding that there should be exchange of trade, cultural delegations between Muslim countries. Hus-san-e-Qiraat, an international competition, will be held in Pakistan this year on the model of Malaysia, he added. The minister also said that Malaysia's impressive growth, economic stability and consistent policies served

as models for emulation. Ambassador Azhar Mazlan highlighted the stark difference in their Hajj quota compared to Pakistan. Prospective Hajj participants in Malaysia, both women and men, face prolonged waiting periods. Malaysia has prioritized providing the new generation access to modern science and achieving economic stability over the years. An independent and robust economy is a fundamental requirement for freedom and decision-making independence, he expressed.

## Aneeq stresses international collaboration for Ummah's unity

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Aneeq Ahmed Thursday emphasized the necessity of restoring the concept of Ummah, urging increased efforts to unite the Ummah with the support of the international community. This was discussed during a meeting with Malaysian Ambassador Mohammad Azhar Mazlan in the office of Religious Affairs Minister Aneeq Ahmad. They

engaged in an in-depth conversation on bilateral relations, economic stability and the promotion of religious harmony, including discussions on Hajj arrangements. The minister emphasized the crucial need for restoring the concept of Ummah. There should be increased efforts to unite the Ummah, taking the international community into confidence, he said and highlighted that Pakistan and Malaysia had valuable lessons to learn

from each other. Malaysia's provision of excellent service and facilities to its pilgrims is worthy of emulation, the minister said adding that there should be exchange of trade, cultural delegations between Muslim countries. Hus-san-e-Qiraat, an international competition, will be held in Pakistan this year on the model of Malaysia, he added. The minister also said that Malaysia's impressive growth, economic stability and consistent policies served

as models for emulation. Ambassador Azhar Mazlan highlighted the stark difference in their Hajj quota compared to Pakistan. Prospective Hajj participants in Malaysia, both women and men, face prolonged waiting periods. Malaysia has prioritized providing the new generation access to modern science and achieving economic stability over the years. An independent and robust economy is a fundamental requirement for freedom and decision-making independence, he expressed.

## 'No possibility of seat adjustment with JUI-F'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) senior leader Sherry Rehman said on Thursday that there was 'no possibility of seat adjustment with Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUI-F), as it did not want general elections to be held on time. "The JUI-F was part of the coalition government; however, this time the situation is different, but PPP doors are always open to other political opponents," she told a private news channel. Sherry reiterated that her party would launch a vigorous electoral campaign from Garhi Khuda Bakhsh on December 27, on the death anniversary of BB Shauheed. She said that the PPP was the only party that stresses the need for holding timely elections in the country. The other political parties in the country are seemingly running away from the polls. She deplored that different tactics were used in the past to create rifts in her party; their all attempts went in vein, and the PPP raised the slogan 'Pakistan Khappay' (Long live Pakistan). "We would never let anyone break Sindh," said Sherry. The PPP leader urged the politicians to abstain from politics of division as the country is going through tough conditions. She emphasized that the national interest must be above everything else. Sherry Rehman was optimistic to form next government, saying that the PPP would contest elections from all constituencies across the country, and results in Punjab would be different. She noted that the PPP wanted a level playing field for all the parties to contest the next polls in a free and fair manner. In response to a query, she remarked PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto is a young politician and he will be the candidate of her party for the slot of prime minister in the upcoming elections.—APP

## SJC awards 12-year RI, Rs 17 mln fine

RAWALPINDI: The Special Judge Central (SJC) on Thursday awarded 12-year Rigorous Imprisonment (RI) and a fine of Rs 17 million to Munawar Hussain, resident of Pind Aziz Tehsil Sarai-Alamgir in a corruption case and criminal breach of trust. According to details, accused Qadeer Hussain r/o Mirpur AJK with the connivance of officers of Post Office Bani District Mirpur and official of GPO Mirpur AJK Munawar Hussain S/O Muhammad Boota, and other en-cashed Defense Saving Certificates (DSCs) of his uncle Nazir Hussain and withdrew an amount of Rs. 1,67,00,000 against the said DSCs by presenting fake Power of Attorneys.—APP

## CPEC Forum to equip journalists

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Media Forum Balochistan Initiative was launched on Wednesday to equip the journalists in underdeveloped areas of Balochistan with information of the Chinese investment in the region and its positive impacts. In an exclusive interview with Gwadar Pro, Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi said that the CPEC Media Forum Balochistan Initiative will equip the local journalists of Balochistan with the right information about CPEC projects. He said, "CPEC starts from Gilgit-Baltistan to Gwadar, and it cannot be completed without the development of Balochistan, especially Gwadar. We should encourage more journalists to join the media industry especially focusing on the region's developmental projects and will give them the right information to counter the negative propaganda against the corridor." On asking about the availability of media education at the University of Gwadar one of the University students Samma who was present at the forum told the correspondent that journalism has not been introduced at Gwadar University as yet, and introducing media education at the university level will help youth play their role in this field. Adding to the role of the media industry in Balochistan Chairman Pakistan-China Institute (PCI) Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed elaborated that the local media channel journalists from print as well as electronic media should be supported by both Chinese and Pakistani governments to convey the right information to the locals. "Supporting journalists in underdeveloped areas of Balochistan through this initiative will not only empower them but will also play a crucial role in promoting transparency, accountability, and civic engagement," he said. The focus of the 8th CPEC Media Forum jointly organized by Pakistan-China Institute (PCI) and China Economic Net (CEN) was "Next decade of CPEC: Opportunities & learning from past decade". The Forum conducted in-depth exchanges and discussions on topics including "3rd Belt and Road Forum: Opportunities for Green Development", "Challenges and opportunities in CPEC media reporting: Synergizing efforts for countering propaganda against CPEC" and "A Decade of CPEC: achievements and the way forward".

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ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has caught 2,527 suspected meters so far in the current month in various circles of the company during the ongoing power anti power theft and recovery drive. Sharing the details, the IESCO spokesperson told that IESCO teams checked over 118,000 meters in various circles. Out of total, 2,514 meters were found slow and 13 tampered while 85 consumers were getting direct electric supply. Fine of over Rs 80 million has imposed on the power pilferers besides arresting 27 power thieves. He requested the customers to report power pilferage at toll free no 118.—APP

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## Fertilizer output increases 8.91 %

ISLAMABAD: Fertilizer production in the country during the first four months of the current financial year increased by 8.91 per cent as compared to the output of the corresponding period of the last year. During the period from July-October 2023 over 1.17 million metric tons of Nitrogenous fertilizers were locally produced as compared to the output of 1.05 million 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. However, during the period under review, the local output of Phosphate fertilizer decreased by 9.22 per cent as compared to the production of the same period of last year, it added. During the period under review, about 250,315 metric tons of Phosphate fertilizer were manufactured in the country as compared to the manufacturing of 275,746 metric tons in the same period of last year, it added. Tractor assembling in the country during the first four months of the current financial year increased by 55.58 per cent as compared to the assembling of the corresponding period of last year.—APP

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## Shopping frenzy reaches its peak during December sale offers

ISLAMABAD: As the birth anniversary of the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah is around the corner, famous brands outlets and online shopping platforms have announced sale offers on dresses and other seasonal accessories to attract the buyers especially women who remain in search of discounted items for their family due to the prevailing price hike situation. The shopping frenzy reaches its peak in the month of December with sales in connection with the Quaid-i-Azam Day, Christmas and New Year celebrations. December is the month when majority of the brands and fashion outlets offer sales up to flat 50 on various items to attract the buyers who usually purchase the stock for this season as well as next assuming further rise in the prices. Following the past trends, the famous brands of dresses, shoes and other accessories have started offering Quaid Day sales while many online retailers have also displayed discount offers to sell maximum winter stock.

A number of women buyers have started visiting the popular malls and brands outlets to look into the discount offers for purchasing winter stuff for them and their families. "Purchasing winter stock at the advent of the season is difficult for the salaried class due to high rates. I always buy dresses, shoes and other needed items at the end of December when the New Year sale starts", Shaista Hameed, a mother of three children said.—APP



## Briefs

**Dengue in Punjab: number of cases decreasing**

DNA

LAHORE: As many as 11 new cases of dengue were reported in the province on Thursday. The latest health department data revealed a total of 15,113 confirmed dengue cases in Punjab this year. However, the battle against fever persists with Lahore leading a tally at 6,983 cases followed by Rawalpindi with 2,654, Gujranwala with 1,590, Multan with 1,457 and Faisalabad with 914 cases. Lahore, with an additional seven cases, continues to grapple with the fever and Multan with new new cases within 24 hours. Currently, 11 patients are undergoing treatment in various hospitals across Punjab, with three of them in hospitals of Lahore. Secretary Health Punjab Ali Jaan Khan issued a compelling plea to citizens, urging them to maintain clean and dry surroundings as a preventive measure against dengue fever. He also called for cooperation with the health department teams that were working tirelessly to combat it. For those in need of dengue treatment, information, or wishing to register complaints, a free helpline is available through the health department at 1033.

**NPO to organize webinar on critical thinking & problem solving**

ISLAMABAD: The National Productivity Organization (NPO) will conduct a webinar on 'critical thinking and problem solving' on December 27 (Wednesday). Problem solving and critical thinking refers to the ability to use knowledge, facts, and data to effectively solve problems, according to an NPO document shared here. The workshop is aimed at evaluating, analyzing and synthesizing key concepts and experiences, and applying diverse perspectives to find creative solutions to problems concerning human behavior, society and the natural world. The workshop will provide information about thinking fundamentals, logical reasoning and fallacies, problem-solving strategies, and practical applications and case studies. The webinar has been designed for senior management, middle management, team leaders and supervisors.—APP

**ECP rejects KP Bar's misinformation on NA seats**

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Thursday dismissed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council's claim about the reduction of seats in the National Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, stating, "It is baseless, contradicts facts, and aims to create confusion among the public." In a statement, an ECP spokesman clarified that, in 2018, the 25th constitutional amendment merged the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Following the merger of FATA with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, 12 National Assembly seats in FATA were eliminated, and six seats were added to the National Assembly seats of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, stated the spokesman. The spokesman mentioned that the National Assembly seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have risen from 39 to 45, and the Provincial Assembly seats have increased from 99 to 115, with an additional 16 general seats. He emphasized that determining the seats of the National and Provincial Assemblies is the prerogative of the Parliament. The Election Commission is performing its duties according to the constitution and law without any pressure.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov briefs the audience about the latest situation in Shusha and other liberated areas.—DNA

**Govt committed to ensure peace, equal rights for all**

The president said Prophet Isa (AS) was an embodiment of peace and affection and these values were much needed in today's world shaken by strife, conflicts and wars

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has reiterated that the government is fully committed to ensure peace, tranquility and equal rights to all citizens irrespective of caste, creed and religion as enunciated in the Islamic teaching, pronounced by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and laid down by the Constitution of Pakistan. He said that being an Islamic welfare state, it was their duty to safeguard the basic rights of all religious minorities and reassured that their all rights would be completely protected at all costs as the successive governments had been making strenuous efforts in this regard. Addressing a ceremony held here at the Aiwan-e-Sadr in connection with the celebrations of Christmas, the president said Prophet Isa (AS) was an embodiment of peace and affection and these values were much needed in today's world shaken by strife, conflicts and wars. He said that teachings of Islam as well as

by almost all religions laid emphasis upon the value of human life and when its value was reduced, it gave rise to conflicts. "Wars and carnage are no solutions. My message to the world is; wars must end," he stressed. The ceremony was arranged by the ministry of religious affairs and interfaith harmony was attended by parliamentarians, religious leaders and members from different faiths, members of diplomatic corps and a large number of Christian families. The president referring to atrocities in Gaza, said contrary to the religious teaching of peace and tolerance, the scenes in the world were topsy-turvy. About 19,000 precious human lives in Gaza had been lost but the human hearts had not melted, he added. He opined that despite the United Nations' calling for immediate ceasefire and a denunciation by the Pope himself, the carnage of Palestinians including Christians continued where churches besides, mosques were razed to the ground. The enlightened world advocating the tenets of democ-

cratic values was so oblivious to the humanitarian woes in the conflict, he added. He said when Pakistan Resolution was passed during 1940, a simultaneous resolution over Palestine was also adopted and reaffirmed that the two-state was the only solution to the issue. The president said in Pakistan, all communities were enjoying equal rights and living with peace which was 'a beautiful banquet' of interfaith harmony and unity. Recollecting the tragic Jaranwala incident, he said whenever an incident involving religious minorities surfaced, the governments had immediately responded and also commended the judiciary for playing a significant role in ensuring their rights. He said Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and the Caliphs also repeatedly advised and acted for the protection of rights, places of worship and lives of the followers of other faiths. Moreover, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of nation, in his

historic and memorable speech of August 11, 1947 had stressed that everyone irrespective of colour, creed and religion would have the equal rights, privileges, and obligations, besides complete religious freedom in the new State of Pakistan, he added. He also appreciated the contributions of religious minorities in the social and economic uplift of the country. Citing treatment meted out to minorities including Muslims, Christians and Sikhs in India, he said an archbishop in the Manipur had claimed that about 150 churches were burnt down which was given a colour of tribal conflict to divert attention from the plight of minorities. President Alvi said Hazrat Isa (AS) served the ailing and miserable humanity and spread the divine message of peace, empathy and affection among the human beings and the observance of day reinforced that message. Earlier, speaking on the occasion, Caretaker Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony

Aneeq Ahmed said that all the Prophets spread the message of peace, equality and tolerance. He urged the religious leaders to spread the message of peace and love in the world, adding that the white colour in the national flag of Pakistan declared that the country could not be completed without their religious minorities. Archbishop of twin-cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, Dr Joseph Arshad said that there was need to reinforce the spiritual message of peace, affection and interfaith harmony as spread by Hazrat Isa (AS). He said the Christians and all other religious communities would continue playing their role in the progress and prosperity of the country. Bishop of Lahore Diocese Nadeem Kamran, in his remarks, said that the joyous day reminded them to further foster brotherhood, affection and unity among their ranks and appreciated the Muslims and the government for taking steps to protecting their equal rights in Pakistan.

**FGEHA authorizes auction of 19 commercial plots in G-13, G-14**

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) has approved the auction of 19 commercial plots in sectors G-13/3, G-14/3 and G-14/4 of the federal capital to facilitate the resident of the sectors. "A Petrol Filling Station in the Mauve area in G-13 also approved by the authority which will generate not only more revenues for the FGEHA but also attract the investors," an official told APP. The FGEHA has already shared the date for an open auction of various sizes of commercial plots (Class-III) in Sector G-13

and G-14 in leading newspapers, the official added. He said in a bid to secure the future through safe investment opportunities with guaranteed profits, the open auction of various sizes of commercial plots is set to take place on December 27 and 28. Additionally, the official said that a Petrol Filling Station plot would be auctioned on December 27 at Aura Grande, E-11, Islamabad. As per the details, the prime location of these plots makes them suitable for a range of purposes, including multi-use businesses, shopping centers, corporate offices,

and banks. The plots have ideal an ideal location like positioned along the Main Srinagar Highway, adjacent to Metro Stations, GT Road, & N-5, eight-minute drive from Motorway M-1 and M-2 while 12-minute distance from the New Islamabad International Airport. Moreover, the official said the investors stand to benefit from a 10 percent rebate on advance lump-sum payments, making the opportunity even more attractive. The reasons to consider these plots for investment include their ideal location, affordable pricing, and

modern facilities, he added. The official said the detailed terms and conditions for participation in the auction can be obtained from the relevant office, with brochures available for interested parties. It's important to note that both the general public and overseas Pakistanis, along with their authorized attorneys, are eligible to participate in this open auction, providing a broad spectrum of potential investors with the chance to secure prime real estate and make a sound investment for the future.—APP

**Pakistanis perceive CPEC positive for Pak economy**

Report draws its insight from 350 individuals encompassing key stakeholders including 62 government employees, 22 parliamentarians, civil sector representatives, private sector professionals, journalists, members of academia and students from Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, KP, Kashmir and Gilgit

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: As 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the launch of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a report titled "Perceptions on CPEC in Pakistan" was launched at the 8th CPEC Media Forum hosted by the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan and organized by China Economic Net and Pakistan-China Institute. Data from the report indicates that there is widespread agreement among Pakistanis that CPEC will help revive economic activity in Pakistan. The report draws its insight from 350 individuals encompassing key stakeholders including 62 government employees, 22 parliamentarians, civil sector representa-

tives, private sector professionals, journalists, members of academia and students from Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir and Gilgit. Based on the report, 65% of the respondents view Chinese professionals as friends of Pakistan who will help revive the country's economy and socio-economic well-being. This means a majority of Pakistani people strongly believe that CPEC will prove to be beneficial for the country and its people. About how CPEC will help Pakistan, 93.5% of the respondents view CPEC as a project that will significantly help Pakistan through investment in various sectors while also opening avenues for businessmen. And, 75.1% of the respondents agree that through CPEC, local businessmen will get ac-

cess to international markets. Moreover, 61.1% of the respondents believe that CPEC will help economically vulnerable groups such as women, which signals positive segments among the Pakistanis with regards to how CPEC is slowly revolutionizing the economy by improving the socio-economic well-being of the people. Additionally, 66.9% of the respondents think that investment under CPEC can significantly improve the agricultural industry of Pakistan, and 72.7% of the respondents believe that CPEC has helped develop state-of-the-art infrastructure in the country. Looking into the future, 54.2% of the respondents think CPEC should focus on business opportunities more, followed by education (13%),

health (5.9%), IT (2.3%), etc. Overall, the majority of the respondents perceive CPEC positively as a game-changer for Pakistan's economy. Furthermore, the second highest responses for the questions were 'neutral' which stems from the idea that while CPEC is fast progressing and its fruit is visible some people lack a good understanding of this corridor and its influence regarding different development phases. Statistics from the Embassy of China in Pakistan exhibit that by the end of 2022, CPEC had brought direct investment of \$25.4 billion to Pakistan, creating 236,000 jobs, building 510 kilometers of expressways and 886 kilometers of national grid, and adding 8,000 MW of electricity.

**PM' program to empower skilled youth key pillar**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Executive Director National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTC) Muhammad Aamir Jan Thursday said that the Prime Minister's Youth skilled program is key pillar to empower them with the necessary tools and innovative skills, which will grow globally. Caretaker government was empowering youth through imparting skilled and vocational training programs to provide them better employment opportunities within the country and abroad, he said while talking to PTV news channel. Amir Jan explained the program that over 4.5 million people in the country entered the labor stream every year with only 1.5 people having proper skills. He said the objective of the programme was to provide skilled training to 56,000 people all across the country and mentioned that the skills were linked with international certification. PM's youth empowerment programme aims to promote youth empowerment by reducing young women and men's vulnerability and exclusion through a three pronged approach of jobs & economic empowerment, social engagement and education and skills development, he added. This program aims to empower hundred thousand marginalized and excluded youth across the country, he said. He also advised parents to allow their children take up vocational skills pending when academic activities resumes, adding, media should play pro-active role to aware people at the grass-root to encourage vocational education training programs.

ED said that a skilled human resource was essential for running industrial units constantly, adding, technical training can play a vital role in the social and economic development of the country. He stressed that skilled manpower can lead the country to its ultimate goal of prosperity and self-reliance. Introducing skills programs for youth at provincial level will be an opportunity to popularize skills education linked with employability and job markets, he mentioned.

**Hafeez Jalandhri remembered on death anniversary**

ISLAMABAD: The 41st death anniversary of creator of Pakistan's national anthem, Abul Athar Hafeez Jalandhri observed on Thursday. He was born in Jalandhar, Indian Punjab on 14th January 1900. His family migrated from Jalandhar to Lahore after partition. He was a great poet of song as well as poem and ghazal. His extreme achievement is "Shahnama Islam" which he wrote in poetic form and published in four volumes. Due to this commendable achievement, he was given the title of 'Firdowsi Islam'. The second major achievement of Hafeez Jalandhri was the National Anthem of Pakistan and he will always be remembered for this unique creation.—APP

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## The North Korean Threat: Unraveling the Enigma

North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), has long been a subject of global concern due to its unpredictable behavior, nuclear ambitions, and human rights abuses. The isolated regime, led by the Kim dynasty, poses a unique set of challenges that continue to perplex the international community. This article aims to dissect the North Korean threat, examining its historical context, nuclear program, diplomatic relations, and the potential implications for regional and global security. The Korean Peninsula has been a hotspot of geopolitical tension since the end of World War II when the Korean War erupted in 1950. The conflict, which lasted until 1953, resulted in the division of Korea into North and South along the 38th parallel. The armistice agreement, rather than a peace treaty, left the two Koreas technically still at war, contributing to the enduring tensions. One of the primary concerns surrounding North Korea is its nuclear weapons program. Despite international condemnation and sanctions, the regime, led by Kim Jong-un, has persistently pursued nuclear capabilities. North Korea's nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches have heightened global anxieties and drawn widespread criticism from the United Nations Security Council. The pursuit of nuclear weapons adds a volatile dimension to the North Korean threat, raising questions about regional stability and the potential for nuclear proliferation. Beyond its nuclear ambitions, North Korea has been repeatedly criticized for its egregious human rights abuses. Reports of political repression, forced labor camps, and restrictions on freedom of speech paint a grim picture of life inside the secretive state. The international community has condemned these actions, calling for accountability and urging North Korea to address its human rights violations. Diplomatically, North Korea's relationships with neighboring countries, especially South Korea and China, play a crucial role in shaping the regional landscape. The interplay between North Korea, South Korea, and the United States has been marked by periods of tension, punctuated by occasional diplomatic initiatives. The delicate balance in the region requires a nuanced approach to navigate the complexities of geopolitical dynamics. The North Korean threat extends beyond the confines of the Korean Peninsula. The potential for nuclear proliferation poses a direct challenge to global security. The international community's response, including diplomatic efforts, sanctions, and dialogue, is pivotal in preventing the escalation of tensions and fostering a more stable and secure environment. The North Korean threat is a multifaceted challenge that demands a comprehensive and cooperative approach from the international community. Balancing the need for regional stability, addressing human rights abuses, and curbing nuclear ambitions requires careful diplomacy and a commitment to finding peaceful solutions. As the situation continues to evolve, navigating the complexities of the North Korean enigma remains a critical task for the global community.



## The view on the politics of migration

Western European politics is suddenly sprouting some very odd couples. Last weekend, Rishi Sunak flew to Rome and posed for pally photos with Italy's far-right leader, Giorgia Meloni. This week, France's "radical centrist" Emmanuel Macron has been cheered to the rafters by the far-right figurehead Marine Le Pen. For both men, this has been a long, strange trip further and further to the right. Mr Sunak and Mr Macron came to politics after elite educations and stints in global finance. Years later, they still appear more at home with Silicon Valley billionaires than ordinary voters. Hardline nativists they are not. So what do these freshly pressed spreadsheet readers see in their unlikely new supporters? In a word: convenience. Lagging in the polls, they are rummaging deep inside the grubby sack of anti-immigrant politics and pulling out rhetoric and policies that the far right claim as rightfully theirs. The one-time arch-globalist Mr Macron now stands behind a bill that will allocate housing and benefits not on the grounds of need, but on degree of Frenchness. No wonder that Ms Le Pen hailed it as an "ideological victory" – or that one minister quit in protest and others had to be implored to stay. For Mr Sunak, the anti-immigrant posturing has proved more personally humiliating. When the son of east African migrants became prime minister, it was hailed as a triumph of multicultural values. Yet last weekend, he warned that new arrivals to Europe threatened to "overwhelm" the continent. Such language may comfort the most reactionary racist, but they will never warm to Mr Sunak because they can't see past the colour of his skin. It is also a gauge of the moral depths in which British Conservatism now wallows. In 1968, when Enoch Powell made his "rivers of blood" speech, he was promptly sacked as a shadow minister and never again held a senior political post. Nowadays, worse is said by leading Tories who hope it might help them become party leader. The only people for whom the new nativism is an unalloyed boon are of course the nativists themselves. In the UK, Nigel Farage has just spent weeks on primetime television posing as a celebrity in the jungle. In Italy, Ms Meloni hangs out with Elon Musk, while Ms Le Pen is using her newfound prominence to shed her party's old associations with antisemitism and to pose instead as a protector of Jews. This is a wholesale reconfiguration of European politics, where the centre-right are posing as radicals and the nativist right are donning the garb of centrists. If Mr Sunak and Mr Macron were still serious about governing, rather than mere politicking, they would make some obvious points. First, both Britain and France ran huge empires from which they extracted fortunes. As the old saying goes, the people of those countries are over here because their one-time masters were over there. Second, ageing western European societies need foreigners to come and work, and to pay taxes to subsidise hospitals and schools. If Britain makes entry unnecessarily hard for skilled nurses from Manila or physicists from Kolkata, they will go elsewhere. Third, it is in the nature of humans to travel, to fall in love, to dream. They always have, and they always will. Migrants are not just economic units; they are people who can add to a society and a culture. Arguing otherwise is to play into the politics of prejudice.

## “Army Chief visit to US: Takeaways”

Qamar Bashir



He purged the illegal aliens despite potential disapproval from the US, the West, and the Afghan interim government. His strategic outreach to China yielded significant progress on the CPEC project, accelerating the pace of investment and launching a second phase focused on agricultural development, industrial zones, research & development

I was sitting in my office when I received a telephone call from the President of Pakistan who was still airborne in a special plane from Islamabad to Lahore to discuss the appointment of a new army chief with the chairman of the PTI. He directed me to keep two press releases ready. The Prime Minister had advised the President to appoint General Asim Munir as the Chief of the army staff, but the president was of the view that the head of one of the biggest parties should be consulted before he consented to the proposed appointment. The president used his magic to secure his appointment. Had he failed Pakistan might have been moving in a different direction.

Following the call on by the Army Chief, Joint Chief of the army staff, on the President, when President's Secretary,

Mr. Waqar Ahmad, asked about my impression, I replied that the body language of the new chief exuded a sense of extraordinary determination and focus, evident in the depth of his eyes, suggesting he had significant ambitions and plans ahead. Subsequently, his distinct approach became evident. He initiated a complete overhaul of border and coastline control practices. His decisive actions targeted illegal money exchanges, dismantling the Hawala Hundi business, and curbing the smuggling of currency, petrol, and other commodities. Additionally, he streamlined trade and investment policies, ensuring their consistency and effectiveness through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). He purged the illegal aliens despite potential disapproval from the US, the West, and the Afghan interim government. His strategic outreach to China yielded significant progress on the CPEC project, accelerating the pace of investment and launching a second phase focused on agricultural development, industrial zones, research & development, and skill development. He also revived the Kashmir issue, supported Pakistan's principled stance on the Israeli-Hamas conflict, advocated for an immediate ceasefire and urged peaceful resolution of the Russia-Ukraine War without siding with either party. Given the differences in perspectives between the US and Pakistan on these issues, the recent army chief's visit was a complex and sensitive diplomatic endeavor. Details about the visit remain largely confidential, but confirmed meetings included high-ranking US officials like Secretary of State Blinken, Defense Secretary Austin, and CENTCOM leadership. While no joint statement was issued, a positive tone emerged with General Austin calling Pakistan a "major non-NATO ally" and Mr. Miller expressing interest in future collaboration on regional security and defense. Discussions reportedly focused on potential areas of cooperation like military ties, regional security efforts, counterterrorism, and economic partnerships. Though specific agreements remain unconfirmed, the visit laid the groundwork for potential future collaboration despite existing differences. The focus of the visit seemed to be on establishing trust and paving the way for future collaboration, rather than unveiling immediate, tangible results. With details largely under wraps, the visit's specific outcomes and long-term impact remain shrouded in uncertainty, awaiting either official clarifications or potential leaks through media channels. The US and Western media covered the entire visit. The coverage generally reflected the complexities of the US-Pakistan relationship, with both optimism and skepticism regarding the potential for progress. Some outlets highlight the shared interests and potential for cooperation, while others focus on past tensions and unresolved issues. Foreign Policy website emphasized the potential for the visit to reset US-Pakistan relations and explore common interests in combating terrorism and stabilizing Afghanistan. The New York Times highlighted that Pakistan's New Army Chief who is faced with Taliban Threat sought improved US relations and expressed Pakistan's desire to work with the US. The Wall Street Journal

said: "Pakistan's top General sought to reset uneasy ties," highlights the importance of Pakistan for US interests in the region and sees the visit as an opportunity to address outstanding issues. The Washington Post said that Pakistan sought U.S. Aid to help the country to overcome its economic woes. The Los Angeles Times said Pakistan's Army Chief sought closer U.S. ties during "Tense Visit," emphasizing the complex history of the US-Pakistan relationship and pointing to ongoing disagreements over various issues like Afghanistan and terrorism. Army chief's visit also sparked a flurry of attention in the Indian media. It highlighted India's security concerns, and the potential impact on regional dynamics. It recognized the strategic importance of US-Pakistan ties for regional stability, viewing it as an avenue to address mutual challenges like terrorism. It expressed worries about potential shifts in US priorities, cautioning against any perceived tilt towards Pakistan that might strain India-US relations. Amidst these concerns, there were calls for India to engage actively with the US while ensuring its own interests and apprehensions regarding Pakistan are adequately addressed. Various publications, including The Times of India, The Indian Express, Hindustan Times, and Deccan Chronicle, offered diverse perspectives, underlining the intricacies and tensions in the regional geopolitical landscape. The visit also drew significant attention in Chinese media. While outlets like People's Daily underscored regional security cooperation and discussions on Afghanistan and terrorism as positive steps, CGTN focused on the potential for improved US-Pakistan relations, emphasizing economic cooperation and stability in South Asia. The Global Times adopted an analytical stance, examining implications for India-Pakistan and India-US relations, urging regional stability. Overall, Chinese media aimed for a balanced portrayal, highlighting the visit's potential for positive developments while acknowledging its complex international context, avoiding contentious issues, and maintaining a neutral, professional tone. Pakistan media showcased multiple narratives, with some outlets emphasizing the potential for strengthened ties between the two nations, discussing regional security cooperation, economic partnerships, and potential military agreements. Others focused on shared challenges like Afghanistan's security situation and regional instability, viewing the visit as an opportunity for joint efforts to address these concerns. Certain media acknowledge the historical complexities in US-Pakistan relations and urged a balanced stance that upholds Pakistan's national interests. The main key word used by the official releases and the media coverage are: "NATO," "partner," "regional security," "defense cooperation," "trust," "cooperation," "reset," "terrorism," "Afghanistan," "Taliban Threat," "economic woes," "perceptions," "regional dynamics," "skepticism," "security concerns," "US priorities," "India-US relations," "Pakistan's track record," "cross-border terrorism," "human rights issues," "strategic balance," "Afghanistan troop withdrawal." These keywords perhaps explain the entire gambit of the US-Pakistan Relations. This visit was specif-

ically important as it was done when the US-India relations are at the lowest ebb. US accusations regarding the Sikh leader's killing and the rejection of India's Republic Day invitation by the US President have undoubtedly added complexity to the dynamic. This has resulted in increased friction and uncertainty in communication between the two governments. Collaboration on regional and global issues like counterterrorism and climate change have faced setbacks and both countries are exploring closer ties with other partners. The current visit of the Army Chief had given a vital opening to Pakistan to create its own niche and nudge itself closer to the one of the most powerful superpowers of all times. This can accrue immense benefits to Pakistan. Pakistan can increase its economic, trade and investment ties with the USA. Attract US investment and expertise in critical technologies like Artificial intelligence, cloud computing, cybersecurity, renewable energy, and biotechnology quantum computing, blockchain, advanced robotics and gene editing which are poised to revolutionize the future. Apparently, Pakistan used this visit to acquire US expertises in counterterrorism such as training, intelligence sharing, and equipment access, improving Pakistan's ability to combat militant groups and border security threats. The visit had given Pakistan an opportunity to seek access to US technology and military hardware to upgrade Pakistan's defense capabilities, enhancing its deterrence against potential threats and improving overall regional security. This visit allowed Pakistan to build closer ties with the US to enhance Pakistan's international standing and potentially open doors to greater diplomatic and economic cooperation with other countries.

Army chief, with his emphasis to improve Pakistan's financial and economic outlook, most likely used this visit to bolster economic ties with the US, strategically harnessing their relationship across multiple fronts. In trade, Pakistan positioned itself as a gateway to broader South Asian markets, leveraging its strengths in sectors like textiles, agriculture, and IT services to attract US investment and explore preferential trade agreements. On the investment front, Pakistan sought US assistance to improve its infrastructure projects and special economic zones. Pakistan's strategic approach towards fostering relations with both the US and China rests on emphasizing shared interests while maintaining transparency and safeguarding its national priorities. Highlighting mutual concerns like regional security, economic cooperation, and climate change with both nations is crucial for building trust and showcasing the value of partnerships. Anchored in its national interests, Pakistan strives for economic development, internal stability, and regional peace, recognizing that a strong, prosperous Pakistan aligns with the interests of both major powers. In this intricate landscape, Pakistan navigates deliberately, ensuring each step taken aligns with its national objectives and positively impacts relations with both the US and China.

—The writer is Former Press Secretary to the President Former Press Minister to the Embassy of Pakistan to France Former MD, SRBC

## The Complex Interplay of Trade, Politics, and Power in East Asia

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



Trade has long served as a catalyst for economic growth and development in East Asia. The region has witnessed remarkable economic transformation over the past few decades, driven by its robust trade networks. Countries like China, Japan, South Korea, and others have become global economic

East Asia is a region of immense economic significance and geopolitical importance characterized by a complex interplay of trade, politics, and power. This interdependence between these three factors has shaped the dynamics of the region which are influencing not only the prosperity and stability of individual nations but also the broader international environment. Trade has long served as a catalyst for economic growth and development in East Asia. The region has witnessed remarkable economic transformation over the past few decades, driven by its robust trade networks. Countries like China, Japan, South Korea, and others have become global economic powerhouses, with exports and imports playing a central role in their success. East Asia's economic prosperity is inextricably linked to international trade. The growth of supply chains, manufacturing hubs and technological innovation has fueled economic advancement. Trade liberalization policies, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and regional trade agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) have facilitated trade integration and helped the region achieve economic interdependence. East Asia has seen the emergence of regional trading blocs like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). These institutions have promoted economic cooperation, reduced trade barriers and enhanced cross-border investments and further deepening the region's economic connectivity. The political situation of East Asia is marked by its rich diversity, historical tensions and shifting alliances. Politics not only influences trade policies but also shapes the regional balance of power. East Asia has been a focal point for global power competition, particularly between the United States and China. The political maneuvering between these

two giants affects trade dynamics, as it influences alliances, security agreements and economic dependencies. The U.S.-China trade war serves as a prime example of how politics can disrupt trade relations in the region. The distribution of power in East Asia is fluid, with a range of actors seeking to exert influence in different ways. National power and strategic interests play a crucial role in shaping the region's dynamics. The United States consumes a significant amount of goods manufactured in Asia, which benefits the United States as a whole by providing consumers with cheaper products. However, this trade pattern simultaneously damages some American sectors and regions by harming local industries. What benefits consumers can lead to increased unemployment and lower wages, creating complex political dynamics within the United States? One of the characteristics of the United States is its tendency to not feel internal political concerns because it has a large scope to manipulate foreign policy. Therefore, the overall benefits of trading with Asia, the United States may find itself in a position where domestic political considerations force it to change its import policies from Asia. While this possibility is remote, it represents a serious threat to the interests of East Asia. China sends about a quarter of its total exports to the United States. If the United States were to ban Chinese products or impose tariffs that render Chinese goods non-competitive, China would face a massive economic crisis. The same would happen in Japan and other Asian countries. Countries facing economic collapse can become unpredictable and may attempt to open up other markets, sometimes through political or military pressure. The United States is also sensitive to domestic political pressures exerted by groups disproportionately affected by cheap Asian imports. In response to internal pressures, the United States may seek to reshape economic relationships in

the Pacific region. The United States cannot resort to protectionist legislation, supported by its military strength. Therefore, there is no real effective counter to the military or economic activities carried out by the United States in East Asia.

From a self-preservation standpoint, the last thing any country in the region wants is conflict. However, objectively, there is a massive power imbalance. Any change in U.S. policies can cause chaos in East Asia and it is not even conceivable that there will be a change in U.S. policy. The threat of U.S. sanctions against China, for example, which could allow the United States to try to limit oil imports from China, strikes at the core of Chinese national interest. Therefore, the Chinese must use their growing economic strength to develop a military option against the United States. They will simply act according to the basic principle of strategic planning: hope for the best and plan for the worst. In this context, China and Japan have no choice but to attempt to increase their military power for the next century. The United Nations will see this as a potential threat to U.S. control over the Western Pacific. This will define defensive moves as offensive, which is objectively the case, no matter their personal intentions. Add to that the two continuously growing countries like South Korea and Taiwan and it's certain that the region will become a powder keg in the 21st century.

The complex interplay of trade, politics, and power in East Asia shapes the region's present and future. Trade is both a driver of prosperity and a potential casualty of political tensions while the distribution of power among nations can profoundly affect regional stability. The region's evolving dynamics have broader implications for global affairs, making it imperative for nations in and beyond East Asia to navigate this intricate web of interactions with care and strategic foresight.



## Briefs

## Engagement with Afghans: Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 01 will enable the Security Council and all relevant stakeholders in the international community to adopt a comprehensive, long-term and realistic roadmap for Afghanistan's normalization. "Any process of engagement with the Afghan interim government must be constituted on the basis of its response to the core concerns of the international community; respect for human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls; political inclusivity; and action to neutralize terrorist organisations in Afghanistan - not only Daesh, but also the TTP and other entities that threaten the security of Afghanistan's neighbours," he added.

## FM reaffirms Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 01 more than 500,000 people have returned to their homeland, out of which more than ninety percent have returned voluntarily. Durrani said, "We are seeking dignified repatriation of all illegal and undocumented aliens." The process was being ensured that no harassment of any kind was done against any individual, the Government of Pakistan has a zero-tolerance policy in this matter, he added.

## UN calls for probe...

FROM PAGE 01 Remain neighbourhood. The soldiers "forced their way into every home, killed the men and detained the women and children. We do not know their whereabouts. They did the same on every floor. All women were rounded up in one room. By the time they reached us on the sixth floor, they started shooting all men," a woman said, adding that her father-in-law and son were shot and killed instantly. Survivors also said that the Israeli soldiers also attacked the women and children after ordering them into a room in the residential block also known as Annan building.

## IHC dismisses...

FROM PAGE 01 Following his conviction in the case, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) disqualified the former PM for five years. In a notification, the electoral watchdog stated that the PTI chief was disqualified after being found guilty of corrupt practices under Section 167 of the Elections Act, 2017 and his sentencing for three years. "As a consequence, Mr Imran Ahmed Khan Niazi has become disqualified under Article 63(1)(h) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan read with Section 232 of the Elections Act, 2017," the notification added.

## PML-N seeks...

FROM PAGE 01 electoral authority, PML-N Senator Ishaq Dar said the commission enjoys the power to make necessary amendments to the election schedule without affecting or changing the polling date which for the present election is Feb 8, 2024. "That perusal of schedule reveals that only 03 days have been allocated for filing of nomination papers whereas 07 days have been allocated for the scrutiny of the same," the letter added.

## Palestine crisis...

FROM PAGE 01 In the meeting, both the minister and Ambassador expressed concern over the tense situation in Palestine. Expressing complete solidarity with the Palestinian people, Murtaza Solangi said that Jordan's role in aid activities in Palestine was commendable.



ISLAMABAD: "In the spirit of Christmas celebrations, a visitor admires the festive Christmas train exhibit at Islamabad Serena Hotel, captured in a delightful photo by Mudassar Raja.

# PCB reconsidering Babar, Rizwan batting order for NZ

Team management and selectors agreed on

DNA

KARACHI: In a bid to give more chances to younger players ahead of the T20 World Cup 2024, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is mulling changes in the batting order during the New Zealand series, sources told media reporters on Thursday. They said the team management and selectors have agreed to give chance to Saim Ayub to play as an opener either with Babar Azam or Mohammad Rizwan. The insiders added that if Babar opens the innings, then Rizwan will play one down. However, the sources said that if Rizwan opens the innings then Babar will play at number three. Consensus has also been developed in resting the star duo in a couple of matches of the series, they said. The sources said there are suggestions to play Fakhar Zaman at number four followed by Iftikhar Ahmed and Azam Khan. Rizwan will do fielding while Azam Khan will keep the wickets. The Babar-Rizwan pair has been opening for Pakistan for a long time and has won a number of matches for the country but there were concerns



giving rest to Babar Azam and M. Rizwan

about whether to retain the same order or give a chance to youngsters. Keeping in view, the PCB inducted several new players in the squad for the New Zealand series led by new captain Shaheen Afridi. The 17-member squad also includes youngsters Abbas Afridi, Saim Ayub, Haseebullah Khan and Sahibzada Farhan. Destructive batter Azam Khan is also part of the squad, along with the likes of Fakhar Zaman, Babar and Rizwan. The T20 World Cup is scheduled for June next year and all the teams are now gearing up for the ICC tournament which will be played in West Indies and the United States. **Squad:** Shaheen Afridi (c), Aamir Jamal, Abbas Afridi, Abrar Ahmed, Azam Khan (wk), Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Haseebullah (wk), Iftikhar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Moammad Wasim Jnr, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Usama Mir, Zaman Khan. **Schedule of Pakistan's 2024 tour to New Zealand**  
First match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 12 January, Auckland  
Second match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 14 January, Hamilton  
Third match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 17 January, Dunedin  
Fourth match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 19 January, Christchurch  
Fifth match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 21 January, Christchurch.

## Use of force against...

FROM PAGE 01 If the law enforcing agencies hoped to prevent their voice from reaching far and wide, it has miserably failed. This was stated by Senator Farhatullah Babar, president of the human rights cell of the PPP, after visiting the uprooted camp in front of the National Press Club Islamabad Thursday afternoon. The sight of a few frightened men and women crammed in the uprooted camp with no one from the government to put balm on their wounds will send shivers even among the coldest observers, he said. He said that the protestors did not expect that the march would result in the production of the disappeared nor they sought a show down.

## 4 Indian soldiers...

FROM PAGE 01 territory in full. The fighting comes just days after India's top court upheld a 2019 decision by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to revoke the limited autonomy of the Muslim-majority territory. Freedom fighters groups have waged an insurgency in the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir since 1989, demanding independence or a merger with Pakistan. The conflict has left tens of thousands of civilians, soldiers and freedom fighters dead. Last month, five Indian soldiers and two suspected freedom fighters were killed in the region.

## Prisoner swap talks...

FROM PAGE 04 read the statement. The Israeli army has blown up the Palestine Mosque in the Ramallah neighbourhood in Gaza City, after stationing itself inside the building for a full month. Footage published by the Israeli army shows a soldier walking over the rubble before stopping at the opening of an alleged tunnel. "This tunnel had stairs and a lift," the soldier says to the camera. "It was used exclusively by Hamas leaders." The armed wing of Hamas says its fighters have targeted Israeli soldiers in al-Mughraqa area, in the central Gaza Strip, with an anti-personnel missile.

## Police crackdown..

FROM PAGE 01 by the privatisation minister - assured the protesters of addressing all of their grievances. Following the development, the government ordered to release of all the protesting women, who were taken into custody during the police crackdown yesterday night. It is pertinent to mention here that the people were protesting against the "extra-judicial killing" of a Baloch youth by the Counter-Terrorism Department officials in Turbat earlier this month.

## Usman charged for wearing black armband

MELBOURNE: Australia's left-handed opener Usman Khawaja on Thursday, was charged by the International Cricket Council (ICC) for staging a muted protest against the ongoing war in Palestine. "Usman Khawaja has been charged for breaching Clause F of the Clothing and Equipment Regulations, which can be found on the ICC Playing Conditions page. The sanctions for a breach of the regulations are outlined in Appendix 2," an ICC spokesperson said. "Usman displayed a personal message (arm band) during the 1st Test Match against Pakistan without seeking the prior approval of Cricket Australia and the ICC to display it, as required in the regulations for personal messages. This is a breach under the category of an "other breach" and the sanction for a first offence is a reprimand." The opener earlier wanted to wear shoes with the hand-written slogans "Freedom is a human right" and "All lives are equal" during the first Test of the three-match series against Pakistan at Perth. But Pakistan-born Khawaja, who is Muslim, was told that it flouted ICC rules on messages that relate to politics, religion or race. When Cricket Australia (CA) expressed their hopes that the opener would uphold the rules, Usman Khawaja covered the slogans with a semi-transparent tape. However, the words written on his shoes remained partially visible - only in close-up - in the colour of the Palestinian flag. Later, Khawaja donned a black armband to show solidarity with Palestine. - Agencies

## PSG end year on top of Ligue 1

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe marked his 25th birthday with a brace as Paris Saint-Germain beat Metz 3-1 in Ligue 1 on Wednesday to reach the halfway stage of the season five points clear at the top of the table. PSG, who had held 1-1 at Lille at the weekend, laboured in the first half before Vitinha opened the scoring early in the second half by turning in a cross from Lee Kang-in. Mbappe then took centre stage by making it 2-0 with a superb strike in off the underside of the crossbar from the edge of the area. Matthieu Udol pulled one back for the struggling visitors but Mbappe pounced on a short backpass to round the goalkeeper and make it 3-1 towards the end for his 18th league goal of the campaign. His birthday was made even more memorable when his 16-year-old brother Ethan came on for his senior debut in stoppage time. PSG end the year with a comfortable five-point cushion over nearest challengers Nice, who defeated Lens 2-0 on Wednesday thanks to two late goals from Nigerian striker Terem Moffi. Monaco are seven points behind the leaders in third place after coming from behind to win 2-1 at Toulouse, with Wisam Ben Yedder scoring both of their goals. The principality side held on to take all three points despite having Aleksandr Golovin sent off early in the second half. Malian international Kamory Doumbia produced the individual performance of the evening by scoring four goals, all in the first half, as Brest beat Brittany rivals Lorient 4-0. That result lifted Brest up into fourth, a Champions League qualifying berth, above a Lille side who were beaten 2-1 away at Patrick Vieira's Strasbourg. Marseille are sixth after coming from behind to draw 1-1 at Montpellier, with Jordan Veretout scoring their goal in a game that was held up for five minutes in the second

*The principality side held on to take all three points despite having Aleksandr Golovin sent off early in the second half. Malian international Kamory Doumbia produced the individual performance of the evening by scoring four goals, all in the first half, as Brest beat Brittany rivals Lorient 4-0.*

half after fireworks were set off at one end of the stadium. Montpellier had a point deducted following an incident in their home match against Clermont earlier this season, when the away side's goalkeeper was hit by a firecracker thrown from the same stand. "These guys are idiots, it's incredible," complained Montpellier coach Michel Der Zakarian on Wednesday. "I don't understand it. You are supposed to come to the stadium to support your team, not to set off fireworks." Japanese international Keito Nakamura got the only goal as Will Still's Reims defeated Le Havre 1-0, while Rennes struck twice late on to claim a 3-1 victory at bottom club Clermont. Meanwhile, Lyon climbed out of the bottom three as they beat Nantes 1-0 thanks to an Alexandre Lacazette goal. It was a third consecutive victory for a team who had previously won just once all season, and the result lifted them two points above Toulouse, who now occupy the relegation play-off position. - Agencies

## Liverpool dominate West to reach League Cup semis

Reds thrash Hammers after goals from Szoboszlai, Gakpo, Salah, and a brilliant double from Jones

SPORTS DESK

LONDON: Liverpool destroyed West Ham 5-1 to reach the League Cup semi-finals, easing the frustration of their weekend Premier League stalemate against Manchester United. Curtis Jones scored twice and Dominik Szoboszlai, Cody Gakpo and Mohamed Salah were all on the scoresheet for Jurgen Klopp's dominant team. They join Chelsea, Fulham and Middlesbrough in the last four of the competition. No team have won more League Cups than Liverpool, who lifted the trophy for the ninth time in the 2021/22 season, and they tore into the visitors from the start at Anfield. Liverpool, who had 34 shots against United on Sunday without finding the net, launched wave after wave of attacks, with West Ham struggling to lay a glove on their opponents. Harvey Elliott blasted over the bar in the 14th minute and Szoboszlai fired wide but Hungary midfielder gave the home side the lead they deserved shortly before the half-hour mark. It came after Said Benrahma lost the

ball carelessly in midfield, squandering a chance for a rare West Ham break. Jarrell Quansah fed Szoboszlai on the right of the Liverpool attack and he let fly with powerful shot from outside the area that flew into the far corner, giving goalkeeper Alphonse Areola no chance. The game continued in

the same pattern, with West Ham forced to feed off scraps - a familiar feeling for a team who have won just once at Anfield since 1963. The home side, who had Salah and Trent Alexander-Arnold on the bench, could have doubled their lead in the final moments of the opening period but Gakpo

headed narrowly wide following a fine cross from Elliott. Liverpool had 11 shots in the first 45 minutes to West Ham's zero. The London side also had a clutch of star players on the substitutes' bench, with Lucas Paqueta and James Ward-Prowse omitted from the starting line-up.

The second half unfolded in a similar way to the first, with Liverpool probing and David Moyes' men looking toothless. Darwin Nunez, who started the game without a goal in his past 10 games for Liverpool, got a shot away after wriggling clear in the box but Areola was equal to the task. However, Jones gave Liverpool a buffer in the 56th minute, firing the ball through Areola's legs at the near post. Moyes threw on Paqueta but Klopp countered by bringing on Salah, Alexander-Arnold and Ibrahima Konate. Liverpool made it 3-0 when Konate surged forward before finding Gakpo, who took a touch on the edge of the box and fired home. Bowen pulled one back, cutting inside Quansah and producing a fine curling finish but Salah restored the three-goal margin and Jones scored his second of the night to complete the rout.





## Briefs

Turkiye,  
Serbia ties at  
their highest  
level

ANKARA : Relations between Ankara and Belgrade are at their highest level in history, Türkiye's ambassador to Serbia Hami Aksoy. Speaking at a media forum of the Yunus Emre Institute (YEE), Aksoy said that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan would soon visit Serbia while the two countries signed 26 agreements in the past five years, showing growing ties between Türkiye and Serbia. He noted that Türkiye, which has a consulate general in Novi Pazar, will also open an Honorary Consulate in Novi Sad next year. Aksoy underlined the YEE contributes to deepening cultural relations between the two countries. The institution has given Turkish language courses to 4,000 Serbians since it started operating in Belgrade. "Serbians do not only learn Turkish from courses, but also through Turkish series with subtitles, which are highly popular." "There is great interest toward Türkiye in Serbia. Last year, the number of tourists visiting Türkiye exceeded 360,000 - Serbia is a country of 6.5 million. Turkish Airlines operates six, sometimes seven flights a day to Istanbul. Last year, we started direct flights to Ankara and Izmir this year. All airlines in Serbia fly to Türkiye," he said. Aksoy said that the image of Türkiye in Serbia is at the highest level and that Ankara is appreciated and admired for both its foreign policy and economy.—APP

Russia  
attacked  
Ukraine  
with 35  
drones

MOSCOW : Ukraine has said that air defence systems in the capital Kiev and other locations across the country had downed dozens of Iranian-designed drones launched by Russian forces in Moscow's latest overnight barrage. "Russian occupiers attacked with 'Shahed' type UAVs from three directions: Chauda - occupied Crimea, Primorsk-Akharsk, Kursk," the Ukrainian air force wrote on Telegram. It said it shot down 34 of the 35 drones, without reporting any casualties. Zelenskyy says working on increasing efficiency of drones President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that Ukraine is working on increasing drones' efficiency in all areas during a conference call with the country's military, law enforcers, intelligence directorate and foreign intelligence service. "We are working to increase the efficiency of drones, including FPV, in all areas," Zelenskyy said in his nightly address. "This is an obvious priority of the state and a concrete way to protect the lives of our warriors."—Agencies

Greece  
Joins naval  
coalition  
for red sea  
protection

ATHENS: Greece will join a US-led naval coalition to protect the Red Sea global shipping lane from Yemen's Houthi militia, the defense minister said Thursday. A Greek navy frigate will join the task force on orders from Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, said Defense Minister Nikos Dendias. As a foremost shipping nation, Greece had a "fundamental interest" in addressing a "massive threat" to global maritime transport, Dendias said in a televised statement. The task force announced by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Monday initially included Britain, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain. The Iran-backed Houthis say their missile and drone strikes on passing container ships are in support of Palestinians in the Gaza war raging between Israel and militant group Hamas since October 7. The attacks in waters leading to the Suez Canal, a chokepoint for about 10 percent of global trade, have forced many shipping companies to divert their vessels.—

'All lives matter' French  
President tells Israel

The Israeli onslaught has left Gaza in ruins with half of the coastal territory's housing stock damaged or destroyed, and nearly 2 million people displaced within the densely-populated enclave amid shortages of food and clean water

## NEWS DESK

PARIS : French President Emmanuel Macron said the idea of a fight against terrorism should not be about "razing the Gaza Strip to the ground." Macron noted that Paris' position was the same since the start of the conflict in the Middle East, despite what critics have said. "We cannot allow to settle the idea that fighting efficiently against terrorism should be razing Gaza to the ground or attacking civilian populations without distinction and causing civilian casualties," Macron told French broadcaster France 5. The president, however, did not back away from the idea that Israel has "the right to defend itself" against the Palestinian group, Hamas. "Israelis must end this response because it is not appropriate, and all lives matter," Macron stressed. Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, killing over 20,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injuring 52,586 others, according to health authorities in the en-

clave. The Israeli onslaught has left Gaza in ruins with half of the coastal territory's housing stock damaged or destroyed, and nearly 2 million people displaced within the densely-populated enclave amid shortages of food and clean water. Nearly 1,200 Israelis are believed to have been killed in the Hamas attack, while nearly 130 hostages remain in captivity. Macron backs immigration law The president also backed the much-disputed immigration law adopted by parliament. French lawmakers passed the bill on immigration late Tuesday that fractured the political majority. Macron backed the law and denied claims that it was adopted with support from the far-right National Rally (RN) party. "This law will allow us to be more efficient against what feeds the RN," he said, adding that the French were expecting the law, particularly in the most fragile neighborhoods. "We must fight against the flows, which means clandestine arrival of people that we cannot resend," Macron explained. One out of four lawmakers in Macron's camp did not vote for the bill, according to the daily Le



Figaro. Left-wing lawmakers criticized the government for having the support of the RN to adopt the law. MP Raquel Garrido wrote on X earlier: "If the National Rally voted against, the bill would not be adopted. Factual. Arithmetic." Lawmaker Mathilde Panot told the broadcaster, Franceinfo, that the government "used National Rally's votes and National Rally's ideas to adopt the worst law ever seen" in France's migration history. Far-right leader and Macron's rival, Marine Le Pen, hailed the bill, calling it "a great ideological victory for our movement." Health Minister Aurelien Rousseau resigned and several minis-

ters threatened to resign if the bill was adopted Tuesday, while government spokesperson Olivier Veran denied any "ministerial revolt" over the law on Wednesday. The Constitutional Council will now verify the text's validity, and the law will take effect once it is published in the Official Gazette. People took to the streets late Wednesday in the northwestern city of Rennes during Macron's interview, according to media reports. Hundreds protested against the immigration law, said local broadcaster TVR. Humanitarian group Medecins du Monde, or Doctors of the World, urged Macron to not promulgate the law. "A true machine to stigmatize, exclude, and destabilize," the NGO wrote on X about what it described as "far-right measures." Hard-left politician Jean-Luc Melenchon noted that some of the articles in the law were taken from the RN's and Marine Le Pen's presidential program. Immigration law The first version of the bill was de facto rejected by lawmakers when the Green groups' motion to dismiss was adopted even before the first parliamentary debate Dec. 11.

But the government formed a joint committee of seven senators and seven MPs who found a consensus between the majority and the opposition, with a reviewed version of the text. After the Senate's passage of the revised text, MPs mostly voted in favor of the new version which was hardened even more. Article 3 in the initial version aimed to give a one-year residency permit under certain conditions to irregular foreign workers who operate in "sectors under tension" - sectors that suffer labor shortages. But the new version gives city prefects the power to accept or reject a foreigner's request to regularize. The crime of irregular residency was reinstated after its cancellation in 2012. Those who commit it will be fined 3,750 (\$4,100) and prohibited from entering France for three years. The law requires five years of legal residency, instead of six months, to be eligible for social aid. It also removes the automatic right of the soil for children born to foreign parents in France.

Milei announces economy  
deregulation as protests continue

## WEB DESK

BERLIN : President Javier Milei has announced sweeping initiatives to transform Argentina's struggling economy, including easing government regulation and allowing privatisation of state-run industries as a way to boost exports and investment. The right-wing libertarian announced the moves on Wednesday for South America's second-biggest economy just hours after thousands of Argentines took to the streets of the capital to protest against austerity and deregulation actions taken last week by Milei. The demonstrations went off relatively peacefully, after a government warning against blocking streets. Around the start of the protest, which drew thousands of marchers, police briefly scuffled with some demonstrators and two men were arrested. However, the event concluded without widespread street blockages that have

been frequent in past years. Undeterred by the protest, Milei afterwards announced the measures in a televised address to the nation. "The goal is to start on the road to rebuilding our country, return freedom and autonomy to individuals and start to transform the enormous amount of regulations that have blocked, stalled and stopped economic growth in our country," Milei said. The approximately 300 changes would earmark many government companies for privatisation, and loosen protections for renters, employees and shoppers. Protests and calls for strike After the announcement, people in some neighborhoods of Buenos Aires held protests to show their disapproval. Marchers set out toward Buenos Aires' iconic Plaza de Mayo, the scene of protests dating back to the country's 1970s dictatorship. Police struggled to keep demonstrators from taking over the entire boulevard, and in the end many kept to the side-



walks and filled about half the plaza. Eduardo Belliboni, one of the march's organizers, said demonstrators faced "an enormous repressive apparatus." Belliboni's left-wing Polo Obrero group has a long history of leading street blockages. Toward the end of the demonstration, organisers called on the country's trade unions to declare a general strike. Milei's administration had said it will allow protests, but threatened to cut off public aid payments to anyone who blocks thoroughfares. Marchers were also forbidden to carry sticks, cover their faces or bring children to the protest.

'Criminalising the right to protest' Today's was Milei's first test of how his administration would respond to demonstrations against economic shock measures, which he says are needed to address Argentina's severe crisis. The steps include a 50 percent devaluation of the Argentine peso, cuts to energy and transportation subsidies, and the closure of some government ministries. They come amid soaring inflation and rising poverty. Protesters "can demonstrate as many times as they want. They can go to the squares... but the streets are not going to be closed," Milei's security minister, Patricia Bullrich, told local media. Bullrich announced a new "protocol" to maintain public order that allows federal forces to clear people blocking streets without a judicial order and authorises the police to identify - through video or digital means - people protesting and obstructing public thoroughfares.

Israeli forces  
convert Indonesian  
hospital in Gaza  
into military base

JAKARTA: The Indonesia Hospital in Gaza has been turned into a military base by Israeli forces, the NGO that funded the facility said on Thursday. The hospital in North Gaza opened in late 2015, financed by donations from the Indonesian people. The four-story building near the Jabalia refugee camp was one of the Israeli military's first targets in its deadly campaign that has killed at least 20,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, since early October. More than 52,000 have been injured. Nearly 2 million residents have been displaced within Gaza, with Israel also blocking entry of food and fuel, and cutting access to clean water. Israel has said that its daily bombardment and siege of the densely populated territory is in retaliation for the Oct. 7 attack by the Gaza-based militant group Hamas, but its forces have since destroyed more than half of the coastal enclave's housing, and wiped out its civilian infrastructure and medical facilities. The Indonesian Hospital was one of the last to remain operational, but Israeli attacks in late November forced staff and thousands of people seeking shelter in its premises to move to Gaza's south. Dr. Sarbini Murad, chairman of the Medical Emergency Rescue Committee, or MERC, the Indonesian organization that funded the facility, said that it was "turned into barracks or a military base for the IDF (Israel Defense Forces)." He told Arab News that the building is damaged but still standing, although most of its medical equipment has been destroyed by the Israeli military.—DNA

US working  
with Mexico  
to solve  
border  
disputes

WASHINGTON : The White House said it was working with Mexico's government to resolve issues that led the Biden administration on Monday to close two rail crossings at the Texas-Mexico border used by increasing numbers of migrants to enter the US. Dozens of major US agricultural groups on Wednesday urged the US to reopen the crossings, saying the closures of the railroad trade routes were causing steep export losses to US growers. The farm groups said the US Customs and Border Protection agency could reopen the rail bridges with as few as five employees per crossing, challenging the agency's rationale for shutting down the train routes. A White House spokesperson said later on Wednesday that the US was "working closely with the Mexican government in an attempt to resolve this issue, while surging personnel to the region." "We are communicating regularly with industry leaders to ensure we are assessing and mitigating the impacts of these temporary closures," the spokesperson said.—APP

Myanmar  
junta accused  
of war  
crimes

NAYPYIDAW : Myanmar's military has likely perpetrated indiscriminate attacks on civilians and used banned cluster munitions in its fight against ethnic minority insurgents, Amnesty International said on Thursday, calling for an investigation of suspected war crimes. The junta is facing its biggest battlefield challenge since its 2021 coup, with coordinated rebel attacks on military posts in Shan state, bordering China, and in western Rakhine state. An air strike in Shan state earlier this month used bombs that were most likely cluster munitions, Amnesty said in a statement, citing evidence analyzed by its weapon investigator. According to the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), one of three groups in the rebel "Three Brotherhood Alliance," the attack killed a resident and injured five people. Civilians in Pauk Taw, Rakhine state, suffered looting, arbitrary arrests, inhumane treatment and torture, Amnesty said citing interviews with 10 civilians. "The Myanmar military has a blood-stained resume of indiscriminate attacks with devastating consequences for civilians, and its brutal response to a major offensive by armed groups fits a longstanding pattern," said Matt Wells, director of Amnesty's Crisis Response Programme.—Agencies

Dutch civil  
servants  
call for Gaza  
ceasefire

THE HAGUE: A group of Dutch civil servants staged an unusual protest in front of the country's Foreign Affairs Ministry on Thursday to call for a cease-fire in war-torn Gaza. Around 150 ministerial workers held up placards and unfurled a banner reading "Civil Servants Demand Cease-fire" over lunchtime, saying they were protesting the government's current stance on the call for an end to hostilities. "There's concern over the fact that the Dutch government is still not calling for a permanent cease-fire and that is in essence why we're here today," said Angelique Eijpe, spokeswoman for the group. Eijpe told AFP she resigned from Foreign Affairs last month over the continued Dutch position in the conflict. The conflict erupted on October 7 when Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip, with Israel retaliating by pounding the area with its heaviest-ever bombardment. The Netherlands, like Germany and Italy, last week abstained from voting for a cease-fire during a UN General Assembly meet, despite an overwhelming number of countries voting in favor. Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot afterwards said the abstention resulted from the text of the resolution "not being clear enough" on Israel's right.—APP

Turkiye  
eliminated 2,100  
terrorists in 2023

ANKARA : The National Defense Ministry announced Thursday that Türkiye has "neutralized" as many as 2,120 PKK/YPG terrorists since the beginning of this year, including those hiding out across the border in the northern areas of Iraq and Syria. A total of 45 terrorists were targeted last week, a ministry official told reporters at a background briefing in the capital Ankara. Turkish authorities use the term "neutralize" to imply that the terrorists in question surrendered or were killed or captured. In its more than 40-year terror campaign against Türkiye, the PKK - listed as a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the U.S., and the EU - has been responsible for the deaths of over 40,000 people, including women, children and infants. The YPG is its Syrian branch. PKK/YPG terrorists often hide out across Türkiye's border in northern Iraq and Syria, where they plot attacks on Turkish forces or the local populations. Since January, the terrorist group has been behind 488 incidents and attacks in areas of Türkiye's counterterrorism operations, and 1,475 terrorists have been "neutralized" through an immediate response by Turkish soldiers, said Defense Ministry press representative Rear Adm. Zeki Aktürk. The ministry on Wednesday announced that the aerial strikes by the Turkish Air Forces Command destroyed 14 PKK terrorist targets in northern Iraq. "Our Air Forces struck 14 targets in the Gara, Hakurk and Qandil regions in northern Iraq used by the separatist terrorist organization," the ministry said on X, releasing a statement on the platform about the strikes.—Agencies



ISLAMABAD : High Commissioner of Canada in Islamabad, Leslie Scanlon, called on Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani. They discussed various aspects of Pakistan-Canada bilateral relations and facilitation by the Pakistani government for the resettlement process of Afghan nationals to Canada. The Canadian High Commissioner thanked the Foreign Minister for Pakistan's assistance in the resettlement process.—DNA

Raeisi praises Palestinian resistance against Israeli attacks  
 Hamas leader exposes  
Israel's frustration

TEHRAN : Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi says the world is amazed by the resistance of the Palestinian people against the Israeli regime. Addressing a large crowd of people in the northern Iranian city of Gorgan on Thursday, Raeisi hailed the resistance of the strong Palestinian people in Gaza in the face of more than two months of unrelenting Israeli assaults. All in the world are surprised by the power and determination of the young Palestinians, he added, noting that heads of many countries officially acknowledge this power and wonder how the Palestinians have achieved it in a land that is described as the world's largest open-air prison. This resistance is inspired by "the invincible power of the people in the Islamic Republic [of Iran]. We believe that blood prevails over the sword." Israeli regime waged the war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian Hamas resistance group carried out the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm

against the occupying entity in response to the Israeli regime's atrocities against Palestinians. A senior official of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad says the movement has struck down Washington's plans to secure the occupying regime's control over the region. Since the start of the US-backed offensive, the Israeli regime has killed more than 20,000 Palestinians, including about 8,000 children and 6,200 women, and injured 52,586 others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under the rubble. Elsewhere in his remarks, the president noted that the enemies have failed to achieve all their vicious plots against the country, including their efforts to prevent the establishment and consolidation of an Islamic republic system and hinder Iran's progress. Despite all threats and sanctions, the determined Iranian people have succeeded in achieving progress in various sectors, Raeisi pointed out.—DNA

GAZA : Israeli foreign minister Eli Cohen's threat of killing leaders of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas exposes the regime's frustration over its defeat against the resistance forces, says a top Hamas official. In remarks cited by media reporter on Wednesday, Cohen threatened Palestinian leaders with assassination, saying, "We will kill [top Hamas officials] Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Meshal and they will not die a natural death." Izzat al-Rishq, a member of the political bureau of Hamas, rebuked the Israeli minister on Thursday, saying his remarks were "shameful" and indicated the regime's desperation with its failure to achieve its proclaimed goals in Gaza. Israel has a long history of carrying out assassination plots against leaders of Palestinian resistance movements. The regime's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said last month that he had "instructed the Mossad to act against the heads of Hamas wherever they are." Meanwhile, Palestinian resistance movements say the occupying regime's savagery, as manifested in its assassination attempts over the years, will not deter Palestinians from their struggle to free their land. "The threats to murder Hamas leaders are clearly indicative of the political and military quagmire that the Zionist occupation is facing" following the Gaza onslaught, Taher al-Nunu, an advisor to Haniyeh, said earlier this month. Cohen's threat comes while the Hamas chief has traveled to Egypt to discuss a potential new Gaza truce involving an exchange of Palestinian abductees for Israeli war prisoners and the entry of more aid to Gaza. The head of Hamas' political bureau says the Palestinian resistance has stood "firm on the battlefield" despite two and a half months of Israeli war crimes in Gaza. "The Zionist regime and its allies thought that they could eliminate the resistance this way and force it to raise the white flag," Haniyeh said in a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian in Doha on Wednesday. "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," he said.—Agencies



## Briefs

### Sanjrani congratulates the New Emir of Kuwait

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani extends warm congratulations and best wishes to His Highness Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah on assuming charge as the new Emir of Kuwait. In a statement, Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani expressed profound felicitations on behalf of the Senate of Pakistan, conveying heartfelt congratulations to His Highness Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah and the people of Kuwait on this momentous occasion. Chairman Senate emphasized the longstanding friendly relations between Pakistan and Kuwait, rooted in shared values and mutual respect. He affirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening these ties under the leadership of Sheikh Meshal al-Ahmad al-Sabah. The Chairman praised Kuwait's remarkable progress under the wise leadership of the late Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah and expressed confidence in the continued prosperity and development of Kuwait under the new leadership. Chairman Senate Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani expressed hope for enhanced cooperation and collaboration between Pakistan and Kuwait across various spheres for the mutual benefit of both nations.

### Siraj speaks out for rights of labour class

DNA

LAHORE: Jamaat-e-Islami chief Sirajul Haq has noted with regret that Pakistan's parliament comprises feudal lords alone who do not care about the well-being of the poor and the labour class. Addressing a workers convention in Lahore on Thursday, Siraj deplored that the state's system was so designed that labourers were being denied fair remuneration for their services. Siraj stated that the labour class, which according to him, was the country's honour and integrity in real terms, was both overworked and underpaid, unfortunately. The Jamaat-e-Islami, he said, was standing by the labour class and they should not feel as if they were left alone. Siraj lamented that none of the government departments were seriously thinking about the well-being of the poor and the labour class.

# Kim warns of 'nuclear attack' if US provoked with nukes

Kim said peace is guaranteed by a war posture of being willing to launch preemptive strikes on the enemy anywhere to make it feel fear

NEWS DESK

PYONGYANG: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country has a policy of not hesitating to launch a nuclear strike on its rivals if provoked, as he praised troops involved in its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, state media reported Thursday. Since adopting an escalatory nuclear doctrine last year, Kim has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons preemptively. But many foreign experts say North Korea has yet to obtain functioning nuclear missiles and is also unlikely to use its nukes first because it's outgunned by the U.S. and its allied forces. North Korea on Monday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile test in five months, calling the drill a warning over confrontational U.S. and South Korean moves. North Korea cited a recent U.S.-South Korean meeting on boosting their nuclear deterrence plans. The North's Korean Central News Agency said Kim met troops from the General Missile Bureau on Wednesday to congratulate them on the launch of the developmental solid-fueled Hwasong-18 missile, the North's newest and most powerful ICBM. During the meeting, Kim said the launch demonstrated the evolution of the North's nuclear doctrine and strategy "not to hesitate even with a nuclear attack when the enemy provokes it with nukes," KCNA said. Kim said peace is guaranteed by a war posture of being willing to launch preemptive strikes on the enemy anywhere to make it feel fear, KCNA said. Last year, North Korea adopted a law that stipulates a broad range of situations in which it can use nuclear weapons. Since

## China-Philippines ties stands at a crossroads

BEIJING: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged the Philippine side to take the proper management of the current maritime situation as a top priority during a phone conversation with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique A. Manalo at the latter's request. "China-Philippines relationship now stands at a crossroads, with its future yet to be decided," Wang said. "The Philippine side must act with caution." He warned that if the Philippine side misjudges the situation, goes its own way or even colludes with "ill-intentioned external forces" to continue to stir up troubles, China will defend its rights in accordance with law and respond resolutely. The severe difficulties facing China-Philippines relations right now are rooted in the fact that the Philippine side has changed its policy stance so far, reneged on the promises it has made, constantly provoked troubles at sea, and undermined China's legitimate and lawful rights, said Wang, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. Instead of continuing in the wrong direction, the Philippine side should return to the right path as soon as possible, with properly handling and managing the current maritime situation as a top priority, he said. Being neighbors separated by a strip of water, China and the Philippines should settle disputes through consultation, Wang said. - Agencies

the beginning of 2022, it has also test-fired about 100 ballistic missiles, many of them nuclear-capable weapons targeting the U.S. and South Korea. Monday's Hwasong-18 launch was the weapon's third test-flight this year. The U.S. and South Korean governments have repeatedly warned that any attempt by North Korea to use nuclear weapons would result in the end of the Kim Jong Un government. The allies have also expanded their military training, which Kim views as invasion rehearsal. After the North's latest ICBM launch, the U.S., South Korea and Japan began sharing real-time missile warning data on North Korea and established details of their trilateral exercises in the coming years. On Wednesday, the U.S. flew long-range B-1B bombers for joint aerial training with South Korean and Japanese warplanes in a demonstration of strength against North Korea. In an emergency U.N. Security Council meeting on Tuesday, the U.S., South Korea and their partners maintained that North Korea's repeated missile launches threatened international peace and violated Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by North Korea. Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, said in a statement on Thursday she "feels very unpleasant" over the U.N. council meeting, which she said was held at "the brigandish demand of the U.S. and its satellite countries." She said the U.N. council must hold the U.S. and South Korea accountable for heightened tensions as they stage "all sorts of military provocations all year round." The North's latest ICBM launch won't likely earn the country fresh international sanctions. China and Russia - locked in separate confrontations with the U.S. - have repeatedly blocked any U.N. Security Council responses to the North's banned ballistic missile tests since last year.

## APNS condemns attack at residence of Mehtab Khan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: "The APNS condemns the police raid on the residence of the Chief Editor of Daily Ausaf and Chairman, ABN Group, Raja Mehtab Khan and terms it as an attack on the freedom of press. Sarmad Ali, Secretary General, All Pakistan Newspapers Society, has stated that in the wee hours of December 20, 2023, a contingent of police intruded the residence of Raja Mehtab Khan, tortured and maltreated the guard and broke the central gate of the residence. They harassed and abused the residents without assigning any reason. The APNS considers this raid as an attempt to harass and threaten the media at the eve of the general elections scheduled in the month of February. The Secretary General, APNS has noted that despite application by the media group to the SSP Islamabad, no action has been taken.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker PM Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar chairs a meeting on Prime Minister Youth Program. - DNA

## JUI-P delegation meets PTI Chairman

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: A high level delegation of JamiatUlema-e-Islam Pakistan (JUI-P) held a meeting with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan and discussed the prevailing political situation, the continued state coercive measures against PTI and a strategy to foil the ongoing attempts to rig the long-awaited general elections threadbare. The JUI-P delegation was led by Maulana Shujaa-ul-Mulk and PTI Central Information Secretary Raouf Hasan was also present in the meeting. During the meeting, they called the efforts to rob elec-

tions and the right of the people to vote through state coercive and brutal measures as a criminal act against democracy and a despicable attempt to push the country into the quagmire of anxiety and chaos. They also held detailed discussion on important issues such as the prevailing political situation in the country, the unabated and continued worst state oppression and suppression against PTI and the strategy to foil the most heinous plan to rig the upcoming elections scheduled for February 8, 2024. Moreover, during the meeting, they shed light on various aspects of political and electoral cooperation between two political parties.

## EXIM Pakistan launched to catalyze economic expansion, global trade

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Minister for Finance, Revenue, and Economic Affairs, Dr Shamsah Akhtar here on Thursday formally launched the Pakistan's Export-Import Bank (EXIM), marking a significant stride towards fortifying external trade, attracting investments and propelling broader economic growth in the country. "EXIM's operationalization is a proud moment and a major milestone for us today. It will augment the banking and trade finance landscape as we know," the finance minister remarked while speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the bank. The minister highlighted the global impact of EXIMs, citing that these institutions disbursed a

staggering \$2.5 trillion in trade finance last year, substantially fostering exports across over 60 countries and boosting export investments. Detailing the diverse portfolio of products offered by EXIMs, Dr Akhtar emphasized the significance of export credit loans, which provided competitive-rate financing to exporters. The minister said as the EXIM of Pakistan grew and matured it would shape Pakistan's trade finance, promoting it principally through a proper institutional framework backed by effective policies and regulatory framework. However, she said it would need to be accompanied by streamlining export policy frameworks further because together both would be able to contribute to balance of payment sustainability that in the past had been hurting of low levels of export earnings.

## Indonesia, Pakistan to collaborate for distant learning programmes

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from the University of Terbuka, Indonesia's leading open university, visited Higher Education Commission (HEC) on Thursday to foster collaboration and discuss opportunities and key challenges in the realm of distant learning programmes. Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum, Executive Director HEC chaired the meeting. Led by its Rector Prof. Ojat Darajat, the University's delegation included faculty members representing various departments and experts in distant learning programmes. Dr. Muhammad Latif Gondal, Executive Director (Planning and Monitoring) Allama Iqbal Open University, Mr. Awais Ahmed, Adviser Quality Assurance HEC and other divisional heads attended the meeting. The University of Terbuka is Indonesia's prominent open university, providing accessible and flexible ed-

ucation through distance learning. Established in 1984, the University's programmes cover a wide array of disciplines, offering degrees at various levels. The meeting aimed at enhancing HEC's efforts advancing quality of higher education, fostering international cooperation, and addressing the evolving challenges faced by institutions in the field of distance learning. Dr. Zia Ul-Qayyum appreciated the University of Terbuka's credibility by achieving a remarkable rate of access to higher education through its distant learning programmes. He emphasized that by ensuring the quality of online education, particularly in terms of robust quality assurance measures, trust in the online mode of education can be developed and strengthened. "The Government of Pakistan has been a staunch advocate of distance learning to improve access rates in the country. HEC is supporting Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU)

to increase the number of students, particularly in tertiary education, aligning with the government's vision for enhanced accessibility to higher education," he said. Both sides deliberated on strategies to create an environment conducive to the success and integration of students within the distant learning system. Various operational, auditing and implementation challenges in the distant learning programmes also came under discussion. The meeting also discussed employability of Pakistani students in the University of Terbuka. The delegation shared the mechanism of Management Review Committee (MRC) with HEC officials, which aims to ensure that the academic programmes remain aligned with contemporary educational needs and global standards. Modalities of online management for specific fields such as agriculture and science studies were a key point of interest during the discussions.



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