



# Islamabad POST

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Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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**Kh Asif slaps defamation notice on Dar**

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**Cristiano Ronaldo becomes top scorer of 2023**

Detailed News On Page-06



## PM Kakar says Pakistan keen to expand ties with MENA region

Prime Minister feted the Ambassadors of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar met the resident Ambassadors of Muslim countries from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region over lunch earlier. The meeting was attended by the Ambassadors of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The Foreign Minister, Secretary to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary also attended.

The Prime Minister underscored the significance attached by Pakistan to fraternal ties with the Muslim world, particularly with countries of the MENA region. He said these ties were anchored in mutual trust, common understanding and close cooperation on bilateral as well as regional matters of common

### Violent extremism, Existential threat to Pakistan: Solangi

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Murtaza Solangi on Wednesday said 16th martyrdom anniversary of former prime minister Benazir

interest. The Prime Minister shared Pakistan's perspective on a number of issues, particularly the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Other challenges confronting the Muslim world such as Islamophobia were also discussed. The Prime Minister emphasized the need for the Muslim Ummah to continue to work closely and collec-

tively, especially through the OIC, to deal with these complex issues. The Prime Minister praised the Ambassadors for their efforts to forge stronger ties between Islamabad and their respective capitals. The Ambassadors thanked the Prime Minister and reiterated their support towards advancing bilateral relations with Pakistan, which played a key role in the Muslim world.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar meets the resident Ambassadors of Muslim Countries of Middle East and North Africa region. - DNA

### Pakistan conducts flight test of FATAH-II

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday conducted the successful flight test of Fatah-II, equipped with the most modern avionics, sophisticated navigation system and unique flight trajectory. The weapon system is capable of engaging targets with high precision up to a range of 400 kilometres, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said. The flight test was witnessed by senior officers from tri-services and dedicated scientists and engineers. The President, Prime Minister, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of Army Staff congratulated the participating troops and scientists on the successful conduct of the flight test.

### SC refuses Imran's Toshakhana plea for immediate hearing

"Two-member bench cannot even give you interim relief," acting Chief Justice Sardar Tariq Masood remarks

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court Wednesday refused to conduct an immediate hearing of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's plea in the Toshakhana case. Among other petitions, PTI also filed one seeking suspension of his conviction in the Toshakhana case to ensure he partakes in the general polls scheduled to take place on February 8 next year. Meanwhile, sharing his remarks on the plea, Justice Athar Minallah observed that the suspension of the trial court verdict against Khan in the Toshakhana case cannot end his disqualification. The PTI chief was disqualified for five years from holding any public office due to his conviction in the case. The apex court, however, refused to fix the petition for hearing as only two judges of the SC were available owing to winter vacation.

### SC procedures act 'strengthened judiciary'

Court observes law does not undermine SC

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court (SC) in its detailed judgment on the Supreme Court (Practice & Procedure Act), 2023 maintained on Wednesday that the legislation has strengthened the judiciary and created greater independence. "The Act does not in any manner violate the Constitution,

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### Briefs

#### Sheer thuggery by Punjab Police

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: PTI Secretary General Omar Ayub Khan strongly condemned the manner in which former Foreign Minister and PTI Vice Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi was arrested from Adiala Jail. PTI Secretary General said that the re-arrest of Qureshi, who is thorough gentleman and a senior politician, is despicable. "The manner in which Punjab Police acted is sheer thuggery," he added.

"There is no Rule of Law in Pakistan. Only the law of the jungle prevails. The writing on the wall is that PM Imran Khan and PTI will win with a landslide inshallah, and this is what has scared everyone," he maintained.

#### Faisal Saleh joins PML-N

DNA

LAHORE: In a blow to the PPP, their senior leader Faisal Saleh Hayat Wednesday joined the Pakistan PML-N ranks in the wake of the upcoming polls slated for February 8, 2024. Speaking to the media in Jhang, PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif termed Hayat's inclusion, along with his associates, as a major boost for the party in the city. The development comes as rumours had been circulating pertaining to the now-former PPP leader's prospects of bidding farewell to the Bilawal Bhutto-led party. The rumours further gained strength after no PPP flags were raised as the former federal minister filed his nomination papers for NA-108 and PP-125 for upcoming elections on Friday.

### PPP kickstarts election campaign with 10-point 'welfare' agenda

Bilawal to request party's top decision-making body to select him as candidate for prime minister



NAZIR SIYAL

LARKANA: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari Wednesday kickstarted his party's campaign for the February 8 elections, unveiling a 10-point agenda with an emphasis on welfare schemes. Addressing a party's gathering in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh on the 16th death anniversary of his mother Benazir Bhutto, Bilawal presented the party's election agenda ahead of the upcoming polls slated for February 8, 2024. Apart from pledging major

policy reforms focusing on the people's welfare, the PPP chief, without taking any names, fired a fresh salvo against political opponent Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Without taking any names, the former foreign minister said that there are those who are relying on "others" for the upcoming polls, in the same manner they had done so in the past. Continuing his tirade against his political opponents, Bilawal said that there are those who are relying on "others" for the upcoming

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### India demands handing over of Hafiz Saeed

MONITORING DESK

ISLAMABAD: In a recent development, the Indian government has formally requested Pakistan to extradite Hafiz Saeed. Diplomatic sources reveal that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has received the official request from the Indian government, urging the initiation of the legal process for the extradition of Hafiz Saeed. However the MOFA did not confirm any such activity. This formal request adds a new dimension to the diplomatic relations between the two

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### Qureshi arrested from outside Adiala Jail after release on bail

Justice Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Athar Minallah granted him bail after hearing arguments, he said

KHAYAM ABBASI

RAWALPINDI: Punjab police took Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Vice-Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi into custody from outside the Adiala Jail here on Wednesday after he was released on bail in the cipher case. Police manhandled Qureshi and drove him to an unknown location in an armored vehicle. It may be recalled that a day ago, Rawalpindi deputy commissioner issued his detention orders under MPO 3 on the application of CPO. However, the DC withdrew the detention order but Rawalpindi R.A. Bazar police arrested him in a May 9 vandalism case registered by it. Earlier talking to media outside Adiala Jail, Qureshi said that he was being arrested in a frivolous case. "I have represented the nation. I am innocent. I am being subjected to political revenge for no reason," he added. Justice Mansoor Ali Shah

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### ECP sets up EMCC

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has set up the Election Monitoring and Control Center (EMCC) to register and address public complaints during the 2024 general elections. EMCCs have been established at provincial, divisional and district levels, extending beyond Islamabad, for the swift resolution of public complaints. According to the spokesperson of the ECP, trained personnel are appointed in the EMCCs to swiftly address and resolve complaints. The control room will maintain communication with relevant personnel and stakeholders, including preliminary findings, Returning Officers (ROs) and District Returning Officers (DROs). He encouraged individuals to register complaints related to the general elections with EMCC Center staff by emailing complaints to complaints@ecp.gov.pk or sending them via

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**TURKISH AIRLINES**

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Stopover IN ISTANBUL

EASY VISA

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FREE ACCOMMODATION: PER LIMITED KINGDOM, IRELAND, USA, ICELAND PASSENGERS

Business: BUSINESS CLASS PASSENGERS CAN ENJOY 3 NIGHTS FOR FREE IN A 5 STAR HOTEL.

# Ashrafi commends interfaith celebrations on Christmas

Ashrafi, who is also the Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council specifically thanked the Christian community for actively participating in their religious ceremonies across the country

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Prime Minister's Special Representative on Religious Harmony and Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Muslim Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, on Wednesday, emphasized the spirit of unity and cooperation among all religious communities on the occasion of Christmas in the country. Holding a press conference here, he expressed gratitude and acknowledged the leaders and representatives of various faiths across Pakistan, commending their collaborative efforts in fostering interfaith harmony. Ashrafi, who is also the Chairman of Pakistan Ulema Council specifically thanked the Christian community for actively participating in their religious ceremonies across the country, highlighting the unity displayed during these events. He shed light on the nationwide manifestation of interfaith cohesion, exemplifying Pakistan as a country that embraces and respects all religions. He reiterated the commitment of Pakistan as a nation that upholds the principles of the Constitution, emphasizing that everyone is bound by the rule of law. In a firm stance, Ashrafi stated, "Pakistan is a country that recognizes and respects all religions and sects. Our Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens, regardless of their faith." He went on

to express regret over the fact that some individuals wish to impose their ideologies on the nation. However, the Prime Minister's Special Representative highlighted that the entire nation, irrespective of religious affiliations, collaborated with the Christian community, setting a remarkable example of interfaith harmony. He reiterated the importance of unity, diversity, and mutual respect in the fabric of Pakistani society. Expressing disappointment over the dissemination of misinformation, Ashrafi highlighted the Ministry of Religious Affairs' efforts in managing Hajj applications that exceeded the designated quota. He asserted that the Ministry was actively working to address these issues and find practical solutions. In a broader context, he announced the establishment of Pakistan Peace Councils nationwide. These councils would foster interfaith harmony and collaboration, promoting unity and understanding among diverse religious communities, he added. Additionally, the Prime Minister's Special Representative said the Ministry of Religious Affairs had launched the Pakistan Hajj Application, providing guidance and information for pilgrims. He said this digital initiative was designed to ensure that Hajj participants receive the necessary support and guidance throughout their sacred journey. He also addressed several critical issues, including the positive economic tra-

jectory in Pakistan, the polio issue, and the humanitarian situation in Palestine. Ashrafi acknowledged the positive developments in Pakistan and the establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to facilitate foreign investment. He emphasized the significance of SIFC in providing essential facilities for external investments, highlighting its pivotal role in the country's economic growth. On the pressing issue of polio eradication, he mentioned a conference being held on Thursday under the supervision of Health Minister Nadeem Jan, involving scholars and religious leaders. He said special guest Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar was expected to address the conference, where a joint Fatwa (religious decree) and declaration would be issued to emphasize the legitimacy of polio vaccination globally. Addressing concerns about delayed justice, Ashrafi, on behalf of the Pakistan Ulema Council, urged the immediate punishment of those involved in the May 9 incidents. Despite the available evidence against the culprits, he questioned the delay in taking action and called for swift justice against the perpetrators. Turning to the distressing situation in Palestine, Ashrafi revealed that Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar was engaged with leaders from all Islamic countries regarding the peace and ceasefire situation in Gaza.



ISLAMABAD : Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani called on President Dr Arif Alvi, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.—DNA

## Provincial minister resolves young doctors' strike

DNA

RAWALPINDI : After meeting with Provincial Minister for Primary and Secondary Health and Population Welfare Punjab Dr. Jamal Nasir, the Young Doctor Association ended the strike. According to the details, the delegation of Young Doctors Association met with the Provincial Minister Dr. Jamal Nasir. In the meeting, the delegation informed the provincial minister about their demands. In the meeting, it was decided to end the strike immediately. Speaking on this occasion, Provincial Minister Dr. Jamal Nasir said that the announcement of the end of the strike by the Young Doctors Association is a good step. With the end of the strike, health facilities will continue uninterrupted to the public. Due to the ongoing development work in Holy Family Hospital, there is work load pressure on other hospitals of the city. Ending the strike of the Young Doctor Association will be beneficial for the people. He said that the legitimate demands of doctors will be seriously considered. Their problems will be solved. Practical steps are being taken to provide the best health facilities to the people. The spokesperson of Young Doctor Association said that in the broad interest of the people and patients and as a goodwill on the occasion of Chief Minister Punjab's visit to Rawalpindi, we announce the end of the strike.

## IG Punjab raises alarm on law threats in 2024 elections

Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has started working on the threats, IG says

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Punjab Inspector General (IGP) Dr. Usman Anwar Wednesday said there were serious threats of law and order situation in the upcoming general elections with groups possibly fighting with each other. Punjab's top cop was talking to the media after the inauguration of an art exhibition at Alhamra Art Gallery.

He said the Punjab Police maintained law and order the police by giving outstanding duty during Muharram and Christmas. "Many terrorism activities were foiled due to the conviction of the police," he said. Dr Usman said the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has started working on the threats and Punjab police in the past year have made 60 percent arrests in the May 9th case

of the offenders. "The properties of the offenders will be seized according to the law," adding, claimed that transfers and postings of the police are being done according to the direction of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). He said the cases of Moonis Elahi were sub judice and dealt in accordance to the procedure of arresting the offenders.

## CDWP approves 7 projects

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Mohammad Jehanzeb Khan on Wednesday presided over a meeting of the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) that approved five projects worth Rs 13 billion. Besides it recommended two development projects of Rs72.240 billion to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) for further consideration, a news release said. Secretary Planning Awais Manzur Sumra, senior officials from the Planning Commission and Federal Ministries/Divisions, and Chairman/ACS (Dev) from Provincial Governments participated in the meeting. Two projects namely "Upgradation of Transmission Network & Replacement of Optical Fiber Cable, AJK & Gilgit Baltistan (revised)" worth Rs.1999 million and "Prime Minister's Initiatives Support for IT Startups, Specialized IT Trainings and Venture Capital (revised)" worth Rs 5000 million were approved. Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, presented a projected "Establishment of Infectious Disease Laboratory" worth Rs 8289.913 million which the forum recommended to ECNEC for approval.—DNA

## All set to take action against one-wheelie doers

LAHORE : The Lahore Traffic Police completed its preparation to launch a major crackdown against doers of one-wheelie in the provincial capital before new year night. Chief Traffic Officer Ammara Athar has issued a directive to register cases against violators. According to a spokesperson for the department, strict action would also be taken against facilitators of one-wheelie doers during the crackdown. Ammara Athar said that special checkpoints had been established on 90 locations to curb one-wheelie and other violations.—APP

## President SCCI, Secretary industries visit Peshawar Expo Centre

STAFF REPORT

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president, Fuad Ishaq along with Secretary Industries, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Pakistan Expo Centre Private Limited Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mariam Khawar visited the under-construction Peshawar Expo Centre. During the visit, a detailed briefing was given to Fuad Ishaq and apprised him that the structure of Peshawar Expo Centre has been completed while renovation and other construction work on the Expo Centre would be completed in the next 18 months, with the provision of timely funds, said a press release here on Wednesday. Fuad Ishaq told the secretary Industries government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Pakistan Expo Centre Chief

Executive Officer Mariam Khawar that in his previous presidential tenure, the Expo Centre was approved when former federal minister for commerce Khurram Dastgir visited the chamber house. Initially, a sum of Rs 500 million had been sanctioned out of the total estimated cost of Rs 2.5 billion, in which over Rs 2.4 billion has so far been spent, the SCCI President elaborated. He said owing to the increasing cost of construction materials, an additional Rs 4 billion is required to complete this important project for which financial assistance would be needed through the Export Development Fund. he SCCI president expressed satisfaction with the design and structure of the Peshawar Expo Centre, which was built at 200 kanals. He, however, voiced concern over the delay in the timely completion of the project. Fuad

Ishaq urged the federal minister for commerce Dr Gohar Ejaz to ensure the required Rs 4 billion for Peshawar Expo Centre in the next meeting of the Export Development Fund. It will not only provide a facility to local industries to display their products at the Peshawar Expo centre but also export would be boosted from the province, he added. The SCCI chief hoped the Peshawar Expo Centre would provide facility to the business community of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province for the promotion of exports. Fuad Ishaq said that former federal minister for commerce Khurram Dastgir Khan and the ex-federal secretary of commerce Muhammad Shehzad Arbab had assisted in the establishment of the Peshawar Expo Centre, for which the SCCI and business community of the KP is highly thankful.



LAHORE : CM Mohsin Naqvi is congratulating the late night laborer on the occasion of Punjab working of apporration project of services hospital.—DNA

## CM inspires students to channel positive energy

CM KP also distributed laptops among the students of Hazara University, Mansehra, under the Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme

DNA

PESHAWAR : Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Justice (Retd) Syed Arshad Hussain Shah, distributed laptops among the students of Hazara University, Mansehra, under the Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme. Addressing the ceremony as the chief guest, he emphasized that promoting education is the government's

top priority. The Prime Minister's Laptop Scheme is more than a gift for students, he said. He urged students to utilize their energies positively and use laptops for education and research purposes. "We need to align the field of higher education with the demands of the modern era," he stated. The chief minister mentioned that the provincial

government is taking serious measures to rescue various universities in the province from financial crises. He expressed the need for positive thinking for the betterment of society and highlighted his efforts to contribute to the welfare of the people of the province during his short tenure. "A lot can be achieved in a short time if the intention is good," empha-

sized the chief minister. He expressed concern over the unfortunate situation of educated youth facing unemployment. To address youth unemployment, he announced the initiation of a program to send young people abroad for employment. "Under this program, at least five hundred thousand young people will undergo various training courses in different fields within a

year," he said. The chief minister mentioned that the formal implementation of this program will take place in the next few days, and demand for this program is being taken from various countries for this purpose. He also stated that the government has declared Haripur and Abbottabad as quantum valleys, and the initiation of quantum computing has begun in the province.



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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

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# ICCI urges affordable credit for private sector

President ICCI said that the record high interest rate has made it very difficult for the private sector to get credit from banks

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD : Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) said that the record high interest rate has made it very difficult for the private sector to get credit from banks for the expansion of existing businesses and make new investments due to which the business activities are suffering badly. He stressed that the government should make a significant cut in the policy interest rate to provide affordable credit to the private sector that would accelerate the pace of business activities and help revive the economy. He said that the bank advances to the private sector have declined to just Rs.208 billion in the financial year 2023 compared to over Rs.1329 billion in the financial year 2022 due to which the GDP of the country has contracted significantly. He said that this dangerous trend can only be reversed by providing



enhanced credit at an affordable rate to the private sector. He said this while addressing a meeting of the business community. Zubair Ahmed Malik, former President FPCCI and ICCI said that the government has set an economic growth target of 2-3 percent, which can only be possible by providing an easy credit facility to the private sector. He said that the production of all major industries of large scale

manufacturing sector including textile, paper board, iron and steel products, electrical equipment, automobiles, and furniture have shown a reduction of over 4 percent in October and if this trend continues, it would not be possible for the government to achieve its set growth target. He said that the facilitation of the private sector is the best option for the government to improve the economic growth of the country.

Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI, and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that the World Bank has already cautioned Pakistan about the risks of reversals of critical policy reforms after the February elections due to the influence of some vested interests. He stressed that the incoming government should ensure policy consistency to improve the confidence of the private sector in making long-term business

and investment plans for the country. Muhammad Ejaz Abasi former President ICCI, Sardar Tahir Mehmood President Federation of Realtors Pakistan, Muhammad Naveed Malik former Senior Vice President ICCI, and others also spoke on the occasion and stressed that the government should promote ease of doing business to facilitate the growth of business and economic activities.

## President directs HEC to expedite degree attestation

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has expressed displeasure over the delay by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) for not attesting the degree of a former student on flimsy grounds and upheld the orders of the Wafaqi Mohtasib directing HEC to attest her degree within 7 days, besides initiating an inquiry against delinquent official responsible for wasting precious months of the student. The President gave these directions while rejecting a representation filed by HEC against a decision of the Wafaqi Mohtasib directing it to attest a female student's BA degree within 7 days. As per details, Savera Afridi (the complainant) had applied to

HEC for attestation of her BA degree and DMC but she was informed that since the session of her degree was 2020, it could not be attested as HEC had phased out two-year conventional B.A/B.Sc. program and the universities were not allowed to enrol students in conventional B.A/B.Sc. program after the academic year 2019. Feeling aggrieved, the complainant approached the Wafaqi Mohtasib who passed the orders in her favour. HEC then filed a representation as well as a review petition with the Mohtasib, which were rejected. Later, HEC filed a representation against the orders of the Mohtasib with the President. The President held personal hearing of the case and rejected HEC's representation. He observed

that the complaint was given admission by the University of Peshawar for the session 2019-2020 and the complainant had produced a letter of the University dated 01.09.2022 which showed that the complainant's session for her BA degree was 2019-2020 and she was given admission in January 2020. He added that since the complainant was given admission by the University for the session 2019-2020, therefore, there was no fault on the part of the complainant and she should not suffer for the acts and omissions of the University if it had violated HEC's policy by allowing registrations for such session. He stated that Wafaqi Mohtasib had rightly observed that it was HEC's responsibility as a regulator to see as to

whether its decisions were being implemented by the universities and any lapse on its part amounted to failure to perform its statutory obligations. The President held that a student should not suffer because of the inaction of HEC or the university. He regretted that HEC, instead of taking any action against the University, had put the complainant into unnecessary ordeal without any fault on her part and was not attesting her degree. The President, therefore, rejected the representation of HEC with the observation that HEC should censure the universities which were not following its guidelines or instructions so that in future the students should not suffer because of its inaction.

## Excise to facilitate citizens for vehicle registration at Jasmine Garden

ISLAMABAD : In a move to streamline services and bring them closer to the community, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon on Wednesday initiated an exclusive drive set to revitalize the Rose and Jasmine Garden parking lot 1 from 3 to 5 pm. The excise staff will be on site, offering a hassle-free experience for vehicle owners seeking registration, transfers, and token tax processing, ICT spokesman Dr Abdullah Tabasum said. This unprecedented initiative not only caters to vehicular paperwork but also introduces the ICT Doorstep Service. Imagine obtaining your Domicile Certificate, Birth Certificate, Power of Attorney, International Driving Permit, Fuel Permit (Domestic/Commercial), or Motor Vehicle Registration, all at one convenient location. The Facilitation Center Doorstep ICT Vehicle will be present, providing a seamless and efficient solution for various administrative needs. He said that whether you're a vehicle owner looking to sort out your paperwork or in need of essential documents, this event promises efficiency with a touch of convenience. The citizens are urged not to miss this opportunity to simplify bureaucratic processes and get everything done at the Rose and Jasmine Garden parking lot today.—DNA

## NHA launches strict action against overloading vehicles

ISLAMABAD : The National Highway Authority (NHA) has issued a detailed advisory warning the truck divers and loaders to avoid overloading their vehicles as it had initiated strict action against the vehicles violating the restrictions and burdening the national thoroughfares leading to accidents and damage to important connectivity infrastructure. The Authority with the cooperation of the National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) has initiated a stringent nationwide drive against overloaded vehicles that were jeopardizing public life, property and infrastructure. The minimum weight allowed for a two-axle Bedford truck or vehicle was 17.5 tonnes, 27.5 and 29.5 tonnes for a three-axle vehicle, 39.5 tonnes and 41.5 tonnes for a four-axle vehicle, 48.5 tonnes and 49.5 tonnes of vehicles for a five-axle vehicle, 51.5 tonnes for a five-axle vehicle, 58.5 and 61.5 tonnes for eight axle vehicle. The overloading of vehicles was leading to risk to life, tyre burst, damage to roads, excessive fuel usage, early damaging of tyres, heavy fines, axle breakage, expenditure of road repairs and wastage of time.—DNA

## SNGPL disconnects 238 illegal connections

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL), in its ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Islamabad, has disconnected 238 more connections and imposed a fine of Rs 3.41 million on pilferers. The regional team in Lahore took action by disconnecting 26 connections due to illegal gas usage and 9 others for the use of com-

pressors, imposing a fine of Rs 0.26 million in gas theft cases said a spokesperson of the SNGPL. The team in Rawalpindi disconnected 4 connections due to illegal gas usage and another one for the use of a compressor. Meanwhile, the team in Islamabad disconnected eight connections for illegal gas usage. In Multan, 3 connections were cut off due to illegal gas usage and another 10 for the use of compressors. In Peshawar and Karak,

SNGPL disconnected 80 connections for the direct use of gas and imposed a fine of Rs 2.4 million against gas theft cases, also filing two FIRs against gas pilferers. In Sahiwal, one connection was disconnected due to illegal gas usage. In Sialkot, the team disconnected two connections for illegal gas usage, imposing a fine of Rs 0.09 million against gas theft cases. In Sheikhupura, 35 connections were disconnected for illegal gas usage, with an addition-

al 2 for the use of compressors, and a fine of Rs 0.03 million was imposed against gas theft cases. The regional team in Sargodha disconnected 34 connections for illegal gas usage and another 20 for the use of compressors, imposing a fine of Rs 0.3 million against gas theft cases. In Gujranwala, the team disconnected 2 connections for illegal gas usage, imposing a fine of Rs 0.33 million against gas pilferers. The team in Gujrat disconnected one connection due to illegal gas usage.

## RPO conducts Open Court to address public grievances

RAWALPINDI : Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Region Syed Khurram Ali conducted an open court in the regional office under the open door policy here on Wednesday. In the open court, citizens from the districts of Rawalpindi region submitted applications for change of investigation and redressal of other complaints. During open court, RPO issued orders to the SP Sadder Division for the inquiry of the case filed by the petitioner Nargis Jahan resident of Gujjar Khan in Jatti police station while Tariq Mehmood resident of District Chakwal filed an application that the plot has been occupied by the land grabbers. RPO issued directives to SDPO Chakwal for redressal. Abdul Hameed resident of Islamabad filed an application that the case registered in Waris Khan police station is baseless and an inquiry should be conducted, on which orders were issued to SDPO Waris Khan for an immediate inquiry. Arshad Mehmood resident of Fateh Jang Attock filed an application for the change of investigation of the case registered in Fateh Jang police station, on which immediate action orders were issued to SSPRB. Muhammad Intiaz resident of Tench Bhatta Rawalpindi requested that the construction materials of the plot be stolen but the case was not registered, on which immediate inquiry orders were issued to the ASP Sadder Circle. The directives were issued to submit the report in the time frame, on the occasion, RPO Rawalpindi Region Syed Khurram Ali said that measures are being taken for immediate public hearing at the police station level, by holding open court. The provision of immediate and speedy justice to the citizens is being ensured along with further improvement in quality policing, he added.—APP

## Pakistan boosts health emergency systems in poor nations

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Federal Minister for Health, Dr Nadeem Jan Wednesday on 'International Day of Epidemic Preparedness' stressed the importance of collaborative efforts and said that Pakistan would play its leading part in strengthening health emergency systems of poor countries through hosting its first global health security Summit.

Talking to a Private news channel, the minister for health said that the 'Global Health Security Summit' will be held on January 10 and 11 in the federal capital of Pakistan, adding, that Pakistan will finalize its strategic road map to effectively tackle health emergencies and epidemics in the country. Holding the summit will be proof that Pakistan will play a key role in the health sector and protect people from global epidemics, he mentioned. The minister highlighted that ongoing efforts will improve the availability of medicines, resources, infrastructure and increase production. Replying to a query, he said that Pakistan stands ready to contribute to all such endeavors and initiatives at relevant UN and WHO platforms.

In this regard, "We need to develop countries that should be prioritized in terms of equitable distribution of vaccines and medicines and building their fiscal space to combat the pandemics," he added. He said that soon Pakistan will also establish a 'global pandemic financial facilities forum' which would provide equal opportunities and distribute equal resources to low-income countries for handling epidemics. He assured that this international summit will give a positive impact of Pakistan globally, adding, that the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing health challenges.

## Dengue cases exceed 15,060 during current year

ISLAMABAD : The number of dengue cases has surpassed 15,060 at Punjab in the current year with four new cases reported during the last 24 hours in the provincial capital.

Secretary Punjab Health Department, Ali Jan Khan told a private news channel that Rawalpindi has so far reported 2,654 dengue cases in the current year. As many as 16 patients of dengue fever were currently admitted to hospitals of the province, he added. Dengue virus is a mosquito-borne viral disease that has rapidly spread in recent years around the world. Dengue virus is transmitted by female mosquitoes mainly of the species Aedes aegypti and, to a lesser extent, Ae. albopictus.—APP

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## Briefs

## 4791 FIRs launched against underage drivers

DNA

RAWALPINDI : Rawalpindi District Police registered over 4791 FIRs against underage drivers during a special campaign so far, said a police spokesman. He informed that police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi, Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani were taking action by the law against underage drivers. The CPO had directed the City Traffic Police officers to take solid steps to control traffic rules violations and underage driving, he said. The parents were also advised to discourage driving by underage drivers adding that fatal road accidents occur due to speeding and reckless driving of the drivers particularly underage. The ongoing operation against underage drivers and other traffic rules violators had been accelerated on the instructions of the CPO. The vehicles and motorcycles of the underage drivers were also being impounded in respective police stations, he said. In addition to issuing fines for underage driving, police were also conducting awareness campaigns in schools and colleges to educate young individuals about the legal age requirements for obtaining a driver's license, he added.

## Police net 17,758 lawbreakers in 6 months

DAN

RAWALPINDI : Rawalpindi district police managed to net 17,758 lawbreakers during last six months including 980 members of 380 criminal gangs and recovered stolen cash and other costly items worth Rs 730 million from their possession. According to a police spokesman, more than 150 stolen vehicles and over 1450 stolen motorcycles were recovered during the period. Police while conducting raids against drug traffickers rounded up over 3600 accused and seized over 63 tons hashish, 01 ton heroin, more than 08 kg Ice, 19 kg opium and over 16,000 liters liquor. Around 1100 big drug dealers were arrested during last 02 months, he added. During operations against illegal weapons, police nabbed 2153 suspects and recovered 95 Kalashnikovs, 90 short guns, 92 rifles, 1858 pistols, 07 revolvers, 07 carbines, 60 daggers and thousands bullets. 829 accused were arrested in 151 cases against gamblers while police recovered over Rs 4.2 million stake money, 628 mobile phones, 50 motorcycles, 06 cars, and other items, he said adding, 105 accused were arrested in 29 cases registered under Sound System Act. 67 accused were sent behind the bars who were allegedly involved in 66 sexual harassment cases. In the crackdown against proclaimed offenders, 257 'A' category and 1674 'B' category criminals were arrested, he said.

## CPEC helps further strengthening Pak-China ties

He expressed these views while talking to Pakistan's Ambassador to China, Khalil-ur-Rahman Hashmi who called on him at Aiwan-e-Sadr

MEHTAB PIERZAD

ISLAMABAD : President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday said the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) had helped further expanding and strengthening the bilateral relations between the two countries. He expressed these views while talking to Pakistan's Ambassador to China, Khalil-ur-Rahman Hashmi who called on him at Aiwan-e-Sadr. The president said under CPEC, a network of roads had been laid across the country whereas infrastructure projects of strategic importance were also included in the mega project. Terming China as Pakistan's brotherly country and a permanent strategic partner, he said the bilateral ties between Pakistan and China were of special importance. "China is the largest trading partner of Pakistan and is an important source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the country, President Alvi remarked. Further, he pointed out that the cultural and educational exchanges were important for strong friendship of the two countries. Congratulating the



recently appointed ambassador to China, he hoped that the strategic partnership with China would further strengthen in future. The president directed the ambassador to further deepen the trade, economic and cultural relations with China.

## Ruling group aims 4th consecutive win in FPCCI Polls

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: As the country's apex trade body is going to hold its annual elections on 30th of Dec 2023, the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's ruling group of Businessmen Panel (BMP) is going to make the history of winning FPCCI's polls 2024 for the fourth consecutive time and defeat its rival group of UBG, maintaining continuity of success and services of the business community. The Businessmen Panel (BMP)

is the true representative of the business community of the whole country and would participate in the next elections to the best of its ability, ensuring the success of the group, as many strong groups of several chambers have joined the BMP. These views were expressed by the PIAF Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol, expressing the hope that the BMP would win apex trade body's elections for the fourth consecutive time with a big margin on the basis of its excellent performance amidst worst economic crisis in the coun-

try. Addressing a meeting, held here on Wednesday in connection with the FPCCI's election campaign, Faheemur Rehman Saigol observed that a large number of chambers of various cities, trade groups and industrial associations from across the country have so far announced their support for the Businessmen Panel (BMP) for the upcoming FPCCI elections 2024. Besides a large number of trade and industrial associations the election meeting was attended by the BMP Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar, FPCCI President from ruling

group Irfan Iqbal Sheikh and FPCCI's presidential candidate of the BMP Muhammad Ali Sheikh also attended the meeting. Faheem Saigol observed that the leadership has visited various cities of all provinces across the country and winning their full support for all candidates of the Businessmen Panel. The PIAF Chairman stated that work of the last four years are in front of everyone, will meet the trust of the business community as before. During the last four years, not only all the departments of the federal government recognized FPCCI.

## Commissioner reviews holy family hospital renovation

RAWALPINDI : Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Liaquat Ali Chhatta here on Wednesday visited Holy Family Hospital and reviewed physical progress of the ongoing expansion and renovation project at the hospital. The Vice Chancellor, Rawalpindi Medical University (RMU) Dr. Umar, Medical Superintendent (MS) Holy Family Dr. Ijaz Ahmed and Xeon Building were present on the occasion. The Commissioner visited different parts of the hospital and was given a briefing by the Building Department on the ongo-

ing work. The Commissioner was informed that 99 percent tile work at the ground floor had been completed. A two-way road would be constructed in front of the Holy Family hospital to give easy access to the hospital. The Commissioner directed the authorities that the problems of the basement of the hospital should also be solved immediately. Overall 60% work on the Holy Family Hospital had been completed, he added. The physical progress in the new building is 56% while the progress in the old building is 66%, he said adding, the

deadline for the Holy Family project is February 20. The reconstruction work would be completed before the deadline. Up-gradation of 100 government hospitals is in progress across Punjab. The Holy Family is being converted into a modern hospital, he said. Work on revamping of BBH's OPD is in progress which would be completed at a cost of Rs 160 million while Rs 110 million had been provided to DHQ Rawalpindi. The Commissioner said, Punjab government was making all-out efforts to provide quality medical facilities to the residents of Rawalpindi.—APP

## Iqbal's poetry, philosophy and thought were universal

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training, Madad Ali Sindhi on Wednesday said that Iqbal's poetry, philosophy and thought were, undoubtedly, universal and his message was for the people of the whole world. Iqbal's message is as fresh as ever and we still need it today, the minister said while addressing the opening session of a two-day international conference on "Iqbal's Thought in the Perspective of 21st Century and Two Great Poets of Islam: Iqbal and Akif" at Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). The conference was organized by the Department of Iqbal Studies AIOU in collaboration with Yunus Emre Institute. Madad Ali Sindhi mentioned that Iqbal's thought provided a solution to the problems of today and served as a guiding light for all human beings.

Iqbal's political philosophy is a source of strength for democracy in Pakistan, he said. He expressed his delight over the presence of eminent intellectuals and Iqbal enthusiasts from all over Pakistan, Egypt, Iran, and Turkey at the conference. The federal minister congratulated Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor AIOU and his entire team for organizing this international conference on Iqbal. Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood mentioned that the University was one of the few universities which had established a Department of Iqbal Studies to promote Iqbal's thoughts and poetry. He stated that through this department, we aimed to convey the message of Allama Iqbal to the youth. Dr. Nasir emphasized the need to elaborate and explain Iqbal's thoughts to train the new generation. Turkish Ambassador Mehmet Pacici and Dr. Halil Tokar com-

mented that Iqbal's poetry had profoundly impacted the Turkish nation. In Turkey, there have been many translations of Iqbal's poetry and research work on Iqbal is being conducted in Turkish universities, he said and added, however, in Pakistan, Muhammad Akif is not recognized, and in collaboration with AIOU, the Yunus Emre Institute will promote the poetry and thoughts of the Turkish poet Muhammad Akif in Pakistan. Other speakers including Director General, NLPD, Prof. Dr. Saleem Mazhar, Dr. Baseera Ambreen from Punjab University and Dr. Fatima Hasan from Karachi expressed their concern about the challenges that today's young generation is facing including academic, intellectual, cultural, and moral crises. They emphasized that Allama Muhammad Iqbal's thoughts, philosophy and poetry can inspire and guide the youth to overcome these problems.

## PECA act: vital for safeguarding Pakistan's cyberspace

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Dr. Umar Saif Wednesday said that the protection of Pakistan's cyberspace under the PECA Act is very important. "Cybercrime, online buying and selling, cyberbullying, protection of online data, other services of our citizens, identification of threats and effective action against criminals is our core responsibility," he said in his address as chief guest at the prize distribution ceremony of Digital Pakistan Cybersecurity Hackathon. The event was organized by the National Technology Fund (Ignite), an organization of the Ministry of IT Telecom. Dr. Umar Saif further said that there was no specific organization to act against cybercrime, so a cybercrime

wing was created in FIA to look after these issues. "We have established a separate agency called the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency equipped with all the required equipment and skills," he said. The minister said gradually, the authority to act against cybercrime is being transferred from the FIA Cybercrime wing to this particular organization which will be able to take effective action against cybercrime. He was of the view that with Pakistan's cyberspace, data of public and private institutions, business transactions, and online activities of citizens can be secured effectively. The IT Minister said that the first National Cyber Emergency Response Team (National CERTS) has also been established in Pakistan, and Sectoral CERTS will be formed under this organization. In other words, the government of Pakistan has created an entire infrastructure under an effective strategy against

cybercrimes, which is being rapidly implemented to make it fully functional. Dr Umar Saif, extended his gratitude to all participants, sponsors, and organizers who played an instrumental role in making the Digital Pakistan Cybersecurity Hackathon an undeniable success. He also lauded the efforts of Team IGNITE to hold training workshops and hackathons since October. "The significance of events like these cannot be overstated; they are pivotal in fostering innovation and collaboration within the dynamic field of cybersecurity. In our increasingly digital world, the prevalence of malware and malicious attacks underscores the critical importance of cybersecurity. The evolving nature of cyber threats necessitates constant innovation to outpace malicious actors" Dr. Saif added. He said that as informed, 6 teams represented Pakistan at Blackhat's cybersecurity competition in

Saudi Arabia this year and 4 of them were ranked in the top 35 teams out of 250 international teams who participated in the event. He termed a good first step by Pakistan and Ignite and said "I hope we have at least one team in the top 10 teams at next year's Blackhat competition." Recognizing the need for robust collaboration, the IT Minister emphasizes the importance of a partnership between the government, private sector, and academia. The private sector's support for cybersecurity initiatives is pivotal, and the government encouraged ongoing collaboration to fortify our cybersecurity defenses. In his welcome address Chief Executive Officer IGNITE, Mr. Asim Shehryar Hussain said, the IT Ministry and Ignite are on a relentless pursuit of identifying and nurturing talent capable of thwarting malicious cyber attempts on our national networks.

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## Washington claims about Xinjiang blatant lies

According to the United States' Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, the US State Department has to submit an annual report on the imposition of sanctions. The four-page report submitted this year repeats the same old lies and unsubstantiated allegations tirelessly spread by Uyghur secessionists, extremists and terrorist elements that have been on the US' payroll for years. And the individuals the US government has imposed sanctions on, who range from grassroots police officers to key lawmakers, are exactly those playing important roles in safeguarding Xinjiang's stability, and who are the enemy of the "performers" and "witnesses" living on Washington's funding. Washington always claims that Beijing is guilty of the genocide of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The facts expose the accusation to be a lie. Over the past six decades, the population of Uyghur people in Xinjiang has swelled from about 5 million to nearly 13 million, their average life span has increased from 30 plus years to about 72. The living standards of local residents have improved dramatically over that period, as shown by the per capita disposable income increasing by more than 200 times. The US also accuses China of trying to eradicate the Uyghur culture and that of other minority ethnic groups. But there are more than 24,400 mosques in Xinjiang, more than 10 times the number in the US where the Muslim population is about half of that of Xinjiang. Xinjiang has more than 5,400 intangible cultural heritages of various levels that are strictly protected and passed down to future generations with the funding of governments, the majority of which are related to the Uyghur. The most absurd claim in the report is that China is using its "poverty alleviation" campaign as a disguise to cover up its human rights violations. Yet that is belied by the deaths of more than 1,800 grassroots civil servants, mostly members of the Communist Party of China, who have died in the noble cause over the past few years to lift all the rural population in the country out of abject poverty. Apart from the US and its key allies, almost all countries and world bodies praise China's remarkable poverty alleviation achievements which stand in stark contrast to the meager crumbs of assistance provided to the poverty-stricken population in the US over the years by successive administrations. The report and related sanctions constitute grave interference in China's internal affairs and violate international law and the basic norms of international relations. It is right that Beijing should take countermeasures in accordance with China's Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law. The State Department report actually does a disservice to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang but that should come as no surprise given the recent wars it has waged. The US condoning of what is happening in Gaza shows how much it cares for Muslim people.

## Fostering harmony: transforming 45 years into celebration

As the curtain falls on 2023, the China-United States diplomatic relationship is about to greet its 45th anniversary in the new year. For all the optimism the November meeting of the two countries' leaders inspired, 2024 may still prove tricky for the lately volatile bilateral ties. The Chinese Foreign Ministry's news briefing on Tuesday was illustrative of the less-than-optimistic atmosphere that has once again descended on China-US relations ahead of the upcoming new year. The Chinese side has expressed strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition, and made solemn representations with the US side over the latter's National Defense Authorization Act for 2024, said spokeswoman Mao Ning. The act, which US President Joe Biden signed into law on Dec 22 after it passed the review of Congress, interferes with Chinese domestic affairs, clamors for military support for Taiwan, and violates the one-China principle and the three joint communiques between the governments of the two countries, she said. "If the US side clings obstinately to its own course," she warned, "the Chinese side would take decisive, forceful measures to resolutely safeguard its own sovereignty security and development interests". On the same occasion, the spokeswoman announced sanctions against a US company and two individuals for concocting and spreading "false narratives related to Xinjiang". The subjects of sanctions will be barred from entering China, or working with any Chinese entities, and any assets they have in the country have been frozen. The move, as Mao indicated, was in response to the US sanctioning two Chinese officials earlier this month, and is another step down the Xinjiang tit-for-tat path, highlighting relations continue to be fraught in the run-up to what should be a celebratory anniversary. When the Chinese leader and his US counterpart met in San Francisco, the general anticipation was that they would manage to stabilize bilateral ties. The progress onentanyl collaboration and high-level military dialogue was indeed conducive to stopping the worrisome downward spiral in ties. What has happened thereafter, however, shows the mutual distrust, if not outright animosity, between Beijing and Washington runs so deep that it is going to require a major booster to alter the downward trajectory of ties. For 2024, a diplomatic thaw in its usual sense may be difficult to achieve. So, instead of pursuing the unachievable, Beijing and Washington should concentrate more on the true imperative of the San Francisco vision, demonstrate genuine realism, and work harder to stabilize the wayward relationship.

## Russia's strategic interests in the Israel-Hamas conflict

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



A loss would deprive Moscow of the international standing it so desperately seeks, would likely spark domestic discontent and lead to exactly what Russia sought to avoid: NATO forces near its borders. These events have led many to

After Israel announced that it was at war with Hamas, several countries expressed concern about the escalating conflict and called on both sides to cease hostilities. Russia was one of them, although some heads of state accused Moscow of aiding Hamas' initial attack on Israel, saying it would be useful to divert attention from the disaster in Ukraine. Israel itself has dismissed these accusations as a pure conspiracy, and although Russia could benefit from the conflict, it will only do so as a mediator, not as an aggressor. It is true that the world has turned its attention from Ukraine to Israel, and it is also true that Russia welcomes the amnesty. The Kremlin has spent countless resources on its war effort and cannot afford to lose. A loss would deprive Moscow of the international standing it so desperately seeks, would likely spark domestic discontent and lead to exactly what Russia sought to avoid: NATO forces near its borders. These events have led many to believe that Russia will use this moment to launch another attack. But the opportunity is not as good as it seems. Russia is deeply involved in Ukraine and is working to stimulate economic growth in the face of labor shortages and stifling sanctions for aiding or abetting either side of the war between Israel and Hamas. Even if this is not the case, Russia has an interest in maintaining good relations with both sides. The worse the war becomes, the more difficult it becomes for Russia to do either. Moscow realizes that the war in Ukraine will end one way or another. He realizes that Ukraine is not his only means of expanding his influence. He realizes that under the current circumstances he needs to engage politically and economically as much as he can with countries with which he has good relations. Israel and the Palestinian territories are precisely such countries, and Russia continues to maintain

dialogue with both accordingly. In fact, Russia's relations with those regions are historical. After Israel reoriented its foreign policy toward the West during the Cold War, the Soviet Union supplied weapons to the Palestine Liberation Organization and trained its fighters in Soviet military educational institutions. They have kept in touch ever since. Its support for the Palestinian territories has strengthened its standing among other Middle Eastern countries, many of which have significantly increased their trade with Russia since the start of Western sanctions. These countries include Iran and Algeria, which also need Russia's economic support in these difficult economic times. What's more, Islam is the second most popular religion in Russia, and many of its followers are in the North Caucasus, whose support the Kremlin needs to maintain stability in its southern fringes. Finally, there are about 2,000 Russian citizens throughout the official territory of the Palestinian Authority, including 1,200 in the Gaza Strip. This explains why President Vladimir Putin called for the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. However, Russia continues to maintain its relations with Israel. About 80,000 Jews live in Russia, and the Russian Jewish diaspora in Israel is also large. Israel was also one of the favorite destinations for Russians who fled the country after the invasion of Ukraine. In 2022, more than 37,000 people fled to Israel from Russia, and in 2023, before immigration laws were tightened, the number of people leaving Russia for Israel rose significantly. In terms of foreign policy, Russia views Israel, a nuclear power, as a stabilizing factor in the Middle East and appreciates the fact that it abstains from the Western sanctions regime. Regarding the war with Hamas, Putin said that Israel is under unprecedented attack and has the right to defend its citizens. But perhaps the

most convincing evidence of Russia's lack of involvement in the war between Israel and Hamas is that Russia has not used this war to its advantage so far. No new attack has been carried out, and there is no indication that the army is on alert in case anything dramatic happens. The only thing he did was try to position himself as a mediator in the conflict. In addition to calling for a ceasefire, Putin stressed the importance of diplomatic efforts to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, noting that any ground operation in Gaza would have serious consequences and civilian deaths. Russia knows that the Middle East is a much higher priority for the United States than Ukraine, and that Washington may be particularly interested in having someone else mediate so as not to be drawn into another regional conflict. Unlike Russia, the United States does not have much support in the Palestinian territories anyway. The Kremlin is already trying to figure out how to use its position to solve its problems, and there are already rumors of a possible dialogue between the United States and Russia. Last week, a working meeting of the five nuclear powers was held in New York with the participation of Russian representatives. For Russia, the benefits of mediation are twofold: it helps Moscow break out of its (relative) international isolation by working with partners it would not otherwise have done so, and it potentially helps prevent the war from escalating further or involving other states in the region. Russia enjoys lucrative economic, infrastructure and logistics partnerships. The real question is whether Moscow has enough time to seize this opportunity, given all the problems it is dealing with. The benefits are significant and inaction carries an opportunity cost. If the war expands to include Russia's allies, it will be very difficult for Moscow to balance its forces in the Middle East, and Russia will lose momentum.

## The impact of private institutions on education in Pakistan

Fukaeha Afnan



The government realized public education had problems and started supporting private involvement. They made it easier to start private schools, gave financial help to low-income students, and joined hands with private companies to improve education overall. Making sure education quality was good became crucial. They set up systems to check and maintain standards in both public and private schools, showing that a private education system also needed to be accountable. At the same time, they gave incentives for private investment in higher education. Tax breaks and land grants were offered to those who wanted to build universities and colleges.

The way education is managed has changed a lot globally, especially in Pakistan. The history, economic challenges, and the goal for better education have made leaders think about the role of private companies in education. This essay will talk about how education has shifted in Pakistan, looking at its history, reasons for policy changes, and what it means for the education system. Since Pakistan started in 1947, education has been seen as vital for building the nation. However, despite efforts, the public education system faced many problems and couldn't provide good education for everyone. In the 1970s, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto tried to make education equal for everyone by taking control of private schools. But this had unintended effects, like lower education quality and too much control from the government. By the 1990s, it was clear that this approach wasn't working. Public education had issues like bad infrastructure, old teaching plans, and not enough qualified teachers. So, the government started thinking about other options, and this led to the rise of private involvement in education. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Pakistan changed its view on education. The government realized public education had problems and started supporting private involvement. They made it easier to start private schools, gave financial help to low-income students, and joined hands with private companies to improve education overall. Making sure education quality was good became crucial. They set up systems to check and maintain standards in both public and private schools, showing that a private education system also needed to be accountable. At the same time, they gave incentives for private investment in higher education. Tax breaks and land grants were offered to those who wanted to build universities and colleges. Programs were started to make private education more accessible, so the benefits of privatization weren't just for a few rich people. This journey through history shows the changing relationship between public and private involvement in education in Pakistan. From the idealistic nationalization policies in the 1970s to the more practical shift towards privatization later on, the country has been trying to find the right balance to provide good education for everyone. Privatization in Pakistan has been a topic of discussion and implementation over several decades. The country has undergone various phases of privatization, influenced by economic conditions, political considerations, and international financial institutions' recommendations. Here are some key points related to privatization policies in Pakistan: Privatization efforts in Pakistan date back to the late 1980s and early 1990s when the government initiated a series of economic reforms, including the privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The privatization program gained momentum in the late 1990s under the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The primary objectives of privatization in Pakistan have included improving the efficiency and performance of SOEs, reducing the fiscal burden on the government, attracting private investment, and promoting economic growth. Various methods have been employed for privatization, including the sale of shares to the private sector, strategic partnerships, and the

transfer of management control to private entities. Different sectors have been targeted for privatization, including telecommunications, banking, energy, and manufacturing. The goal has been to involve the private sector in industries traditionally dominated by state-owned entities. Privatization in Pakistan has faced challenges and controversies, including concerns about transparency, fairness, and the impact on workers. There have been instances of legal battles and public opposition to certain privatization efforts. The privatization program in Pakistan has often been supported by international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, as part of broader economic reform packages. As of my last update, the privatization landscape in Pakistan was dynamic, with new initiatives being considered and implemented by different governments. It's advisable to check the latest sources for information on any developments that may have occurred since then. It's important to note that the effectiveness of privatization can depend on various factors, including the regulatory framework, the quality of oversight, and the specific context of the education system. Here are some potential advantages: Private institutions are often driven by competition and efficiency in order to attract students and funding. This competitive pressure can lead to cost savings and greater operational efficiency compared to some public institutions that may face bureaucratic challenges. Privatization can foster innovation in education. Private institutions may have the flexibility to implement new teaching methods, curriculum designs, and technologies more rapidly than some public schools, which may be subject to more bureaucratic processes. Private institutions are often more responsive to market demands and consumer preferences. They can adapt quickly to changes in the job market and tailor their programs to meet the specific needs of students and employers. Competition for students can incentivize private institutions to focus on improving the quality of education they provide. This can lead to a greater emphasis on teacher training, curriculum development, and overall educational excellence. Privatization can alleviate some of the financial burden on public budgets. Private funding sources, such as tuition fees, endowments, and philanthropy, can contribute to the funding of educational institutions, reducing the strain on government resources. Privatization can lead to a more diverse range of educational options. Different private institutions may offer specialized programs or unique educational approaches that cater to a variety of student needs and preferences. Private institutions often have more flexibility in hiring and compensation decisions. This can lead to a more merit-based system for selecting educators and administrators, potentially attracting high-quality professionals. Private institutions may experience less bureaucratic red tape compared to some public institutions. This can result in quicker decision-making processes, allowing for timelier implementation of educational initiatives. While privatization in education can bring certain benefits, it also comes with a set of disadvantages. It's important to note that the impact of privatization can vary depending on the context and the specific policies implemented. Here are some commonly cited disadvantages of privatization in education: Privatization may lead to increased inequality in access to education. Private schools often

have tuition fees and additional costs, making quality education unaffordable for low-income families. This can result in a two-tiered education system, where only those with financial means can access better-quality education. Privatization may contribute to social segregation as private schools often cater to specific socio-economic groups. This can lead to a lack of diversity and limit students' exposure to a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. Some critics argue that private educational institutions may prioritize profits over the quality of education. The need to generate revenue and compete in the market may lead to compromises in teaching standards, faculty salaries, and resources. Private schools may be less inclined to enroll students with special needs or those from marginalized communities. This exclusion can exacerbate existing social disparities and limit educational opportunities for vulnerable populations. Private schools may have a more rigid curriculum that focuses on standardized testing to attract students and parents seeking measurable academic success. This can result in a narrowed educational experience, with less emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and holistic development. In a competitive market, private schools may cut costs by offering lower salaries and fewer benefits to teachers. This can lead to teacher exploitation, impacting the quality of education as experienced and qualified educators may be discouraged from working in the private sector. Privatization can sometimes result in a lack of accountability and transparency. Private educational institutions may not be as transparent about their operations, financial status, or academic outcomes compared to public institutions, which are subject to public scrutiny. Private schools may be more focused on short-term goals, such as maintaining enrollment numbers and financial viability, which could compromise long-term educational quality and sustainability. Privatization may lead to a loss of public control over the education system. When education becomes a commodity, decision-making power may shift from the public to private entities, potentially undermining democratic principles in education policy. The privatization of education in Pakistan has been a double-edged sword, bringing transformative innovations alongside persistent challenges. While private schools have emerged as beacons of quality education, the concerns of affordability, equity, and cultural preservation linger. The integration of technology and entrepreneurship education signifies a commitment to future readiness, yet questions of access and societal inclusion remain. As we navigate this evolving landscape, a nuanced approach that balances progress with inclusivity is essential. The narrative of privatization continues, urging stakeholders to forge a path that bridges gaps, preserves cultural identity, and ensures that the promise of quality education reaches every corner of Pakistani society. I thank full to Sir Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer for his invaluable assistance in helping me to write an article. His expertise, guidance and unwavering support throughout the entire process have been instrumental in shaping the article into its final form. His deep knowledge and insightful feedback not only enriched the content but also improved my overall understanding of the subject matter.

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## Briefs

## Qureshi arrested from...

FROM PAGE 01 and Justice Athar Minallah granted him bail after hearing arguments, he said. He warned that he would move the Supreme Court against any "unlawful action" against him. Regarding his bail, Qureshi said that the judge signed his release order (robkar). Then the deputy commissioner issued orders for his arrest under MPO 3 and police detained me. "I accepted his order and went back to my cell [in jail]," he stated. Later, his daughter Meharbano, who was outside the jail to receive her father, quoted him as saying that he knew he would be arrested again. She lamented that police officials mistreated her father while arresting him. She said that her father told him that people were inspired by hearing his and PTI founder's voice and seeing their faces. "People know that injustice is being done in Pakistan at present," she added. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) spokesperson vehemently condemned the draconian manner of re-arrest of PTI Vice Chairman Shah Mehmood Qureshi by Punjab police from Adiala Jail premises by tossing the Supreme Court's (SC) order in the trash, demanding the top court to take notice of such blatant transgressions and ensure his immediate release from unlawful detention.

## SC refuses Imran's...

FROM PAGE 01 On December 21, IHC's two-member bench rejected Khan's request seeking suspension of the trial court's verdict in the aforementioned case. Addressing Khan's lawyer Shahbaz Khosa, Justice Minallah said the matter before the bench was that conviction should be overturned following suspension of sentence in the case. "There is no judicial precedent in the country's history that suspension of sentence led to the annulment of conviction," he remarked. Khosa responded by saying that there were judicial precedents when senior politician Javed Hashmi's sentence was abolished along with the verdict. "The court should see how Judge Humayun Dilawar issued five sentences in a single day," the lawyer added. Acting Chief Justice Sardar Tariq Masood told Khosa that this petition could be dismissed by a two-member bench, asking him if they should do so. "A two-member bench cannot even give you interim relief because there is a division bench decision in the high court," he remarked. Justice Masood said the disqualification petition in the Toshakhana case should be fixed before a three-member bench.

## ECP sets up EMCC

FROM PAGE 01 WhatsApp to 0327-5050610. A helpline at 111-327-000 is established for the convenience of complainants, operating initially from 8 am to 6 pm. Starting mid-January 2024, the center will operate 24/7 until the conclusion of polling day on February 8, and the completion of results. The control center is also equipped with social media and electronic media monitoring facilities. Complainants can be submitted through the fax number 051-9204403.

## India demands handing...

FROM PAGE 01 countries, as India seeks cooperation from Pakistan in bringing individuals involved in cross-border incidents to justice. The extradition process, if initiated, will require collaboration and communication between the relevant authorities in both countries. As the situation unfolds, it remains to be seen how Pakistan will respond to this formal request and whether it will pave the way for increased cooperation in addressing issues related to cross-border security concerns.

## Pakistan falters after dismissing Aust for 318

Australia lost seven wickets for 131 runs on the second morning

## SPORTS DESK

MELBOURNE : Australia were on top after reducing Pakistan to 194-6 at stumps on day two of the second Test in Melbourne on Wednesday. The visitors still trail by 124 runs in the first innings with Mohammad Rizwan (29) and Aamer Jamal (2) out in the middle. Pakistan were 124-1 at one stage but lost quick wickets towards the end of the final session and were pushed on the backfoot. Abdullah Shafique (62) and Shan Masood (54) smashed fifties but couldn't kick on and score a big one. Star batter Babar Azam once again failed to impress and was cleaned up by Pat Cummins, who claimed three wickets, after scoring just one run. Post-lunch session Pakistan reached 68-1 at tea on day two of the second Test against Australia in Melbourne. Opener Abdullah Shafique was unbeaten on 39 but his partner Imam-ul-Haq was dismissed by Nathan Lyon after scoring 10 runs. Captain Shan Masood was not out on 15 at the break. Pakistan are looking to make a comeback in the three-match series after losing the first Test in convincing manner. Australia dismissed for 318



Australia lost seven wickets for 131 runs on the second morning and were all out for 318 in their first innings against Pakistan. Marnus Labuschagne scored his fourth Test fifty of the year but

was dismissed by Aamer Jamal (3-64) soon after for 63. But Pakistan will be unhappy with the number of extras, 52 in total, since it was the second-biggest contributor to Australia's total. Pacers Shaheen

Afridi, Mir Hamza and Hasan Ali claimed two wickets each. Day one Yesterday, Pakistan captain Shan Masood won the toss and opted to bowl in the second Test. Australia reached 187-3 at stumps

on the opening day as the Boxing Day Test was affected by rain which is why only 66 overs were bowled. The hosts are looking to seal the three-Test series after thumping the visitors by 360 runs in Perth, and went into the game with an unchanged side. Pakistan preferred Mohammad Rizwan to keep wicket ahead of Sarfaraz Ahmed while fast bowlers Mir Hamza and Hasan Ali both play after being overlooked for the first Test. They came in for injured pacer Khuram Shahzad and Faheem Ashraf, who was axed. It means an all-pace attack led by the experienced Shaheen Shah Afridi and impressive newcomer Aamer Jamal, with no room for a specialist spinner. Pakistan have performed poorly in Australia, losing 15 Tests on the trot with their last win in 1995. Teams Australia: David Warner, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins (capt), Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Josh Hazlewood Pakistan: Imam-ul-Haq, Abdullah Shafique, Shan Masood (capt), Babar Azam, Saud Shakeel, Mohammad Rizwan, Agha Salman, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Hasan Ali, Mir Hamza, Aamer Jamal.

## PCB rejects Melbourne Stars' request for NOC extension

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Wednesday rejected Melbourne Stars' request for an extension in the No Objection Certificate (NOC) for Haris Rauf and Usama Mir. The PCB has already informed the Stars and Sydney Thunder, who wanted an extension for Zaman Khan, about their decision as all three players are part of the five-match T20I series against New Zealand which will begin on January 12. The Stars submitted a formal request to PCB for an extension in NOC for Haris and Usama till the first week of January. The request was spe-

cifically for their availability until the commencement of the tour to New Zealand. Melbourne Stars were keen on expanding their roster with the inclusion of these players. Had the PCB agreed to Big Bash League (BBL) sides' request, Haris, Usama and Zaman would have potentially participated in three additional matches. The deadline for their availability, as per the initial NOC issued by PCB, was until December 28. According to PCB's NOC regulations, Haris and Usama are expected to play their final BBL match on Thursday against Hobart Hurri-

canes. The PCB granted them permission to participate in five matches in total. The last scheduled match for both players under the current NOC is yet to take place. The Melbourne Stars' request for an NOC extension aimed to allow these players to participate in three more matches, extending their availability until January 12. Similarly, another BBL team, Sydney Thunder, also contacted PCB regarding Zaman Khan, submitting multiple requests for his NOC extension. It is worth mentioning that Melbourne Stars announced earlier that it

has introduced a designated seating area called "Pakistan Bay" on level 1 of the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), an area that promises a unique and thrilling experience for cricket enthusiasts. It also unveiled an exclusive membership called the "House of Rauf" for the BBL 13, which brings an unparalleled fan experience and allows fans to witness the exciting action live from "Pakistan Bay." Melbourne Stars and the MCG aimed to create a memorable experience for fans with the introduction of Pakistan Bay and the House of Rauf membership.—Agencies

## Nadal, Osaka to make comebacks in AO

SYDNEY : Rafael Nadal returns from a "winding, tortuous" injury journey in Brisbane this week, while fellow superstar Novak Djokovic kickstarts his bid for an unprecedented 11th Australian Open title at Perth. It appeared last season that the veterans, with 46 Grand Slam crowns between them, may never share a competitive court again. But the prospect is back in play with Spain's Nadal recovering from hip surgeries that sidelined him for almost a year. He begins what is set to be a farewell season at the Brisbane International from December 31-January 7 alongside Andy Murray and world number eight Holger Rune. Top-ranked Djokovic has opted for the mixed teams United Cup in Perth and Sydney, starting Friday, as have fellow top 10 players Stefanos Tsitsipas, Alexander Zverev and Taylor Fritz. Barring last-minute setbacks, Nadal and Djokovic will then grace the courts of Melbourne Park for the Australian Open from January 14, perhaps for the last time together. Nadal said he expects "nothing" from himself this time around. "I have internalised what I have had throughout my life, which is demand myself the maximum," he said in announcing his return. "Right now what I really hope is to be able not to do that, to accept things are going to be very difficult at the beginning and give myself the necessary time." Since being sidelined, Nadal has been overtaken in the total number of Grand Slam tournaments won by his Serbian arch-rival, who is targeting an all-time record 25th major title in Melbourne.—APP

## SC procedures...

FROM PAGE 01 it does not undermine the Supreme Court, nor does it compromise the independence of the judiciary. In effect it does the very opposite in ensuring the enforcement of Fundamental Rights, strengthening the Judiciary and creating greater independence therein," says the majority judgment, authored by Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa and endorsed by nine other judges. On October 11, the SC by a majority 10 is to 5 declared the Supreme Court (Practice & Procedure Act 2023) as valid. The detailed judgment maintained that, "The Constitution empowers Parliament to legislate with regard to making the practice and procedure of the Supreme Court as it specifically stipulated in Article 191. Parliament enacted the Act which does not in any manner infringe any of the Fundamental Rights, rather facilitates their enforcement. The Act also grants an appeal to one who is aggrieved by a decision of the Supreme Court which is passed in exercise of the original jurisdiction of the Supreme Court under Article 184(3) of the Constitution. "A standard good worldwide practice and the Injunctions of Islam, require that an appeal be provided and when two interpretations are possible, the one that conforms with the Injunctions of Islam shall be adopted.

## PPP kickstarts election...

FROM PAGE 01 polls, in the same manner they had done so in the past. Reiterating his resolve to contest the elections regardless of the challenges, the PPP chairman said that he would face his political opponents in Lahore. "I had told my team that I wanted to contest from Lahore. I'll take the battle to Lahore. Let's see what happens," he said. "Is it Lahore's destiny that the same person will be installed for the fourth time?" Bilawal said while taking a jibe at the PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif, who is eyeing a record-fourth term as the country's prime minister. "Our paths are different with that of those we were in government for 16 months," Bilawal said while referring to the PML-N led Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government of which the PPP was a key part. The PPP chief assured of giving "a befitting response" to their opponents in Lahore in the polls. On the issue of the party's candidacy for the prime ministership, Bilawal said that he would seek the support of PPP and Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) — headed by his father Asif Ali Zardari — for contesting the polls as the party's candidate for the prime ministership. His remarks come as last month, Zardari — during an interview with Hamid Mir on Geo News' programme "Capital Talk" had termed his son as "inexperienced" saying that as the head of the PPP, he had the authority to issue party tickets to candidates, including Bilawal — comments which fuelled rumours of a rift between the father-son duo. Pledging to introduce policies that prioritise people's welfare, Bilawal announced a 10-point agenda, which his party is to enforce if they are voted into power by the people in the upcoming polls. Here's a breakdown of what Bilawal promised his party would do if they came into power.

- Double the salaries within five years
- Free solar energy of 300 units for the poor; every district to have green energy parks
- Education for all — rolling out projects for better education
- Free health for all across Pakistan
- Three million houses for flood affectees and the poor
- Expand BISP's scope; introducing more welfare schemes
- BSIP-like programme for farmers and 'Hari Card'
- Enhanced support for labourers through Benazir Mazdoor Card
- 'Youth Card' for unemployed youth and 'Youth Markaz'
- 'Bhook Mitao Programme'

## Yousuf shares words of wisdom for Babar

ISLAMABAD : Pakistan's middle-order batter Babar Azam continued his struggle with the bat during the second Test against Australia at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) on Wednesday. Azam was dismissed by Pat Cummins after scoring just one run as the right-handed batter misjudged the ball and ended up getting bowled. Meanwhile, former captain Mohammad Yousuf has shared words of wisdom for the 29-year-old. "Be strong now because things will get better, it might be stormy now, but it can't rain forever," he posted on X, formerly Twitter. It must be noted that Babar is not having a great year, particularly in red-ball cricket as he has now gone eight innings without scoring a Test fifty in 2023. It happened for the first time since his debut that Azam failed to bag a single half-century in a calendar year. He will have one more chance to deliver for his side this year. Pakistan played a total of five Test matches this year, one of which is still underway. Their first red-ball encounter of this year was against New Zealand which ended up in a draw. Azam was Pakistan's skipper during that time and he managed to score 24 and 27 across two innings. In July 2023, Pakistan travelled to Sri Lanka to play a two-match series which they won, but Azam continued to fail with the bat. He scored 13 and 24 in the first Test, meanwhile, during the second Test, Pakistan only played one innings in which Babar contributed 39 runs. During the current tour of Australia, Babar, once again, failed to deliver for his side as during the first Test, he amassed 21 and 14 runs.—DNA

## Cristiano Ronaldo becomes top scorer of 2023

## DNA

RIYADH : Cristiano Ronaldo became the top scorer of 2023 as he netted his 53rd strike of the year during the match between Al-Nassr and Al-Ittihad in the Saudi Pro League. Ronaldo, who is turning 39 in a month, proved once again that age is just a number as he has now scored more goals in the year than the likes of Harry Kane, Kylian Mbappe and Erling Haaland. After a disastrous 2022 where Ronaldo only managed to bag 16 goals as he had trouble finding consistent game time with Manchester United because he was not greatly favoured by their coach Erik Ten Hag, the five-time Ballon d'Or



winner made an astounding comeback, something he is known for, and went all the way to become the top scorer of 2023. Cristiano Ronaldo in 2023: - 58 matches - 53 goals - 15 assists Al-Nassr managed to defeat Al-Ittihad

final matches for 2023 while Ronaldo will play his last game of the year on December 30 against Al-Taawoun. On the other hand, Erling Haaland is likely to play two games in the year as Manchester City are scheduled to take on Everton on Wednesday and Sheffield United on December 30. Top scorers for club and country in 2023: Cristiano Ronaldo - 53 goals Harry Kane - 52 goals Kylian Mbappe - 52 goals Erling Haaland - 50 goals It is worth noting that Ronaldo has played for some of the biggest clubs in the world like Manchester United, Real Madrid, and Juventus where he created history and became a legend in little to no time.

## BD register historic win over NZ in first T20I

Litton Das top-scored for the visitors by contributing 42 runs

## OUR CORRESPONDENTS

DAHKA : Bangladesh secured a historic five-wicket victory over New Zealand in the first match of the three-match T20I series at McLean Park, Napier on Wednesday. This was Bangladesh's inaugural T20I win on New Zealand soil, coming shortly after their first away one-day international victory against the Black Caps at the same venue. New Zealand, asked to bat by Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, faced early setbacks, losing three wickets and finishing at 134 for nine in 20 overs. Despite the Black Caps bowlers initially troubling Bangladesh, veteran Litton Das, with partners Soumya Sarkar and Towhid Hridoy, guided Bangladesh to 96-4 after 13 overs. Facing troubles at 97-5, Bangladesh lost quick wickets, but Das, finishing on 42 not out, survived close calls. Umpire decisions and a boundary-catch accident allowed Bangladesh to overcome hurdles. Mahedi Hasan, 19 not out, partnered with Das to secure victory with eight balls to spare. Batting first, Despite Daryl Mitchell's brief resistance with consecutive fours, the Black Caps found themselves struggling at 20-4. Skipper Mitchell Santner and James Neesham added 41 runs, but Sarkar's catches disrupted the partnership. Neesham fell just

short of a half-century, and Southee was caught on eight. Adam Milne's late six took the hosts to 134, but Bangladesh's batters steadily chipped away at the target. The victory showcased Bangladesh's resilience and determination against a higher-ranked

opponent. In the second and third T20Is, both scheduled at Mount Maunganui on Friday and Sunday respectively, Bangladesh, ranked ninth, aim to continue their impressive performance against third-ranked New Zealand to remain on a high note during

their preparations for the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 which will begin in June 2024. Playing XIs New Zealand: Tim Seifert (wk), Finn Allen, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Mark Chapman, James Neesham, Mitchell Santner (c), Adam Milne, Tim Southee, Ish

Sodhi, Ben Sears Bangladesh: Soumya Sarkar, Litton Das (wk), Najmul Hossain Shanto (c), Rony Talukdar, Towhid Hridoy, Afif Hossain, Mahedi Hasan, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Shoriful Islam, Rishad Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman.



## Briefs

## Russia warns Japan against supplying patriot systems

MOSCOW : A move by Japan to provide Patriot air defence systems to Ukraine will have "grave consequences" for Russia-Japan ties, Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Wednesday. Relations between Moscow and Tokyo, already difficult, have deteriorated sharply since Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in Feb. 2022. Japan has joined its Western allies in imposing sweeping economic sanctions on Russia. Last week, Japan said it would prepare to ship Patriot air defence missiles to the United States after revising its arms export guidelines, in Tokyo's first major overhaul of such export curbs in nine years. Although Japan's new export controls still prevent it from shipping weapons to countries that are at war, it may indirectly benefit Ukraine in its war with Russia as it gives the United States extra capacity to provide military aid to Kyiv. "The Japanese side loses control over the weapons with which Washington can now do whatever it wants," Zakharova told a weekly briefing. "It cannot be ruled out that under an already tested scheme Patriot missiles will end up in Ukraine." Such a scenario would be "interpreted as unambiguously hostile actions against Russia and will lead to grave consequences for Japan in the context of bilateral relations", she said.—Agencies

## 9 dead as wild weather batters Australia

SYDNEY : At least nine people were killed as wild weather battered the eastern Australian states of Queensland and Victoria on Wednesday. Three men, aged 48, 59 and 69, were killed after a boat with 11 people on board capsized in rough weather in Moreton Bay off the south Queensland coast on Tuesday, police said. Ambulances took the eight survivors to a hospital in stable condition. The men were aboard the 12-meter (39-foot) pleasure craft on an annual fishing trip, The Courier Mail newspaper reported. Queensland Police Acting Chief Superintendent Andrew Pilotto said those who were rescued were lucky to survive. "The storm was still raging when they were rescued," Pilotto said. "It would have been very difficult to survive in those conditions anywhere." A 59-year-old woman was killed by a falling tree in the Queensland city of Gold Coast on Monday night. The body of a 9-year-old girl was found Tuesday in the neighboring city of Brisbane hours after she disappeared in a flooded stormwater drain.—APP

## N.Korea declares 2023 a year of great turn

Ruling Workers' Party holds key annual meeting to review work done, and policies, budget for new year

## NEWS DESK

PYONGYANG : Buoyed by the successful launch of a reconnaissance satellite and at least five intercontinental missiles, North Korea has described the outgoing year as one of "great turn and great change." In a report to the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, which began a key meeting, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said 2023 was a "year of great turn and great change both in name and reality." "Democratic People's Republic of Korea left a great trace in the glorious course of development in the efforts to improve the national power and enhance the prestige of the country," Pyongyang-based Korea Central News Agency quoted the report tabled by Kim during the meeting. Democratic People's Re-

public of Korea is North Korea's official name. During the outgoing year, Pyongyang was successful in its third attempt to send a military satellite into space, which North Korea claimed sent back pictures of various US installations, including military bases and the White House. North Korea, one of the most sanctioned countries due to its nuclear program, also launched several missiles in the waters surrounding the Korean Peninsula in what Pyongyang called a response to "provocations" by the US, South Korea, and Japan, which have held regular joint military drills in the region. "The year 2023... has recorded heroic annual to be immortal in the history of the country, and fully proved that the dignity of a genuine power and the fame of a strong one are



on the orbit of independence, self-sustenance and self-defense advancing unyieldingly," said the meeting. The meeting also discussed the implementation of the "five-point Party-building line in the new era,

the core and innovative system and methods of Party work." It hailed the "attainment" of the main goals of the party's five-year plan in the "development of national defense, new strategic weapons," and ad-

vancement in national defense capabilities while North Korea also possessed "space reconnaissance assets." The meeting said North Korea achieved "12 major goals" in agriculture amid "a rare harvest." Besides reviewing the outgoing year's work, including the budget, the meeting this week will discuss the "orientation of struggle and the draft state budget" for the next year. Separately, South Korea on Wednesday sanctioned eight North Korean individuals for "arms trade and cyber activities banned under international sanctions." Among those sanctioned is Ri Chang-ho, the chief of the North's spy agency who also heads the Reconnaissance General Bureau of North Korea, According to Media reporter.

## Turkiye aims to boost trade with Uzbekistan

ANKARA : Turkiye seeks to improve trade relations with Uzbekistan to higher levels through the efforts of its private sector, Vice President Cevdet Ylmaz said on Tuesday while addressing the forum in the capital, Ankara. "Turkiye ranks third among the countries where Uzbekistan exports the most and fifth in imports. We will move these ranks to higher levels with the efforts of our private sector," Ylmaz said in an address to the Turkiye-Uzbekistan Business Forum. He said the forum convenes the two countries' business world and serves as a platform where businesspeople can engage in new connections. Ylmaz also said Turkiye and Uzbekistan elevated bilateral relations to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership through joint efforts. Turkiye's bilateral trade with Uzbekistan reached \$3.5 billion (TL 108.2 billion) in 2022, and its investments in Uzbekistan amounted to \$1.5 billion with over 1,700 Turkish companies operating in various parts of Uzbekistan, according to the vice president.—DNA

## DR Congo opposition defies election protest ban

KINSHASA : Opposition candidates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's presidential election in which early results show the incumbent with a large lead, plan to march in the capital on Wednesday, despite authorities banning the protest. Five opposition presidential candidates informed the governor of Kinshasa in a letter published on Saturday of their intention to organise the march. Afterwards, Martin Fayulu, one of the main challengers to President Felix Tshisekedi in the December 20 election, had said the opposition candidates who had called the joint demonstration over alleged election.—APP



ISLAMABAD: A view of the under construction pipe line of the Rawal Interchange for evacuation rainy water after the several month of the completion of under pass, which needs the investigation by high authorities to find out the suspect of wasting tax spares money of the nation.—ONLINE

## Russia offers assistance for Azerbaijan-Armenia peace treaty

MOSCOW : Russia is ready to help Azerbaijan and Armenia in finalizing their work on a peace treaty, the Kremlin's spokesman said in an interview. "In fact, both sides declared on numerous recent occasions their readiness to complete the effort, to finalize the work on the peace treaty. Russia is ready to assist them," Dmitry Peskov told the Izvestia television channel. Noting that Russia was not forcing anyone to accept its mediation services, Peskov said it fully realizes the importance of completing work on the peace treaty. "It is very important for us that our two partners and allies - not only within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States, but also within the framework of our high-level bilateral relations - sign this treaty as soon as possible," he said. Peskov added that the signing of the peace treaty will bring about an atmosphere of peace, stability and predictability" in the Caucasus, which is of great importance for Russia. Relations between the two former Soviet republics have been tense since 1991, when the Armenian military occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, and seven adjacent regions. Most of the territory was liberated by Azerbaijan during a war in the fall of 2020 which ended after a Russian-brokered peace agreement and also opened the door to normalization.—DNA

## Sigrid named UN humanitarian coordinator for Gaza

## WEB DESK

WASHINGTON : UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced Tuesday the appointment of Sigrid Kaag as senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza. "In this role, she will facilitate, coordinate, monitor, and verify humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza," the UN said in a statement. The former Dutch minister will also establish a UN mechanism to accelerate humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza through states that are not party to the conflict. Kaag is expected to begin Jan. 8, said the statement. The assignment comes as part of a Security Council resolution that was adopted last week to step up humanitarian aid to the Palestinian enclave. The Council passed the resolution Friday that calls for "urgent steps" to immediately allow "safe, unin-



dered, and expanded" humanitarian access to Gaza amid the ongoing Israeli offensive on the territory. It demands parties to the conflict allow and facilitate the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Strip, including border crossings, to ensure humanitarian personnel and assistance reach the civilian population in need. ECP clarifies that it doesn't upload electoral rolls on website in response to a cross-border attack by Hamas on Oct. 7, Israel launched air and ground attacks on the coastal terri-

tory and has since killed at least 20,915 people, most being women and children. The onslaught has left Gaza in ruins, with 60% of the enclave's infrastructure damaged or destroyed and nearly 2 million residents displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water and medicine. Tel Aviv vowed to destroy the Palestinian resistance group and ensure the release of all hostages taken in the October attack. Some of the hostages were released after a temporary truce in November in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

## Ukraine faces challenges in 2024 amid setbacks

A failed counteroffensive, declining aid and shifting public sentiments are leaving Kyiv less optimistic about the direction of the war in the new year

## FOREIGN DESK

KYIV : Whenever Svitlana Matvienko hears the wailing of air raid sirens, she goes down to the nearby suburban shopping mall. There, a barista she's on a first-name basis with gets her a large latte, and Matvienko clacks away on her tiny silver laptop, sitting next to several dozen others waiting out the air raid. "I'm like a little Pavlov dog, but the sirens make me drool for coffee," the 52-year-old freelance marketing expert told Media person with a sense of self-deprecating humour that helps Ukrainians cope with the war. The crowd around her is minuscule in comparison with last year, when hundreds of people thronged the same Metrograd mall, often staying for the night with their weeping children and squealing pets. To Matvienko, the December 15 air raid was yet another multimillion-dollar exercise in the futility of Russia's war effort, with all the cruise missiles and kamikaze drones shot down and no casualties reported. And when asked about what awaits her and all of Ukraine in 2024, the ginger-haired,

petite mother of two pointed up, as if her manicured forefinger could pierce the ceiling towards the grey sky and howling sirens, and said: "A lot more of this." This year has been uneasy and somewhat disappointing to many Ukrainians. The long-awaited counteroffensive in eastern and southern regions stalled as Russian bombardment of urban centres resumed to sow panic and destroy power stations and central heating facilities. "Because the summer counteroffensive lacked notable results, Ukrainians got back to feeling danger and threat that seemed to have subdued as they were getting used to the ongoing war," Svitlana Chumikhina, vice president of the Association of Political Psychologists, a group in Kyiv, told Media reporters. "We need to adapt to the war again, to correct expectations and life strategies taking into account more realistic estimates," she said. The counteroffensive's fiasco seems sobering in comparison with last year's emotional rollercoaster, when Russian troops horrified Ukraine by advancing from three directions - only to withdraw from around Kyiv

and northern regions and to suffer a string of humiliating defeats in the east and south. This winter, the tables seem to have turned. "Now is the time to switch to defence" along the crescent-shaped front line that traverses eastern and southern Ukraine for more than 1,000km (600 miles), says Kyiv-based analyst Igar Tyshkevich. "For the winter campaign, Ukraine's logic is to hold the front. Hold the Black Sea, keep the ports open, work the political field to guarantee the reception of military aid as the spring approaches." Kyiv's manpower and arsenals are too depleted to go on the offensive next year, according to some top Ukrainian military experts. "We don't have the resources for next year's operation," Lieutenant General Ihor Romanenko, the former deputy chief of the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, told Media reporters. Polls show that the number of Ukrainians who believe that the war should go on until Ukraine regains all lost territories, including the Crimean peninsula that Russia annexed in 2014, is going down, albeit insignificantly.

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## Briefs

### OIC condemns Israeli war crimes

DNA

JEDDAH: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has strongly condemned the continued Israeli military aggression, genocide, forcible displacement, and destruction perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people, which today 27 December 2023 has claimed the lives of 6 persons in Tulkarm in the West Bank. This is in addition to hundreds who have been injured, mostly women and children, in all parts of the Gaza Strip, and the continued targeting of facilities and workers in the health, humanitarian, and media sectors and United Nations staff, in flagrant violation of the recent resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly. The OIC also condemned the Israeli occupation for continuing to deprive the Palestinian civilian population of food, medicine, water, medical care, protection, and other basic services. It renewed its demand to the international community to assume its responsibility towards forcing a stop to the Israeli military aggression, ensuring delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip in a sufficient and sustainable manner, counter attempts at forcible expulsion of Palestinian civilians, and providing protection for the Palestinian people, in implementation of relevant United Nations resolution.

### Australia: Child among 10 killed in storms

DNA

CANBERRA: At least 10 people, including a nine-year-old girl, have died in eastern Australia during severe thunderstorms on Christmas and Boxing Day. Most of the deaths were in the state of Queensland, where tens of thousands of people are still without power. Victoria and New South Wales were also hit by widespread flooding and destructive winds. Further thunderstorms have been forecast but conditions are expected to improve over the next day. The winds were so strong in places, they tore roofs off buildings, felled trees and ripped concrete-based electricity poles from the ground. "It's the first time we've ever had a concrete pole destroyed by a storm, that's pretty significant. That's unprecedented," said Queensland Premier Steven Miles. Residents in parts of New South Wales and South Australia were shocked to find hailstones the size of golf balls blanketing their lawns in summer. "I haven't seen anything like this in probably the 20 years I've lived in the town," a resident of Melrose in South Australia told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

### Khawaja Asif slaps Rs1bn defamation notice on Usman Dar

DNA

SIALKOT: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) central leader Khawaja Asif has sent a Rs1 billion defamation notice to former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Usman Dar and his mother. The notice stated that Dar and his mother levelled false allegations to defame Asif. The defamation notice called on Dar and his mother, Rehana Dar, to pay Rs1 billion in damages within 14 days. Both politicians hail from Sialkot and they contested the 2018 elections from the National Assembly's NA-73 constituency — and Asif defeated Dar. After a raid on Dar's house earlier in the month, Rehana accused Asif of orchestrating the police action and being manhandled by the raiding party. In a video statement, Dar's mother said that her house was broken into by people who manhandled her, pulled her hair, and tore her shirt.

# IHC tells police to not treat Baloch protesters as 'enemies'

## Orders police to present 34 arrested protesters in identification parade, submit report on female protesters' arrest

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) asked the federal capital's police on Wednesday to not treat the Baloch protesters as "enemies". Justice Miangul Hasan Aurangzeb's remarks came as he heard a petition filed last week challenging the protesters' arrests and denying them the right to protest in Islamabad. The hearing was attended by the senior superintendent of police (SSP) operations, the advocate general (AG) Islamabad and the lawyer representing the organisers of the protest, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC). Expressing his indignation, Justice Aurangzeb asked the SSP operations whether the order to treat the protesters 'harshly' was given by him. "You make some people sit in your lap while you treat others like this", the judge remarked as he re-

ferred to the mass arrests the protesters were subjected to on reaching Islamabad on foot from Kech, in Balochistan. "They have come [here]. Let them sit". During the hearing, the petitioner's counsel stated that 34 Baloch protesters were still in custody who were still to be presented in an identification parade. He added that an individual named Zaheer, named in the first information report (FIR) registered at the Kohsar police station, is missing. At this, the SSP informed that Zaheer was in jail and could not be released due to non-payment of bail money. Meanwhile, the AG Islamabad maintained that it was "easy to blame the government, but not one Baloch person from among the protesters is missing". "A larger number of protesters than these have come here [Islamabad] before. You have pampered them. What did they [Baloch protesters] do?" the judge asked the

SSP. The petitioner's lawyer pleaded that the court demand a report from the capital's police explaining the arrest of the more than 50 women protesters. "There is a lot that I would like to say, but I cannot," Justice Aurangzeb remarked. He then ordered the police to conduct an identification parade of the 34 arrested Baloch protesters by today, and also instructed the Islamabad Police to submit a report explaining the arrest of the female protesters. The IHC adjourned the hearing of the case till December 29. Authorities claim to have released all Baloch protesters who arrived in Islamabad last week to highlight the issue of missing persons but were rounded up in a crackdown. However, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) — the protest organizers — disputes this, asserting that Islamabad Police have failed to release all detained protesters despite the three-day deadline's expiration.

The BYC announced that people in Balochistan will stage demonstrations and strikes starting today (Wednesday) to protest against authorities' highhandedness. "We doubt the government's sincerity as its negotiation team, assigned by the premier for talks, has not reached out to us in the last two days," stated a protest leader. Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Murtaza Solangi, part of the PM's committee, affirmed that the BYC march participants were released by court after due legal procedures. "We await the protesters' demands to proceed with negotiations. Once these demands are presented, we anticipate further discussions," he stated. Gul Zadi, a female participant in the march, voiced dissatisfaction with the government's lack of commitment to meeting the protesters' demands and missing the deadline. Consequently, she said, the BYC is expanding the protest's scope.

## Iraqi resistance targets US military bases

DNA

BAGHDAD: Iraqi resistance fighters have launched two separate attacks against US military bases in western Iraq and neighboring Syria over Washington's support for the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip. A rocket attack targeted a US military base in Iraq's western province of Anbar early on Wednesday, the Dubai-based and Saudi-owned al-Hadath television news network reported. The report said three powerful blasts were heard at the US military facility. The consequences of the attack are unknown at this point. Earlier, the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of anti-terror fighters, claimed responsibility for the drone strike against the US-run al-Shaddadi base in Syria's northeastern province of Hasakah. In a statement published on its Telegram channel, the group noted that the drone strike was carried out in retaliation for US support of Israel's bloody war against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. There were no immediate reports about the extent of damage at the military facility, or possible casualties. The United States, Israel's biggest ally, has provided the regime with arms and ammunition since the initiation of the Gaza war.

## Delhi: Dense fog causes travel chaos

DNA

NEW DELHI: Extreme cold and dense fog have caused travel chaos in India's capital Delhi and other parts of northern India. More than 100 flights and 25 trains in the city have been delayed due to poor visibility. The city witnessed one of the foggiest days of the season so far, with visibility dropping to below 50 metres on Wednesday. A thick blanket of mist in the morning brought traffic to a crawl and also led to accidents in some parts. Accidents have been reported from other parts of north India as well. In the neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, multiple vehicles collided on a prominent expressway on Wednesday morning as a dense fog swept through the state.



PARIS: Pakistan Ambassador to France Asim Iftikhar hosted a Christmas party which was attended by a large number of French friends & families, Pakistani Christian community, diplomats & people from all walks of life. — DNA

## Objections raised at nominations of Maryam, Bilawal, Imran

DNA

ISLAMABAD: As the nation awaits polling for their favourite leader in the upcoming general elections, objections have been raised on the nomination papers of three of the most popular political leaders: Maryam Nawaz of the PML-N, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari of the PPP and Imran Khan of the PTI. An objection has been raised to Bilawal's nomination

for the National Assembly's NA-127 seat, with the complainant appealing to the returning officer that one person cannot be a member of two parties at the same time.

In the petition filed by a citizen, Muhammad Ayaz, it has been stated that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has displayed his affiliation with the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians in his nomination papers. The Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan People's Party Parliamentarians are separate

political parties. The symbol of PPP-P is an arrow, while that of the PPP is a sword. Bilawal is the chairman of the PPP and Asif Zardari is the president of PPP-P. According to the Elections Act 2017, one person can be a member of only one party at a time. His nomination was against the Elections Act and the returning officer should act according to the law, the application stated. Meanwhile, objections have also been filed over the nomination of PML-N chief organiser Maryam Nawaz from the PP-80 constituency of Sargodha district's Shahpur area. The petitioner says Maryam is a convict and her nomination papers bear fake signatures. The petitioner says that, as a convict, Maryam does not meet the requirements of articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution. He added that the PML-N leader has also not declared her assets. The objections were submitted in writing by local lawyers to the Sargodha returning officer. On the other hand, Imran Khan's nomination from Lahore's NA-122 constituency has also been challenged. Former PML-N MPA Mian Naseer has raised objections, saying the former PTI chairman was ineligible to contest the election.



## IRGC to Israel: Await our revenge for commander's assassination

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: The spokesman of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran will respond appropriately to the Israeli regime over the assassination of a senior military advisor in Syria, vowing to take revenge for the terrorist attack in different times and places. Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif made the remarks at a news conference on Wednesday, after senior IRGC commander, SeyyedRazi Mousavi was killed in an Israeli airstrike in the Sayyeda Zeinab neighborhood of the Syrian capital of Damascus. "Definitely, with the martyrdom of Mousavi, there will be no disruption in our missions to confront the Zionist regime," the IRGC's spokesman said. He noted that the assassination of Mousavi is a continuation of the violation of international laws by the Israeli regime, calling on the international community to stop the crimes of the occupying regime which endanger international peace and security. SeyyedRazi Mousavi was martyred by the Israeli regime on Monday, while on an advisory mission in Syria. He was one of the companions of Iran's top anti-terror commander, General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the US in Iraq four years ago. Sharif further noted that the martyrdom of Mousavi is a great loss but stressed that Iran will continue the path of resistance with strength. The IRGC's spokesman also noted that one of the main reasons that the Israeli regime assassinated Mousavi at this point was due to its failure on October 7, when Palestinian resistance movements launched the

surprise attack, dubbed Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, into the occupied territories. He also said Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the Israel regime was one of the acts of revenge for the assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani, warning that these acts of revenge will continue. The Israeli regime has for years targeted what it calls Iran-linked positions in Syria. Sharif said Mousavi had a good experience in equipping the resistance and confronting Israelis, adding that he played a vital role along with the resistance front in the fight against the Daesh Takfirist terrorist group in Syria.

The IRGC's spokesman continued that Iran's response to the assassination of Mousavi will be a combination of direct action and the resistance front, pointing out that the number of Israel's casualties following Operation Al-Aqsa Storm is a sign of the regime's decline. Israel is under immense pressure, he said, which is the reason why the occupying regime is seeking to expand the scope of the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip and attack other countries as well. Sharif noted that Iran will continue to confront the Israeli regime as it did after the assassination of its nuclear scientists. Iran maintains an advisory mission in Syria at the request of Damascus with the aim of helping the war-torn Arab country get rid of the foreign-backed militants who have been fighting the democratically-elected Syrian government since 2011. Earlier in December, Israel killed two IRGC military advisors — Mohammad Ali AteeShoorcheh and PanahTaqzadeh — in an attack in Syria. The IRGC announced in a statement that the two officers were martyred against the backdrop of the relentless savagery of the "fake and child-killing" Israeli regime in Gaza.

## ECP issues SOPs for election observers

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday issued the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the journalists and commentators who would cover the general elections scheduled to be held on February 8, 2024. According to the guidelines issued by the ECP, journalists as well as commentators should be possessing Accreditation Cards for the purpose. Media personnel can apply for these cards, say the rules. Similarly, members of non-governmental organisations and civil society can also submit their applications. The election commission said in its statement that it would maximum facilities for the coverage of elections. In this connection, the ECP has also sent a letter to all returning officers (ROs). Following is the text of ECP's circular: The Election Commission of Pakistan has approved SOPs for issuance of accreditation cards to the election observers/media (SOPs enclosed). The guidelines as per SOPs for DROs being Issuing Authority of the accreditation cards for election observers at District level are as under: Accreditation Cards to the domestic observers and domestic media will be issued by the District Returning Officers only for all the constituencies in their respective districts. National/local media, all the media persons/cameramen shall apply for Accreditation Cards on the letter head through relevant Press Information Department (PID)/Information Department/Directorate General Public Relations (DGPR), District Press Information offices as where available at Provincial/District level. After authenticating all the media persons who have applied for accreditation, the respective PID shall send the verified cases to the respective Issuing Authority i.e. District Returning Officers. This way, only verified media personnel/journalist are able to cover the Elections. The local NGOs and civil society organizations shall apply for Accreditation Cards on the letter head of their organization (attaching a verified consolidated list containing names, parentage, address, gender, NIC number, contact number and email, two photos, NIC copy of each observer as well as area wise deployment of these observers) to the concerned Issuing Authority i.e. District Returning Officer and the concerned NGO shall also submit an affidavit provided which takes the responsibility of the conduct of their observers on the polling day. The DROs are to follow guidelines outlined in SOPs and to ensure implementation on Code of Conduct for national observers and national media approved by Commission in their respective domain.

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