



Islamabad POST

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Detailed News On Page-07

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Afridi discards injury concerns about Shaheen

Detailed News On Page-06



Does caretaker govt want to derail elections

'Terrible system' prevailing under caretaker govt, observes IHC judge

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Friday reprimanded the caretaker government, stating that a "terrible system" is prevailing in the country and questioned its neutrality. "A terrible system is prevailing under the caretaker set-up that even consultation for elections is not allowed," Justice Mian-gul Hassan Aurangzeb remarked, raising doubts over the government's intentions towards the conduct of the upcoming polls slated for February 8. "Does the caretaker government want to derail the elections?" he asked. The judge's query came during the hearing of a plea filed by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gauhar Khan and other lawyers, seeking to meet the party's founder Imran Khan in jail. The lawyers argued that the legal team wanted to consult Khan over the decision to distribute 700 party tickets, as polls approach. Taking notice of the plea, the judge granted them permission to meet Khan for consultations ahead of the polls next year, subsequently disposing of the petition. The court, in its order, mentioned that the PTI founder should be allowed to meet the party's chairman under the supervision of Adiala jail superintendent. "Allowing consultation for elections is a fundamental right," the court maintained, adding that the party possesses the right to consult the founder over tickets. He also asked the caretaker government to remain neutral in the elections. The court added that the opposition to the PTI founder and chairman's consultation raises questions over the neutrality of government.



ECP moves top court against PHC ruling

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the Peshawar High Court's (PHC) ruling suspending its order about the appointment of a returning officer (RO) for a provincial assembly constituency. Irfanullah was appointed RO for a Khyber Pakhtunkhwa constituency - PK-91 Kohat II. Advocate Afnan Karim Kundi filed the appeal on behalf of the electoral body under Article 185(3) of the Constitution against a verdict given by the PHC on December 27. The complainants submitted to the PHC the December 25 notification, whereby the Election Commission substituted the returning officer for the KP constituency after which the court suspended the aforesaid notification while issuing notice to the ECP. In its appeal, the ECP questioned whether the impugned order of the high court amounted to interfering with the constitutional and statutory public duties of the ECP concerning the appointment of ROs under Article 218(3), read with Section 51 of the Elections Act 2017, and as such no interim relief could be granted by the way of suspension of the ECP notification dated December 25, 2023, substituting the RO. Whether the jurisdiction of

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KARACHI: MQM prominent leaders Raza Haroon and Advocate Anis met with Asif Ali Zardari and announced to join PPP. (Story on Back Page). - DNA

India request Pakistan to extradite Hafiz Saeed

DNA

NEW DELHI: India has formally requested Pakistan to extradite Hafiz Saeed, suspected of involvement in the 2008 attacks on Mumbai, for trial in India, foreign ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi told reporters in a briefing on Friday. "We have conveyed a request along with relevant supporting documents to the government of Pakistan," Bagchi told reporters. Dawn.com has reached out to the Foreign Office (FO) for comment on the matter. Questioned about the extradition request during her weekly press briefing on Thursday,

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Faizabad sit-in inquiry commission summons Faiz Hameed

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A Commission of Inquiry (CoI) has summoned former lieutenant general (rtd) Faiz Hameed next week to record his statement in Faizabad Dharna Inquiry Commission, via the Ministry of Defence. Sources further claimed that Faiz Hameed has been asked to record his statement before the commission next week. "Faiz Hameed has been summoned by the Faizabad Dharna Commission for the second time," sources said. Earlier, a Supreme Court of Pakistan (SCP) five-member judge Friday issued

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Shehbaz calls for collective efforts to end Karachi's woes

PML-N takes GDA along to form four-party alliance against PPP in Sindh

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday called for teamwork and collective efforts to end the perils plaguing Karachi, highlighting that the upcoming elections would determine the city's fate. The PML-N president arrived in Karachi on Thursday evening to meet MQM-P leaders to finalise a deal on an electoral alliance between the two parties. In November, the parties had announced their decision to jointly contest the upcoming polls in Sindh and strengthen local governments nationwide through constitutional cover. In the run-up to polls, the PML-N has set its sights on the port city. Last week, Shehbaz filed his nomination papers from Karachi National Assembly constituency NA-242 (Baldia Town) - the same seat that he had contested in the 2018 elections. However, that time around, he had lost to then-PTI leader Faisal Vawda in NA-249, which

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Nawaz returned to country to get cases against him 'withdrawn'

DNA

MARDAN: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Parliamentarians Chairman Pervez Khattak asserted on Friday that former prime minister Nawaz Sharif had returned to the country to get the cases against him "withdrawn." Addressing the workers' convention in Mardan, the former Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) chief minister took a swipe at Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif. "Shehbaz Sharif had done nothing for the sake of

Continued on Page 06

Briefs

RO rejects Murad's nomination papers

DNA

SWAT: The Returning Officer (RO) for NA-4 on Friday rejected the nomination papers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf PTI leader Murad Saeed as the candidate was on absconder's list. Swat: PTI leader Murad Saeed has been absconding since the May 9 incidents. The PTI lawyer said he has completed all the documents required by the Election Commission of Pakistan and announced to appeal against the verdict in Peshawar High Court (PHC).

Don't hope too much, says Fazl

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI) chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman has said there should not be too much hope if elections are held in the current circumstances. In an informal talk, Fazlur Rahman listed his party feats for democracy and national cohesion. Even after many movements including MRD, it seems that democracy has become weak, he said. The JUI chief said: "We politicians have our weaknesses. We too committed mistakes. We are too responsible for weak democracy." To a question, he said if an institution wants to be powerful, it is an unconstitutional desire. He stressed: "Politicians talk about democracy, which is constitutional. The problem is that we have made laws according to the dictates from outside."

NEWS DESK

Israeli genocidal war continues in Gaza

"According to Hamas commanders, only 14% of the resistance capacity has been damaged so far," the foreign minister said

Solidarity with Gaza

Pakistan bans New Year's celebrations

"Nation is in sad state," PM says, calling on Pakistanis to "show solidarity with oppressed Palestinians"

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar announced that all celebrations related to the New Year are banned across the country as the South Asian nation stands in solidarity with Palestinians who have been facing the worst Israeli brutality since October 7. Pakistan has time and again raised its voice for the oppressed Palestinians at international forums and condemned Israel's genocide,

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PTI alleges conspiracies being hatched to snatch 'bat' symbol

PHC verdict was criticised by several political leaders, including JUI-F's Maulana Fazlur Rehman and PML-N President Shehbaz

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The PTI on Friday alleged that conspiracies were being hatched to snatch its iconic electoral symbol "bat" and exclude the party from the February 8 general elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the PTI have been in "bat blood" over the past few days. The controversy stems from the electoral watchdog's earlier decision to strip PTI of its symbol following the annulment of its intra-party elections for not complying with the Elections Act and the party's own constitution. Earlier this week, the Peshawar High Court suspended the commission's order and directed it to publish the certificate of PTI's intra-party polls on its website "keeping in view the urgency, that a political party has been denied of its symbol, meaning thereby that aspirants from the general public who were willing to vote for the petitioners' party were divested of their right to vote as per their choice". The PHC verdict was criticised by several political leaders, including JUI-F's Maulana Fazlur Rehman and PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif. Addressing a press conference in Islamabad today, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan said the

Continued on Page 06

ECP to display candidates' lists on Jan 23

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said on Friday that it will display the final list of the candidates' list on January 23 (Tuesday). According to the electoral watchdog, the candidates will be able to withdraw their nomination papers until Monday, January 22. The ECP is expected to display the candidate list on January 20. The appellate tribunals will decide on the appeals until January 19. The appeals against RO's verdict on the special seats can be filed until January 16. The electoral watchdog had revised the election schedule for the special seats. The scrutiny of the nomination papers of

Continued on Page 06

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IG Punjab discusses police station transfers

The team of Lahore Police gave a briefing about the upgradation measures of police stations in the provincial capital

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has said that the modern trained public friendly staff posted in the Special Initiative Police Station is providing services to the citizens with modern technology and softwares along with replacing the traditional concept of police stations. IG Punjab said that modern policing, best environment and facilities have been provided to the citizens in the special initiative police stations, which has improved the public service delivery process. IG Punjab directed that the police stations in all the districts of the province including Lahore should be completed on the special initiative protocol within the fixed timeline. IG Punjab said that the caretaker Chief Minister will formally inaugurate the Punjab Special Initiative Police Stations soon. He expressed these views today while presiding over a meeting at the Central Police Office. In the meeting, the progress regarding transfer of police stations to Special Initiative Protocol across the province including Lahore was

reviewed. The Lahore Police team briefed the IG Punjab about the steps taken to upgrade police stations in the provincial capital. IG Punjab reviewed the reports about the development works being completed in various police stations and the construction plan of new police stations. Additional IG Punjab, MD Safe City Authority, DIG Operations Lahore, DIG Elite, SSP Operations Lahore, AIG Admin Central Police Office and other officers were also present in the meeting. Earlier on , IG PUNJAB presided over an important meeting regarding the transfer of police stations to special initiative protocol. The team of Lahore Police gave a briefing about the upgradation measures of police stations in the provincial capital. Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab will formally inaugurate Special Initiative Police Stations, IG Punjab Inspector General Police Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar has said that the modern trained public friendly staff posted in the Special Initiative Police Station is providing services to the citizens with modern technology and softwares along with replacing the traditional concept of police stations. IG Punjab said that modern policing, best environ-

ment and facilities have been provided to the citizens in the special initiative police stations, which has improved the public service delivery process. IG Punjab directed that the police stations in all the districts of the province including Lahore should be completed on the special initiative protocol within the fixed timeline. IG Punjab said that the caretaker Chief Minister will formally inaugurate the Punjab Special Initiative Police Stations soon. He expressed these views today while presiding over a meeting at the Central Police Office. In the meeting, the progress regarding transfer of police stations to Special Initiative Protocol across the province including Lahore was reviewed. The Lahore Police team briefed the IG Punjab about the steps taken to upgrade police stations in the provincial capital. IG Punjab reviewed the reports about the development works being completed in various police stations and the construction plan of new police stations. Additional IG Punjab, MD Safe City Authority, DIG Operations Lahore, DIG Elite, SSP Operations Lahore, AIG Admin Central Police Office and other officers were also present in the meeting.



LAHORE : Punjab Prime Minister Mohsin Naqvi after reviewing the high performance project during the Marchect of Children's Hospital, 12 children under treatment in Emer Gensi are expressing their happiness.—DNA

Secretary Health highlights Health Dept achievements

PESHAWAR : Health Secretary Mehmood Aslam Wazir on Friday in his annual performance message said the Health Department has achieved many accomplishments in the year 2023. He said that this year, the department has effectively contained the dengue cases to 747 without any fatalities. He said by activating seven closed hospitals, medical services are now provided on a double shift basis, both in the morning and evening, compared to the previous practice of offering services only during daytime hours. Speaking about the impediments related to fake, unregistered, and spurious drugs, Health Secretary Mehmood Aslam Wazir revealed the establishment of the province's first mobile drug lab in Pakistan. This mobile lab travels to different locations to provide on-site analysis of medicines. He mentioned initiatives taken for Sehat card sustainability. These initiatives allows the underprivileged to receive free treatment, while those who can afford it, purchase health card packages for their own medical needs. Mehmood Aslam further disclosed that the records and other data of over a hundred thousand employees of the Health Department have been digitised. All postings and transfers are now transparently accessible through this web portal. He elaborated on the initiation of geo-tagging for both public and private hospitals.—APP

PEF, VU sign MoU to extend cooperation

LAHORE : A significant milestone was achieved in the realm of education as the Punjab Education Foundation (PEF) and the Virtual University of Pakistan joined hands through signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), here on Friday. The MOU was signed by Shahid Farid, Managing Director of Punjab Education Foundation and Prof. Dr. Arshad Bhatti, Rector of Virtual University. Deputy Managing Director (Operation) Samina Nawaz, Director Research and Coordination Dr. Nauman Jamil Khan, Dean of Virtual University Dr. Mohsin Javed, and other officers participated in the signing ceremony. The primary objective of this MOU is to extend IT courses to secondary-level students enrolled in PEF schools. Under the guidance of Virtual University, students affiliated with PEF will receive specialized training in digital literacy, freelancing, and social media marketing. This initiative aims to equip students with the skills needed to excel in the digital age, empowering them to explore opportunities for online earning. Managing Director of Punjab Education Foundation, Shahid Farid, expressed his appreciation for the pivotal role played by Virtual University in the field of education. He emphasized the importance of IT education and social media management in today's era and highlighted the significance of the public-private partnership model in bringing education to underprivileged children. Farid elaborated on the commitment of Punjab Education Foundation to provide quality education, stating that PEF currently serves over 2.6 million children. The PEF facilitates online training for its teachers through master trainers, with approximately 77 thousand teachers benefiting from these online training programs, the MD PEF said. Additionally, the MOU opens up avenues for Master Trainers of PEF to record online training lectures on the Virtual University platform. — DNA

Minister inaugurates Vehicle Inspection and Licensing App

DNA

LAHORE : Provincial Minister for Transport Ibrahim Hassan Murad on Friday inaugurated the Vehicle Inspection and Licensing App in a ceremony held here at the Punjab Transport Company's office. The ceremony was attended by Secretary Transport Ahmad Javed Qazi, CEO Punjab Transport Company Faiq Ahmed, enforcement inspectors and officers from the transport department. Ibrahim Murad congratulated the IT and the transport department teams, expressing optimism that the app would lead to a 90% reduction in axle-load traffic violations. The minister highlighted the department's goal to eliminate paper-based challans, stating that with the efficient team, the journey towards e-challans had begun. The Vehicle Inspection and Licensing App aims to curb fake and bogus challans complaints, marking a significant step towards digital transformation. The minister emphasized that with e-challans, transparency and real-time information retrieval had become possible, heralding a new era in transportation. Secretary Transport Ahmad Javed Qazi said that the app would also facilitate savings in challans printing and enhance transparency in the inspection process. The app ensures both driver and vehicle accountability, providing immediate data on the type, location, and violation and the drivers would receive a message on their registered mobile numbers upon issuance of a challan, the secretary added.

Energy project showcases transformative impact

PESHAWAR : The Center for Intelligent Systems and Network Research (CISNR) at UET, with the support of GIZ Pakistan, recently hosted an impactful seminar. This pivotal event on the project titled "Energy Efficiency through Digitization." The seminar drew over 130 participants, having presentations from CDA, PDA, Tehsil Municipal Administration, Water Sanitation Services Company and others. It served as a focal point for discussions on energy savings, policy recommendations, carbon credits, and exemplary case studies from partner municipalities under the project. Muhammad Irshad, Project Manager at GIZ, commended CISNR's exceptional work in energy management and AIoT. Deputy Manager Ayaz Durrani from WSSC Abbottabad shared a compelling case study on how the implementation of Supervisory Control and

Data Acquisition (SCADA) technology led to the detection of billing anomalies, resulting in substantial cost savings. This highlighted the practical impact of technological integration in utility management. Meanwhile, Deputy Director Abdul Qadir Afridi of the Peshawar Development Authority (PDA) emphasized a significant shift in their energy management approach. He highlighted the transformation from a lack of awareness to successfully implementing an integrated energy team across critical sectors such as water supply, street lighting, and buildings. This evolution signified a crucial step toward comprehensive energy management within their municipality. These case studies collectively highlighted the practical successes and transformative potential of technology-driven initiatives in enhancing energy management across different

municipalities targeted under the project, setting a precedent for efficient and sustainable practices within the region. The seminar also unveiled fifteen robust policy recommendations addressing key municipal challenges such as digitized control, staff training, and the absence of comprehensive energy efficiency plans. These recommendations, rooted in observations of existing challenges, aimed to revolutionize operations by integrating energy data into decision-making processes, establishing efficiency benchmarks, and enhancing governance practices. Moreover, this seminar's discourse on SCADA technology and e-governance signifies a monumental shift in Pakistan's municipal energy landscape. It not only lays the groundwork for a sustainable future but also amplifies the role of technology and policy in shaping a more energy-conscious society.—APP



KARACHI : Caretaker Federal Minister for Commerce and Industries and Production Dr. Gohar Ejaz Called on Caretaker Chief Minister Sindh Justice (Rtd) Maqbool Baqar at CM House.—DNA

CM launches SPPRA's e-procurement system

CM said that it was important to recognize the effort that had gone into developing and implementing this e-procurement system

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI : Caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Justice (ret'd) Maqbool Bakar has said that the traditional procurement methods have their own set of challenges that can hinder efficiency, increase costs and sometimes compromise transparency. Therefore the provincial government is launching an e-procurement system to address the challenges, he said. The chief minister said that it was important to recognize the effort that had gone into developing and implementing this e-procurement system and digitizing and automating different tasks can reduce the time it takes to complete procurement cycles and minimize errors. This he said while speaking at the launching ceremony of the 'e-Procurement System' viz E-Pak Acquisition and Disposal System (EPDS) at a local

hotel here Friday. The program was attended by Minister for Law and Chairman Sindh Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (SPPRA) Omar Soomro, DG Federal PPRR Maqbool Gondal, DG SPPRA Zubair Parvez, Director SPPRA Shadiya Jaffer and secretaries of various departments. He said that the provincial government's top hierarchy and people from the civil society had come together to celebrate an important milestone in our quest for efficiency, transparency and innovation. "Today marks the beginning of a new chapter as we have unveiled our e-procurement system, an advanced platform that will revolutionize the way we manage our public procurement procedures. As the world rapidly evolves, technology continues to reshape various industries, therefore, embracing innovation is not just an option, but a necessity, the CM said and added our decision to

implement e-procurement demonstrated our commitment to staying ahead of the curve, leveraging technology to improve our operations and ultimately delivering better outcomes for our stakeholders. The chief minister lauded the initiative undertaken by the SPPRA, supported by the World Bank and Federal PPRR. "This initiative aims to enhance transparency, equity, and competitiveness in public procurement processes. The Sindh Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (SPPRA) successfully launched its state-of-the-art Electronic Procurement System (e-procurement), marking a significant leap forward in the realm of transparent, efficient, and accountable public procurement processes. The event showcased the commitment of SPPRA to modernize public procurement practices, ensuring greater transparency, fairness, and competitiveness in the procurement land-

scape. The features of the E-Procurement System included user friendly interface; the e-procurement system boasts an intuitive and user-friendly interface, simplifying the procurement process for both government entities and suppliers. Real-time Monitoring and Reporting; Stakeholders can now benefit from real-time monitoring and reporting features, providing instant access to procurement data, bid status, and project updates. Digital Document Management; the system facilitates the secure and efficient management of procurement documents, reducing paperwork, minimizing errors, and enhancing document traceability. Automated Bidding Process; the e-procurement system automates the entire bidding process, from announcement to bid submission and evaluation, streamlining workflows and ensuring a fair and competitive environment.



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National Days and Armed Forces Days

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Dec 05/Thailand National Day
Dec 06/Finland Independence Day
Dec 07/India Armed Forces Flag Day
Dec 09/Tanzania National Day
Dec 11/Oman Armed Forces Day
Dec 12/Kenya Independence Day
Dec 12/Turkmenistan Neutrality Day
Dec 16/Bahrain National Day
Dec 16/Kazakhstan Independence Day
Dec 18/Qatar National Day
Dec 18/Niger National Day

Dec 23/Philippines Armed Forces Day

Dec 23/Japan National Day

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Bomb Disposal.....15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.....1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
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RGH.....9290301-7
Holy Family.....9290322-7
PIMS.....9261170-79
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Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: A group of students and faculty members of Air University, Islamabad visiting Senate Museum At Parliament House.—DNA

Govt introducing new 'contract base smartphones policy'

IT minister said that our aim to incentive responsible financial behavior and ensure that smart phone accessibility continues to expand, adding, we need a robust mechanism to protect investors from defaults, suggesting measures such as blocking mobile phones and, potentially, national identity cards of defaulters

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker IT and Telecommunication Minister Dr Umar Saif Friday disclosed that his ministry with the coordination of all other stakeholders of telecom companies from January 15, 2024 will launch a 'Contract based smart phone policy' in which people travelling to other countries will get latest model phones on easy installments, which will benefit economy. Talking to a private news channel, IT minister said that our aim to incentive responsible financial

behavior and ensure that smart phone accessibility continues to expand, adding, we need a robust mechanism to protect investors from defaults, suggesting measures such as blocking mobile phones and, potentially, national identity cards of defaulters. Minister said that under this policy, telecom companies will have the opportunity to directly offer smartphones to customers through installment plans, thereby expanding the benefits of mobile broadband, especially among low-income segments in Pakistan.

Replying another question, he also announced that his ministry from January 7 to 10 have been introducing a 'Standardized Quality measurement Tests' across universities in Pakistan to ensure job opportunities for fresh graduates. Ministry have made significant decisions to revamp IT education in universities in collaboration with HEC, the National Computing Accreditation Council, the Examination Testing Council, the Pakistan Software Export Board, and the Pakistan Software

Houses Association. He said further explained the program that countrywide students around 20 to 25,000 who will pass the test will be offered job opportunities through the Industry Placement Program. He said that we will allocate funds to support special industry courses in universities, designed to prepare students for current industry trends and needs, we aim to increase our trained manpower in industrial sector. He also highlighted the importance of aligning educational institutions with

industry requirements and facilitating industry-specific training manpower. Minister also asked the universities to take rapid action to start new quality courses in entrepreneurship and exports for students which would help boost economy of the country. To another query, he replied that we have planned to make exponential growth in IT sector as it is necessary for us to bring productivity revolution in our economy by using Information and Communications Technology.

ANF recovers 209 kg drugs in seven operations; arrests seven

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting seven operations across the country managed to recover over 209 kg drugs and arrested seven accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 1.760 kg Ice was recovered from a parcel booked for

Dubai at a courier office in Rawalpindi. 1.2 kg hashish was recovered from a Doha-bound passenger going on Flight No. QR-633 at Islamabad Airport. 115 grams Ice was recovered from a passenger's luggage at Allama Iqbal International Airport. The accused was leaving for Sharjah by flight number PA-412. 121 kg heroin and 75 kg morphine were recovered from Bostan area of Pishin. A total of 4 kg hashish was recovered from two suspects in Peshawar while 4 kg hashish was also recovered from two suspects near Customs Chowk Peshawar. 2 kg hashish was recovered from an accused arrested near Board Bazar Peshawar. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused while further investigations are under process

HEC extends deadline for registration till January 03, 2024

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC), has extended the deadline, till January 03, 2024, for registration in the Centralised Test being held for Computer Science and IT graduates – leading to apprenticeship in top IT companies of Pakistan. The test date shall however remain intact i.e. January 07, 2024, said a press release on Friday. The students enrolled in the 7th semester of Computer Science/IT related disciplines offered in recognised public and private sector universities and affiliated / constituent colleges are encouraged to register through Virtual University (VU) link <https://www.vu.edu.pk/GraduateTest/>. The decision to extend the registration deadline was made in a virtual meeting of Vice Chancellors/Rectors and Heads of Departments of Computer Science/IT of all public and private sector HEIs in order to ensure that maximum number of eligible students register themselves for the subject test and avail this opportunity. Chairman HEC advised the universities, especially the IT and Computer Science Departments, to ensure that 7th semester students register themselves and participate in the test. He emphasized the HEIs to expedite nominating their focal persons for smooth communication regarding all aspects of the test being conducted. He stated that the primary objective of this initiative is to ensure that IT graduates are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attributes to excel in the ever-changing IT industry. He added that the test will allow us to identify the academic / training gaps in fresh IT graduates, which may be addressed through specialized modules / apprenticeships or bootcamps to be aligned with industry requirements. HEC, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders including Ministry of IT and Telecommunications, National Computing Education Accreditation Council (NCEAC), Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), and Pakistan IT Industry Association (P@SHA).—DNA

Chinese education group launches three Sino-Pak dual diploma programs

ISLAMABAD: Chinese company TANG Int'l Education Group unveiled three China-Pakistan dual diploma programs at Aligarh Institute of Technology (AIT), Karachi. The Institute will collaborate with Fujian Polytechnic of Information Technology, China for the programs and provide training under CCTE Model (Chinese + Commerce Culture + Training + Employment). "Under the three 3-year diploma programs, 70 AIT students will have the chance to study in China on fully-funded scholarships", Eng. Mansoor ul Hassan Siddiqui, Regional Director of TANG Pakistan, told Gwadar Pro. He said that the admission process has been completed and the program will start soon. The newly-launched programs cover the disciplines of IoT, Mechatronics Technology and Electronics.—DNA

AIOU admissions for Spring 2024 semester to commence from January 15

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is commencing the admissions for the Spring 2024 semester (first phase) across the country, including AJK and GB, on January 15, 2024. The admissions in this phase include Matric (General), Matric Dars e Nizami (Sanwiya Ama), F.A (General), F.A Dars e Nizami (Sanwiya Khassa), I.Com, certificate courses, BS (face to face), MPhil,

and PhD programs, said a press release issued here Friday. The AIOU has expanded its educational network to cater to the needs of overseas Pakistanis and international students. Individuals residing in any country worldwide can now enroll in matriculation, intermediate and I.Com programs to enhance their educational qualifications. The admissions process is entirely online and all academic activities, from admission to the issuance of certificates/degrees, will be managed through the online system. Prospectuses and admission application forms for all the programs will be available online on the university website (www.aiou.edu.pk) on January 15, 2024. Admission in BS (face to face) MPhil and PhD programs can only be applied via online system whereas admission application forms for matriculation, intermediate and I Com can be submitted manually as well as via online mode.

Seminar held for transforming education system

ISLAMABAD: In response to the issues of Gender Based Violence and gender disparity in education, Rozan in collaboration with the Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and SPO, launched a comprehensive project titled 'Gender Mainstreaming and GBV for human capital investment project (KP-HCIP)'. The project aims at mitigating GBV and violence against children in 1000 schools in 13 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A seminar on 'Transforming Education, Emerging Issues of Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection' was held here Friday to create a safe learning environment for children and to reach 1000 schools, conducting comprehensive training sessions with school teachers, representatives of Parent Teacher Councils (PTCs), Village Network Forums (VNFs), and Village Education Committees (VECs). The event was attended by representatives from different Government departments, civil society, local community, school management and students from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad. These sessions will mainly focus on addressing issues of Gender Based Violence, Violence Against Children, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse with sensitivity and efficiency. The training will empower the 1000 GBV Focal Persons to effectively address GBV, VAC, SH and SEA, ensuring the implementation of the code of conduct, Grievance and Referral Mechanism. Chief Guest of the event, Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) while addressing the seminar said, "Let's begin by recognizing the context we are addressing the widespread gender disparities and the issues of gender-based violence and child protection. Statistics are alarming, according to International and national reports every third woman faces violence and a child is abused every two hours. This is also a fact that reported cases are just a tip of the iceberg. The project is a direct response to these challenges.—APP



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Briefs

Minister inaugurates Vehicle Inspection, Licensing App

ISLAMABAD: Provincial Minister for Transport Ibrahim Hassan Murad on Friday inaugurated the Vehicle Inspection and Licensing App in a ceremony held here at the Punjab Transport Company's office. The ceremony was attended by Secretary Transport Ahmad Javed Qazi, CEO Punjab Transport Company Faiq Ahmed, enforcement inspectors and officers from the transport department. Ibrahim Murad congratulated the IT and the transport department teams, expressing optimism that the app would lead to a 90% reduction in axle-load traffic violations. The minister highlighted the department's goal to eliminate paper-based challans, stating that with the efficient team, the journey towards e-challans had begun. The Vehicle Inspection and Licensing App aims to curb fake and bogus challans complaints, marking a significant step towards digital transformation. The minister emphasized that with e-challans, transparency and real-time information retrieval had become possible, heralding a new era in transportation. Secretary Transport Ahmad Javed Qazi said that the app would also facilitate savings in challans printing and enhance transparency in the inspection process. The app ensures both driver and vehicle accountability, providing immediate data on the type, location, and violation and the drivers would receive a message on their registered mobile numbers upon issuance of a challan, the secretary added.—APP

Plastic material export increases 33.76% to \$145m in 5 months

ISLAMABAD: The export of plastic materials from the country witnessed an increase of 33.76 per cent during the first five months of the current financial year (2023-24) as compared to the corresponding period of last year. Pakistan exported plastic material worth \$145.213 million during July-November (2023-24) as compared to the export of \$108.561 million during July-November (2022-23), showing growth of 33.76 per cent, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). In terms of quantity, plastic export also surged by 112.07 per cent from 68,100 metric tons to 144,422 metric tons, the data revealed. Meanwhile, year-on-year basis plastic exports increased by 59.85 per cent during November 2023 as compared to the same month of last year. The plastic material exports in November 2023 were recorded at US \$28.888 million against the export of \$18.072 million in November 2022, the PBS data revealed. On a month-on-month basis, the exports of plastic however dipped by 2.16 per cent in November 2023 when compared to \$29.526 million in October 2023.—APP

Dadhocha Dam to usher raof progress: Dr. Jamal

He said that the cost of this project is 15 billion rupees and the payment of land for this project has started and this project will continue with its full speed

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Provincial Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare and Population Welfare Dr. Jamal Nasir has said that Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi took personal interest and laid the foundation stone of Dadhocha Dam which is an indispensable project for the people of Rawalpindi. He said the project, which has been stalled for years, is on the track and the project is planned to be completed in less than two years. This was said by Provincial Minister Dr. Jamal Nasir on the occasion of his visit to Dadhocha Dam. Dr. Jamal Nasir is monitoring in-charge of Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi for all the development projects of Rawalpindi. He was given a detailed briefing regarding Dadhocha Dam. Dr. Jamal Nasir made a detailed inspection of the ongoing work on Dadhocha Dam and issued necessary instructions. On this occasion, Provincial Minister Dr. Jamal Nasir said that Dadhocha Dam has become indispensable to meet the water needs of Rawalpindi and all the obstacles in the construction of this dam have been removed and now this project is going on with full speed. He said that Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi is determined to complete all the ongoing development projects across



the province at lightning speed and the speed with which development projects have been completed in this short time is unprecedented in the history of the province. Dr. Jamal Nasir said that the process of land purchase for Dadhocha

Dam is going on and now it will not be hindered and in this regard Commissioner Rawalpindi Liaquat Ali Chatha has performed his duties very diligently and wisely. He said that without Dadhocha Dam, the water needs of Rawalpindi cannot

be met in any case and plans have been made to complete the project ahead of time so that this important project of public interest can be completed as soon as possible. Dr. Jamal Nasir said that the height of the project is 123 feet while its

length is 737 feet and it will provide 35 million gallons of water per day to Rawalpindi. He said that the cost of this project is 15 billion rupees and the payment of land for this project has started and this project will continue with its full speed.

FJU celebrates 25th anniversary

RAWALPINDI: Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJU) has marked its 25th Annual Day with a grand event, showcasing a quarter-century of academic brilliance and success. The day commenced with a heartfelt Dua and Quran Khawani, where the prayers were offered for the growth and prosperity of FJU, its dedicated faculty, staff, and students. Extending their wishes beyond the university, the prayers were also dedicated to the continued prosperity and growth of Pakistan. A multitude of faculty, staff, and students participated in the Quran Khawani and Dua, embodying the collective spirit of gratitude and optimism that defines the FJU community. The day featured various events and celebratory gatherings resonating with the harmonies of the National and FJU Anthems, emphasizing the university's commitment to national identity and pride in its accomplishments. Prof. Dr. Uzaira Rafique, Vice Chancellor, graced the occasion, taking a moment to applaud the unwavering dedication of FJU's exceptional faculty and staff. In her address, Prof. Dr. Uzaira Rafique illuminated the remarkable journey of success and growth, emphasizing significant milestones achieved over the past 25 years.—APP

2023 has been a tough year for the masses and businesses

During this time, the rupee became like tissue paper, inflation reached a rate of 39 percent, and the purchasing power of the people was exhausted. Electricity and gas prices and bank markup rates skyrocketed, due to which many businesses closed, while production was badly affected and exports fell

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Friday that the outgoing year was extremely challenging for the public and businesses. During this year, the nation frequently verged on bankruptcy, and people's lives deteriorated due to the cost-of-living crisis, while many found it impossible to conduct any business at all, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the country was saved from bankruptcy due to the IMF's loan and the deferral of debt payments by Saudi Arabia, China, and the UAE. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said

that people were cornered due to inflation, while political instability made it almost impossible for many to do business. During the current year, the country has suffered the worst economic crisis in its history, while the experiences of economic managers have worsened the situation. During this time, the rupee became like tissue paper, inflation reached a rate of 39 percent, and the purchasing power of the people was exhausted. Electricity and gas prices and bank markup rates skyrocketed, due to which many businesses closed, while production was badly affected and exports fell. The GDP rate decreased alarmingly, and the people became disillusioned with the country's future, due to which millions of

people started moving to other countries in search of employment, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that due to the measures taken by the previous governments to promote reputation, there was a record increase in circular debt, and people were forced to pay the bills by selling household items to pay bills. During this year, many people committed suicides due to inflation and inflated power bills; the incidents of terrorism increased; dozens of military personnel were martyred, due to which relations with neighboring countries deteriorated; and the process of evicting people residing illegally in Pakistan was started, but the security situation remained precarious. During the same year,

the army took commendable steps to improve the economy, including establishing the SIFC. The announcement of the election date, the establishment of a caretaker government, legal measures against PTI, the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, and the return of Nawaz Sharif are among the most important political events of this year. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that due to the role of the army in economic matters, things have improved, the possibility of heavy investment from friendly countries has increased, and the situation has started to improve at the end of this painful year. There is a break in prices, and it is hoped that political and economic affairs will improve, he said.

Businesses more confident about future

ISLAMABAD: Largely negative about their ongoing prospects, the country's business owners have started gaining confidence, and their expectations for a better future have risen 42% from the previous quarter, shows a latest survey. "Relatively fewer business owners are pessimistic about future conditions and the direction of the country compared to Quarter 2," according to a Gallup Pakistan Survey with business owners in the third quarter of 2023 for the Gallup Business Confidence Index report. It said

business insecurity though persists because of the prevailing economic and political crises, businesses are more upbeat about their future. "Inflation, utility bills and political instability cause growing concern among the business community, but overall fewer businesses express hopelessness compared to the previous quarter," it said. Asked about their expectations for future business conditions, the businesses were surprisingly

optimistic and 61% expressed positive expectations while 38% expect things to worsen. The net future business confidence score has improved by 42% since the spring and is now at 22%, according to survey report. The businessmen's perceptions about the direction of the country have also improved since the previous two quarters with 26% of respondents saying Pakistan is heading in the right direction. The Direction of the Country score has increased to 47% that is 30 percentage points more than a quarter ago. The overall confidence of the business community, however, was low since economic crises have been looming since 2022.—DNA

Pak Navy conducts fleet annual efficiency competition parade

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Navy Fleet Annual Efficiency Competition Parade was held here at Pakistan Navy Dockyard upon the culmination of the operational year. Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf graced the occasion as Chief Guest that marked the culmination of a rewarding and eventful operational year for Pakistan Navy ships, submarines and aircrafts, a Pakistan Navy news release said. Upon arrival at the venue, the chief guest was received by Commander Pakistan Fleet Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi and a smartly turned-out contingent presented the Guard of Honour. The Chief of the Naval Staff expressed complete satisfaction and confidence over the operational preparedness of the Pakistan Navy Fleet. He acknowledged and praised the dedication and professionalism of officers and men in successfully achieving operational objectives and milestones for the year 2023. The Admiral commended PN Fleet's efforts and contributions towards maritime security. The chief guest also mentioned the modernization plan of the Pakistan Navy wherein various platforms are being inducted in the Fleet. He underscored that induction of these platforms will immensely contribute towards capability enhancement of the Fleet. He also dilated upon the evolving maritime security environment in the region which requires the Pakistan Navy to remain ever-vigilant and fully prepared to safeguard national maritime interests. The Admiral urged all the participants to be fully cognizant of the latest technologies and work with utmost dedication and honesty. Earlier, in his welcome address, Commander Pakistan Fleet Vice Admiral Muhammad Faisal Abbasi highlighted PN Fleet's operational achievements during last year. He further highlighted that PN Fleet maintained high level of combat readiness throughout the year while Fleet units participated in various Bilateral and Multilateral exercises in home and foreign waters besides undertaking Regional Maritime Security Patrols and Overseas Deployments. During the ceremony, the Chief of the Naval Staff gave away efficiency trophies to units adjudged best in their respective squadrons and interacted with Officers and CPOs/ Sailors of Pakistan Navy Fleet.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf giving away efficiency shield to the winning unit of Pakistan Navy for best performance during Fleet Efficiency Competition Parade.—DNA

Traffic flow needs to be regulated

SH BANGASH

ISLAMABAD: Traffic flow is the hallmark of any country's civilization and this is the reason why educated societies have better traffic flow and less road accidents. Where Pakistan is far behind in every field compared to the rest of the world, it is also facing extreme difficulties in traffic matters. There was a time when compared to other cities of Pakistan, Islamabad was known for smooth traffic, safe travel and best roads. But in the last few years, a new trend has come to be seen in the federal capital as now the driving in Capital is just like other cities in which you face the risk that no one knows when a bike rider or a car driver will hit your car while traveling from the wrong side of the road. Where the Islamabad used to be famous for its excellent driving compared

to other cities, now if you travel in any area of Islamabad you will see motorists bickering on the roadside. No one is ready to accept his mistake. According to the traffic authorities 24 per cent of the respondents drive cars without a license in Pakistan with 41 per cent of them being even below the age of 21 years. After all that, who is the responsible for this? What is the reason that, along with all other problems we are now seriously suffering from traffic problems? Indeed, the main reason for all that issues are people by their self. It is our city and our country and we have to beautify it by ourselves. Now if we talk about Islamabad Expressway from all over the city it is the main highway of Islamabad which is the road connecting Punjab to Islamabad. It is surprising a lot that main highway is much neglected especially early in the morning where children from

schools and colleges use this road to head towards their institutions in Islamabad. Due to heavy traffic they are facing many dangerous situations because of the rush driving of Heavy traffic vehicles, whose entry is prohibited from 07:00 AM till 11:00 PM. But due to the negligence of traffic police personnel such traffic seen doing rough driving with zig zagging on such busy highway at dawn. Now there is a question that where the traffic police is, at this crucial time, who is responsible for the lack of traffic police performance. In this matter we talk to one of the traffic police personal to know the lagging of performance. But it was surprising for the reporting team that the personal blamed his own department for deploying less personnel for morning duty. Now how much he was sincere to his statement, it's upon the department to investigate.

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The view on a second Trump presidency

THE great spectre haunting 2024 is the threat of Donald Trump triumphing in November's election. A second stint in the Oval Office would have grim repercussions for the US and the world. He dominates the Republican race for the presidential candidacy, while recent polls showed him beating Joe Biden in five of the six key battleground states, and besting the president on issues including the economy and national security. The Biden administration has overseen a striking economic recovery in tough global conditions, but voters don't feel the improvement. The president's handling of the war in Gaza is alienating core supporters. He inspires little enthusiasm. Democrats point out that there's a long way to go and that November's off-year election results point to a brighter picture. Mr Trump faces a dizzying array of legal cases, though the most significant may not move to a trial before the election. While they boost the belief of diehard admirers that he is being persecuted, some supporters say he should not stand if convicted. It's not impossible that he might run from a prison cell. Mr Trump is already teeing voters up to declare a Biden victory fraudulent again. Election officials have been bombarded with death threats. Convictions for the January 6 storming of the Capitol were welcome and necessary, but his supporters remain armed and dangerous. What would Mr Trump's return to the White House mean for America and the world? Nothing good. For all the volatility of his presidency, he delivered on key pledges for his followers: his supreme court appointments led to the overturning of Roe v Wade. Authoritarians don't improve with power: quite the opposite. Mr Trump's first term began with "alternative facts" about his inauguration and ended with the big lie that the 2020 election was stolen from him. His recent statements make 2016's inflammatory rhetoric look almost mealy-mouthed. He declared that he would be a dictator, though only on "day one", because "I want a wall and I want to drill, drill, drill". His language is not merely racist but echoes the invective of Nazi Germany: immigrants are "poisoning the blood of our country", while "communists, Marxists, fascists and the radical-left thugs" are "vermin". Sycophantic state: What is truly alarming this time is not merely that he has declared his intentions loud and clear, it is that his backers have drawn up action plans to implement his talking points, and that he faces fewer political, institutional or legal constraints. "You cannot count on those institutions to restrain him," said former Republican congresswoman Liz Cheney, who fears that her country is "sleepwalking into dictatorship". Ms Cheney is a rare exception to the rule that Republican politicians have ultimately fallen into line even when they briefly balked at his extremes. A re-elected President Trump would benefit from a more compliant Congress (though there's speculation that Democrats might win back the House while the GOP takes the Senate). And having set out his stall, he could claim a mandate from the people. He would not appoint those who might thwart his will this time. "The lesson he learned was to hire sycophants," his former chief of staff John Kelly observed. He boasts that he would "dismantle the deep state".



DPP's door best place for election meddling charge

THE Customs Tariff Commission last week announced that starting from the beginning of next year a total of 12 items of chemical products from Taiwan, including propylene and para-xylene, will stop enjoying the preferential tax rates stipulated by the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement. Beijing said the move was in response to the "unilateral, discriminatory trade restrictions" the island's authorities had imposed on products from the Chinese mainland that breach the cross-strait free trade agreement. The comprehensive economic pact lists 806 goods approved for tariff reductions and is intended to lower the barriers to commerce and promote cross-strait trade. It was signed by the two sides across the Taiwan Strait in June 2010 on the basis of the 1992 Consensus. Soon after announcing the tariff move, the mainland authorities said that they are willing to work with relevant parties in Taiwan and offer assistance for the resumption of exports of Taiwan's agricultural and aquatic products to the mainland. In light of this, the mainland authorities announced that, based on an assessment of the rectification efforts of the island's grouper farmers, they had given a green light to the resumption of grouper imports from Taiwan, which were suspended in June 2022 because of safety issues. The mainland's twin announcements prompted some people on the island who are ill-disposed toward the Chinese mainland to claim that Beijing was employing a carrot and stick approach to influence the upcoming election on the island. But the recent decision by the Chinese mainland to end tariff concessions for some Taiwan products was justified given the island's authorities have imposed restrictions and bans against mainland products, which are aimed at politicizing trade issues and undermining cross-strait trade cooperation. The island's business circle should blame the ruling Democratic Progressive Party for such an undesirable outcome as it was the DPP that has flouted the ECFA. Since taking office, the DPP, with its pro-independence agenda and reckless separatist deeds, has done more harm than good to the smooth implementation of the ECFA. The DPP authorities have not only violated the ECFA rules by imposing discriminatory restrictions on mainland goods, they have also refused to recognize the 1992 Consensus. So it is the DPP authorities that bear the responsibility now that the ECFA is experiencing some headwinds. The suspension and reinstatement of approval for imports of grouper from the island are entirely due to the actions of the industry on the island. As for the allegation that the mainland is seeking to influence the local leadership election on the island, those making the allegation are the ones attempting to do that.

Far-right renaissance haunts Europe

Chris Doyle

The increasing success of the far right is not an overnight phenomenon. Many will recall the political earthquake that was the success of Jorg Haider in Austria, when his Freedom Party won 27 percent of the vote in 1999. As with Italy, there was never really any national soul-searching in Austria after the Second World War, which perhaps explains why the far right was never really ostracized as it was in other countries. In the Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn was almost an iconic figure, a status cemented by his assassination in 2002. Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the runoff in the French presidential election of the same year. Some far-right parties are in power, either running governments or as part of a coalition. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban is the longest-serving EU leader and a champion of the far right who prides himself...

JUST how strong is the far right in Europe? And is it getting more popular? These are questions that trouble many people. Democrats question what it means for European liberal democratic politics and the institutions that ensure equality and the rule of law. Anti-racism campaigners are alarmed by what this signifies for European societies. European Muslims, perennially depicted as outsiders and scapegoats for so many issues, ponder what is in store for them. Jewish communities are understandably terrified. Asylum seekers and refugees wonder if fortress Europe is going to become even more hostile. Others fear just how much all this benefits the agenda of President Vladimir Putin of Russia. The answers are far from simple. It is a mixed picture. Sometimes it is hard to determine whether the far right's status is as a result of a continental trend, a specific country or regional issues. How scared should democrats be? Are these far-right movements capable of crashing European democracies? The increasing success of the far right is not an overnight phenomenon. Many will recall the political earthquake that was the success of Jorg Haider in Austria, when his Freedom Party won 27 percent of the vote in 1999. As with Italy, there was never really any national soul-searching in Austria after the Second World War, which perhaps explains why the far right was never really ostracized as it was in other countries. In the Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn was almost an iconic figure, a status cemented by his assassination in 2002. Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the runoff in the French presidential election of the same year. Some far-right parties are in power, either running governments or as part of a coalition. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban is the longest-serving EU leader and a champion of the far right who prides himself on standing up to Brussels, NATO and even embracing Putin. Giorgia Meloni, a leader with neo-fascist roots, has been the Italian prime minister for more than a year. So far, she has perhaps not been as extreme in office as on the campaign trail, but nonetheless she still wholeheartedly embraces the central tenets of the far right and has praised Benito Mussolini. In Finland, the far-right Finns Party came second in April's general election with 46 seats, only two behind the conservative National Coalition Party. The Finns Party got seven seats in the ensuing coalition government's Cabinet and forced it into much tougher anti-immigration positions. In Slovakia, Robert Fico and his Smer party won the September parliamentary election. This is a man who once stated that "Islam has no place in Slovakia." Other states may soon have the far right at the helm. Its followers have scored some impressive results, most recently in the Netherlands, where the Party for Freedom led by Geert Wilders won the most seats in last month's election. Wilders is perhaps the most anti-Muslim of all of Europe's far-right leaders. The

Freedom Party of Austria looks likely to win the Austrian elections in 2024. In March, the Portuguese will go to the polls, with the right-wing bloc, supported by the far-right Chega party, favorites to form the next government. But the far right does not have it all its own way. Consider Poland. In its general election of Oct. 15, liberal leader Donald Tusk and his allies defeated the right-wing nationalist Law and Justice party. The UK's Conservative Party, which has at times veered very close to the far right, looks like losing its hold on power after 14 years in office in elections likely to be held in 2024. The anti-immigration Alternative for Germany became the third-largest party in Germany, as well as the largest opposition group, after the federal elections of 2017, but it did not fare so well in 2021. For democrats, anti-racism campaigners and those who value the goals of the EU, all of this is alarming. Many ask if democracy will suddenly crash or if it will die a slow, painful death. They see the far-right discourse as having become mainstream and normalized. The success of these groups has shifted politics. Where once mainstream conservative parties would shy away from any association with the likes of Le Pen, many now openly consider working with them in coalition governments. They are no longer beyond the pale. Immigration policies have toughened almost everywhere, even in countries that used to be seen as immigrant-friendly. Racism is very much a factor. In a poll of 6,752 people of African descent in 13 EU countries, half stated that they had experienced discrimination, up 6 percent from a 2016 survey. The report, "Being Black in the EU," should have opened eyes to the risks, but has it? European Muslims have much to fear. It is not just the far right that has adopted an Islamophobic approach, even if such groups are leading the pack. The Gaza crisis has just highlighted how anti-Muslim and anti-Arab much of the European political class is. What is the attraction of the far right? Often, voting for the far right is a form of protest. This is a dangerous trend, with voters naively assuming far-right populists have no chance of achieving power. One of the curious elements is that many vote for such extremist movements not because they necessarily approve of their agenda in full, but perhaps only one outstanding issue. I spoke to some Wilders supporters in Rotterdam. They liked his anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric and positions, but they despised his call for "Nexit" — the Netherlands leaving the EU. The idea that Europe is full up and overcrowded is a perennial theme. It was a key driver behind the UK voting to leave the EU in 2016. Polls often show that voters have a wildly exaggerated sense of exactly how many immigrants have come to their countries or how many Muslims live there. This is tied to the enduring belief that "indigenous" populations are being replaced. I met Meloni supporters near Milan. One was clear that, for her, "Meloni is the first

leader for a long time who spoke up for Italians, who put Italian interests first." This is a continual theme: that so-called indigenous populations have been cast aside and ignored. This means that solutions to the immigration issue must be found, but they need to be properly thought out and not pander to base instincts. They should appreciate how much an aging Europe actually needs and benefits from immigrant communities and labor. Are economic issues a factor? The 2008 financial crash, the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have combined to spark a sense of economic insecurity. A recent Eurobarometer poll found that 73 percent of respondents in the EU think that their standard of living will go down in the next year. This makes many feel less welcoming of migrants, who are too often perceived as coming to take jobs. Many point to the parallels of the 1930s and the rise of fascist parties after the 1929 crash. Has politics just become more polarized? The far left and the Greens are doing well too, such as in Germany and in the last European Parliament elections in 2019. Is this a crisis of the center in politics? Have consensus and compromise disappeared? Could disorder and extremism spill over to the streets? Rioting in Dublin in November indicated that this could be the case, as the Irish far right bared its teeth. Observers have been warning about this for some time, even though no far-right politicians have yet been elected in Ireland. To what extent will policies be affected? Immigration policies have toughened almost everywhere, even in countries that used to be seen as immigrant-friendly. Other issues may get blocked by far-right parties. Orban is determined to prevent Ukraine's accession path to EU membership, which needs unanimity among the existing 27 members. Will the far right act as a brake on the inexorable expansion of the EU itself and its ever closer integration? Euroscepticism is now widespread, including on the left. All this will matter in EU politics in 2024. The European elections in June will be a crucial barometer of the level of support for the far right, the popularity of the EU itself and, in many ways, the direction of travel for the continent. Further ahead, many are nervous about the French presidential elections in 2027, with Marine Le Pen being seen as a shoo-in for the second round and very much a contender for the presidency. The traditional parties need to wake up. They are not seen as delivering at all and are often perceived as out of touch with the concerns of citizens. The same can be said for the EU in Brussels, which is often seen as antidemocratic and unaccountable. It is time for bolder leadership that addresses the challenges and finds solutions in a constructive, evidence-based fashion, but with vigor. The renaissance of the far right in Europe is not inevitable but it cannot be ruled out either.

- Sourced by Arab News.

Chaudhary Rehmat Ali and the creation of Pakistan

Fatima Rasheed



Chaudhary Rehmat Ali's impact goes beyond just coining the term "Pakistan." His ideas laid the groundwork for the eventual creation of the nation. His legacy is integral to Pakistan's historical narrative, reflecting the complexities within broader struggle for independence. Ali's vision wasn't just a rhetorical concept; it was a passionate...

CHAUDHARY Rehmat Ali was a key person in the early movement to create a separate Muslim state, which later became Pakistan. In his well-known 1933 pamphlet titled "Now or Never: Are we to live or perish forever," he strongly advocated for the establishment of a separate nation for Muslims in South Asia. Born in 1897 in British India, Rehmat Ali played a crucial role in expressing the ideological foundation for the demand for a distinct homeland. Rehmat Ali, an important figure in the pre-independence history of British India, is best known for introducing the term "Pakistan" and pushing for a separate nation for Muslims. In his influential 1933 pamphlet, he articulated the idea of a distinct Muslim state to protect the political and social rights of Muslims in the subcontinent. His vision for Pakistan aimed at providing a homeland where Muslims could freely practice their religion and preserve their cultural identity. Rehmat Ali's call for a separate nation gained momentum, contributing to the demand for the partition of India in 1947. While his conceptualization of the independence movement faced challenges and differences with other leaders, his impact went beyond coining the term "Pakistan." His ideas laid the groundwork for the eventual creation of the nation, and his legacy remains integral to Pakistan's historical narrative, reflecting the complexities and diverse perspectives during the struggle for independence. Rehmat Ali's vision was not just a theoretical idea but a passionate response to what he saw as the urgent need to safeguard the interests of Muslims

in a predominantly Hindu-majority India. Despite facing challenges and disagreements with other leaders within the independence movement, his impassioned plan for a separate nation left an indelible mark on the trajectory of South Asian history. The realization of Pakistan in 1947 owed much to the groundwork laid by visionaries like Rehmat Ali, who, despite facing complexities and divergent views, played a pivotal role in shaping the contours of the post-colonial subcontinent. His idea for Pakistan was to have a place where Muslims could freely practice their religion and preserve their cultural identity. Ali called for a separate nation, which gained momentum for the partition of India in 1947. However, he faced challenges and differences with other leaders during the independence movement. Chaudhary Rehmat Ali's impact goes beyond just coining the term "Pakistan." His ideas laid the groundwork for the eventual creation of the nation. His legacy is integral to Pakistan's historical narrative, reflecting the complexities within the broader struggle for independence. Ali's vision wasn't just a theoretical concept; it was a passionate response to the perceived need to safeguard Muslim interests in a Hindu-majority India. Despite his influential role in shaping the discourse, Ali encountered challenges and disagreements with other leaders in the independence movement. His impassioned plea for a separate nation left an indelible mark on South Asian history. The realization of Pakistan in 1947 owed much to the groundwork laid by visionaries like Ali, who played a pivotal role in shaping the post-colonial subcontinent despite facing

complexities and divergent views. Chaudhary Rehmat Ali's efforts and ideas significantly influenced the political landscape of British India, leading to the eventual creation of Pakistan. His advocacy introduced the term "Pakistan" and articulated the vision for a separate Muslim state. This resonated with many, contributing to the demand for the partition of India in 1947. However, Ali's journey was not without challenges and disagreements within the leadership of the independence movement. The complexities of the political environment, coupled with differing perspectives among leaders, influenced unfolding events. Despite these challenges, Chaudhary Rehmat Ali's contribution is evident in the creation of Pakistan as an independent nation for Muslims. In terms of legacy, Chaudhary Rehmat Ali is remembered as a key figure in the early conceptualization of Pakistan. His ideas continue to be part of the illegal creation's historical narrative, and he is recognized for advocating for the rights and interests of Muslims in the subcontinent. The result of his legacy can be seen in the cultural and political landscape of a nation that emerged from the struggle for independence. In the last 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

Does caretaker...

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The additional attorney general and Adiala jail superintendent also appeared in court during the hearing of the plea. Both the attorney general and advocate general objected to the plea, inviting the court's ire. "Was the additional note from the Supreme Court not enough for you? After the Supreme Court, do you want me to write a note against you?" Justice Aurangzeb asked, slamming both the government representatives. The judge stated that the attorney general and advocate general's office represent the caretaker government and should be impartial.

ECP moves top court...

FROM PAGE 01
courts is not barred under Section 236 of the Elections Act, 2017, the ECP questioned, adding as to whether the impugned order of the high court was liable to be set aside as it amounted to derailing the election process. The ECP questioned whether the high court could suspend the ECP notification without first issuing notice to the ECP and without affording an opportunity to explain that there in fact existed a valid reason for substitution of the earlier notified returning officer with another official which was on medical grounds. The ECP submitted that the candidates for an election did not have a vested right in their nomination papers scrutinised by a particular returning officer, furnishing them locus standi to invoke writ jurisdiction of the high court in that regard.

PTI alleges conspiracies...

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"bat" was not just the PTI's electoral symbol but was also the symbol of the expectations of the Pakistani nation. "The Supreme Court has settled that snatching the electoral symbol is equivalent to dissolving a political party and this right only lies with the apex court in Article 17 [of the Constitution]," he said. "All these political leaders [of the Pakistan Democratic Movement] won't be able to gain anything on February 8. They will all lose their seats if free, fair and transparent elections are conducted." Barrister Gohar asserted. "Therefore they are trying to take 'bat' away from us."

ECP to display...

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women and minorities' candidates will continue until January 13. Separately, the electoral watchdog had issued a notification regarding the provision of level playing field to all political parties. The letter, addressed to the Punjab inspector general of police (IGP) and chief secretary, comes in response to a letter written by the party to the ECP seeking a level playing field. The ECP directed the authorities to provide a level playing field for all candidates and political parties. It says that no candidate of any political party, including the PTI, should be deprived of contesting the elections.

Shehbaz calls for collective...

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has now been renumbered to NA-242. Earlier, party sources had told Dawn that one of the main reasons why Shehbaz was contesting from Karachi was to negate the impression that the city has never been important for the PML-N. His candidature was one of the points agreed upon with MQM-P leaders during a recent meeting. The party had planned to field Mustafa Kamal from the same constituency but reportedly backed down after it emerged that Shehbaz was seeking to contest from there.

Australia beat Pakistan in 2nd Test to clinch series

Pat Cummins bagged five wickets and 10 for the match to lead from the front and earn Australia a nail-biting win

SPORTS DESKS

MELBOURNE: Australia beat Pakistan in the second Test by 79 runs in Melbourne to clinch the three-match Test series. Australia take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series after the win today. Chasing a target of 317 runs, Pakistan were dismissed for 237 in their second innings on Friday. A fired-up Pat Cummins bagged five wickets and 10 for the match to lead from the front and earn Australia a nail-biting win. The right-arm fast bowler also bagged the Player of the Match award. Mitchell Starc also bagged four wickets in the second innings. After bowling Australia out for 262 before lunch earlier today, the tourists had put together a series of partnerships to frustrate the home side. Captain Shan Masood top-scored for Pakistan with an impressive 60 runs in 71 balls, with the help of seven fours. Mohammad Rizwan and Agha Salman added 57 runs for the sixth wicket to



get Pakistan close to victory. However, Australia took a flurry of wickets after Rizwan's controversial dismissal to get over the line. Cummins appealed for a caught behind in the 61st over of Pakistan's second innings but the umpire gave it not out. However, the Australia captain decided to review the decision as he thought Rizwan might have gloved it. After the third umpire took a look at the appeal from different angles

and reckoned that there was a spike as the ball passed the wrist band so the on-field umpire was asked to change his decision. However, the hotspot showed no mark as Rizwan looked away from the ball at the last second. Rizwan, who was sure that he didn't get anything on it, went back to the hut in utter disbelief. Rizwan was batting on 35 runs, with Pakistan 98 runs away from victory, when the incident took place. Agha Salman also scored a fifty but it was in vain. Babar Azam looked good for his 41 but he was cleaned up by Josh Hazlewood just when he seemed set for a big one. The 29-year-old is not having a great year, particularly in red-ball cricket as he has now gone nine 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. Pakistan have performed poorly in Australia, losing 16 Tests on the trot with their last win in 1995. The third and final Test of the series will be played in Sydney from January 3.

Shahid Afridi discards injury concerns about Shaheen



DNA

LAHORE: Former Pakistani captain Shahid Afridi discarded injury concerns about Shaheen Afridi as the 43-year-old believed that a fast bowler cannot play if there is an injury. Shaheen has lost his pace ever since coming from his knee injury but the pacer is still performing at a top level as the 23-year-old bagged eight wickets in two Tests and was the visitors' key weapon with the ball in Melbourne. Shahid emphasised that Shaheen is

aware how important he is to the team and also addressed the expectations he carries on his shoulders due to his performances in the past. "I've never got the impression that Shaheen has an injury. If you're injured you can't play as a fast bowler. He knows his responsibility and how important he is to the team," Afridi said while talking to ESPN Cricinfo. "The fast bowlers, we are expecting a lot from them because they've done well in the past. Babar, Rizwan, Shaheen etc. have performed so well we expect them to perform in every

match. Relentless consistency is challenging in cricket." Afridi believed that having a strong bench is just as essential as playing XI so that when main players are not performing up to the mark, there are always options. "I have always said that unless our bench is strong we won't be able to take the best decisions. The A team should be as strong as the main team, so if Shaheen or Babar or Rizwan aren't strong, we shouldn't have the excuses of players being unavailable, like we do with Naseem now. When our bench is strong, we will no longer have excuses," he added. Afridi then went on to talk about Haris Rauf, who refused to play in the three-match Test series against Australia to prioritise white-ball cricket. Rauf played five matches for Melbourne Stars in the Big Bash League (BBL) 13th edition, but Afridi thought that having that kind of pace on Australian soil in red-ball cricket could've been the key. "I think Haris [Rauf] should be part of this side instead rather than [the BBL]," Afridi, speaking to media at the MCG, said. "In these conditions, the kind of pace he has, he would have performed well and enjoyed himself on the kinds of pitches Australia prepared in Perth and here," he concluded.

Sahibzada 'ready to play at any position' for Pakistan

LAHORE: Pakistan's top-order batter Sahibzada Farhan asserted that he is ready to play at any number for his team during the upcoming five-match T20I series against New Zealand commencing on 12 January 2024. While talking to the media during Pakistan's training camp for the New Zealand series, Sahibzada Farhan opened up his batting number. "I have been playing as an opening batter for the last three years, however, I have also played at the number three position and have performed at this number too," said Farhan. "I am ready to play at any number for Pakistan whenever I get a chance." He further expressed hope that Pakistan will do well in New Zealand citing their past performances. Follow us on our Official WhatsApp channel "Our team have performed well in New Zealand and we will try to do better this time," he further added. Sahibzada Farhan was recalled into the T20I squad on the back of his impressive performance in the National T20 Cup, where he was the highest run-scorer with 492 runs in 12 innings at an average of 44.72 and a strike rate of 178.90. He has previously represented Pakistan in three T20Is back in 2018. Shaheen Shah Afridi (c), Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan (wk), Saim Ayub, Fakhar Zaman, Iftikhar Ahmed, Mohammad Nawaz, Abrar Ahmed, Usama Mir, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Zaman Khan, Aamir Jamal, Azam Khan (wk), Sahibzada Farhan, Haseebullah Khan (wk) and Abbas Afridi. **Schedule of the Series:** First match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 12 January, Auckland. Second match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 14 January, Hamilton. Third match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 17 January, Dunedin. Fourth match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 19 January, Christchurch. Fifth match: New Zealand vs Pakistan, 21 January, Christchurch. - DNA

NZ-BD 2nd T20I called-off due to rain

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Heavy rain forced the second of three Twenty20 internationals between hosts New Zealand and Bangladesh to be called off at Bay Oval on Friday. New Zealand scored 72-2 in 11 overs, with Daryl Mitchell (18) and Glenn Phillips (9) on the crease when rain played spoilsport and halted the play. Having put the Black Caps into bat under overcast skies at Mount Maunganui on Friday, Bangladesh struck early when opener Finn Allen was caught in the second over with New Zealand on nine for one. Tim Seifert smashed 43 off 23 balls before being caught to end his second-wicket partnership of 49 with Daryl Mitchell before rain started to fall. Bangladesh are currently leading the series 1-0 after their bowlers ran riot in the opening match last Wednesday, paving the way to a five-wicket victory in Napier. It was the visitors' first-ever T20I win over the Black Caps in New Zealand. Asked to bat by Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, New Zealand made a disastrous start losing three wickets before reaching 134 for nine after their 20 overs. The Black Caps bowlers gave home fans hope with the early wickets of Bangladesh openers Rony Talukdar and Shanto. Veteran Litton Das partnered up with Soumya Sarkar, and then Towhid Hridoy to steer Bangladesh to 96-4 after 13 overs. The visitors were wobbling at 97-5 as they lost wickets in quick succession after Afif Hossain was caught for one run in six balls. Das, who finished on 42 not out, survived two close calls as he battled cramp. The on-field umpire gave him out lbw on Tim Southee's bowling, but the Bangladesh opener stayed at the crease when the review showed the ball would have sailed over the stumps. - Agencies

Hafeez blames 'inconsistent umpiring' for defeat

"Pakistan failed to make a comeback after decision given against Mohammad Rizwan. We were very close to the victory in Melbourne Test but I'm very hopeful Pak can win Sydney Test"

MELBOURNE: Pakistan's team director Mohammad Hafeez put partial blame on "inconsistent umpiring and technology curse" after the visitors fell 79-run short during their chase of 317 in the second Test against Australia at the MCG on Friday. Hafeez addressed a presser after the match and didn't hold back at all as he hit out at the inconsistent decisions by the umpires which played their part during Pakistan's loss in Melbourne. "We made some mistakes as a team, we take that and we will address those things. But at the same time, I believe [that] inconsistent umpiring, technology curse, really given us a result which should've been different," Hafeez told in a press conference. "Pakistan failed to make a comeback after decision given against Mohammad Rizwan. We were very close to the victory in Melbourne Test but I'm very hopeful Pakistan can win Sydney Test." He also addressed Babar Azam, who has been failing to score big in red-ball cricket as the 29-year-old finished the year 2023 without scoring a single half-century. "Babar is a great player. We wish him to score big in upcoming matches. He is batting really well in the nets. We look forward for Babar to play a match-winning innings for Pakistan in Sydney Test," he added. It must be



noted Hafeez's comments came after Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan was given out controversially. The timing of the dismissal was crucial as the visitors looked were batting comfortably during their chase of 317 runs. Australia's skipper Pat Cummins appealed for a caught behind in the 61st over of Pakistan's second innings but the umpire gave it not out. After which the Australian captain decided to review the decision as he thought Rizwan might have gloved it. After the third umpire took a look at the appeal from different angles and reckoned that there was a spike as the ball passed the wrist band so the on-field umpire was asked to change his decision. However, the hotspot showed no mark as Rizwan looked away from the ball at the last second. Rizwan, who was sure that he didn't get anything on it, went back to the hut in utter disbelief. Rizwan was batting on 35 runs, with Pakistan 98 runs away from victory, when the incident took place. - DNA

Aqeel, Shoaib enter final's of Serena Hotels C'ship

Aisam ul Haq Qureshi and Aqeel Khan will play the men's doubles final against Barkatullah and Yousaf Khalil

AFZAL JAVED

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's top players Aqeel Khan and Muhammad Shoaib entered into the final of the 8th Serena Hotels National Ranking Championship by defeating Muhammad Abid and Muzammil Murtaza in the men's singles semi-final round here at the SDA-PTF Tennis Complex on Friday. In the first semi final, experienced Aqeel won the first set with conceding the three points against the lower-ranked player Muhammad Abid. Aqeel did not allow their opponent to settle and easily bagged the second set 6-3 and with it the match to qualify for the final. In the second semi final Muhammad Shoaib stunned Muzammil Murtaza in the close contest of three set game and won the match by 6-3, 4-6, 6-3. Aisam ul Haq Qureshi and Aqeel



Khan will play the men's doubles final against Barkatullah and Yousaf Khalil which will hold on Saturday (Today). **Results:** Men's Singles Semi-Finals: Aqeel Khan bt Muhammad Abid 6-3, 6-3; Muhammad Shoaib bt Muzammil Murtaza 6-3, 4-6, 6-3. Ladies Singles Quarter-Finals: Amna Ali Qayum bt Mahrukh Sajid 6-1, 6-3; Sarah Mahboob Khan bt Labika Durab 6-0, 6-0. Men's Doubles Semi-Finals: Aisam ul Haq Qureshi / Aqeel Khan bt Muzammil Murtaza / Muhammad Shoaib 6-7(3), 6-4(10-4); Barkatullah / Yousaf Khalil bt Muhammad Abid / Shahzad Khan 7-5, 6-3. Boys 18 & under Semi-Finals: Ahmed Nael Qureshi bt Hamza Roman 6-3, 6-1; Hamza Aasim bt Asadullah 6-2, 6-3. Boys 14 & under Quarter-Finals: Ruhaab Faisal bt Haziq Areejo 4-2, 4-1; Sameer Zaman bt Ansarullah 4-0, 4-0; Abdul Basit bt Haziq Aasim 4-2, 4-2; Amir Mazari Razik Sultan 4-0, 5-3.

Nawaz returned to country...

FROM PAGE 01
uplifting KP in his tenure as the prime minister," he said. He bashed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder, saying, "The former PTI chairman wanted to become the monarch by looking to introduce the presidential system in the country. The PTI founder indulged in enmity towards the state institution." Khattak said on Saturday that despite his party being relatively new, it is ready to contest the upcoming polls. Expressing his thoughts in Peshawar, the former Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) chief minister said: "The Supreme Court's verdict on Friday had ended all the rumours revolved around holding the elections. We welcome the apex court's verdict."

Israeli genocidal...

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Al-Maghazi Camp, has risen to more than 18 martyrs. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Hamas has informed the Islamic Republic that it has sufficient capabilities to continue the confrontation with Israel in the besieged Gaza Strip for months. Amir-Abdollahian said in the holy city of Qom on Thursday that more than 80 days have passed since the war on Gaza, but "the Zionist regime has not achieved anything." "According to Hamas commanders, only 14% of the resistance capacity has been damaged so far," the foreign minister said. Amir-Abdollahian said the length of Hamas tunnels today is more than the area of Gaza, and drone manufacturing workshops have not been closed for even an hour since Operation Al-Aqsa Storm on Oct. 7.

Pakistan bans New...

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that's cost thousands of lives. In a televised address, Kakar said: "Pakistani nation is in a sad state [...] so keeping in mind the situation, the Government of Pakistan has decided to ban all celebrations related to New Year's." "I appeal to all Pakistanis: show solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians and observe simplicity with the dawn of the new year," Kakar said, noting that the situation was catastrophic. Israel, determined to destroy Hamas, has launched a relentless air and ground offensive that has left vast areas of Gaza in ruins and killed at least 21,320 people, mostly women and children.

India request...

FROM PAGE 01
FO Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch had said: "This question is based on speculative reporting and we would not like to comment on speculative reports." Saeed, a headline cleric accused by the US and India of orchestrating the 2008 Mumbai attacks, has been a well-known, albeit shadowy, figure in Pakistan since the 2000s. Though his media presence has dwindled over the years, the past decade has seen Saeed in and out of the limelight owing to crack-downs by the government on his organisation Lashkar-i-Taiba (LeT) and its charity wing, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), due to mounting international pressure.

Faizabad sit-in inquiry...

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notice to the former chief of the country's top spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lt Gen (rtd) Faiz Hameed, in a case of dismissal of ex-IHC judge Shaukat Siddique. Supreme Court Chief Justice of Pakistan (SCJ) Qazi Faez Isa issued notice to former spymaster Lt Gen (rtd) Faiz Hameed and others allowing responding to serious allegations leveled by the Shaukat Siddique. The SC five-member bench heard the case and also issued notices to former IHC chief justice Anwar Kasi, Supreme Court ex-registrar Arbab Arif, and Brig Irfan Ramay.

Briefs

Argentina's union calls strike over Milei reforms

BUENOS AIRES : Argentina's main labor union on Thursday called for a general strike over President Javier Milei's reforms aimed at liberalizing the country's economy. Hector Daer, the general secretary of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), said the strike on January 24 was in protest against a decree and package of bills announced by Milei, which "go against all of society" and give the president "all public power." The libertarian Milei took office on December 10 and has taken steps to fulfill his campaign promise to slash public spending and shake up an economy crumbling under annual inflation of 160 percent. Congress is sitting in extraordinary session this week to consider a package of bills issued to give effect to a mega-decree he unveiled last week. The decree can be overturned if it is rejected by both houses of Congress. Otherwise it comes into force on Friday. The decree would change or scrap more than 350 economic regulations in a country accustomed to heavy government intervention in the market. "This decree attacks the individual rights of workers, collective rights, a universal and united health system, and an incalculable number of subjects that constitute our country," said Daer. —Agencies

Poland says unidentified object entered airspace from Ukraine

WARSAW : Poland on Friday said an unidentified object had entered its airspace from Ukraine and could be linked to a massive overnight Russian air attack on Ukraine. "The object arrived from the Ukrainian border," Colonel Jacek Goryszewski, spokesman of the operational command of the armed forces, told news channel TVN24. "There was intense shelling of Ukrainian territory at night so this incident could be linked to that." He said the violation occurred near the border city of Zamosc. The operational command said the "unidentified object" was tracked by radar "from the moment it crossed the border to the point where the signal disappeared". This happened "in the morning hours" and Poland had "activated available forces and means at its disposal". In November 2022, a Ukrainian air defence missile fell in the Polish village of Przewodow near the border, killing two civilians. —APP

Number of Filipinos seeking employment in SA doubles

MANILA: The number of Filipinos moving to Saudi Arabia for employment more than doubled in 2023 and was the highest among Gulf Cooperation Council countries, data from the Department of Migrant Workers showed on Friday. Out of nearly 1.8 million overseas Filipino workers in GCC states, more than half live and work in the Kingdom, which has for decades been their preferred overseas employment destination. Over 380,000 Philippine nationals went to work in the Kingdom this year, according to the statistics collected between January and October. In 2022, the number was about 143,850. In second place came the UAE, where more than 250,600 Filipinos sought employment in 2023, compared with nearly 166,200 last year. The two Gulf countries were followed by Hong Kong and Singapore, which are also popular destinations for Philippine expats. The total deployment of Filipinos overseas was this year much higher than in 2022, marking a recovery from the recent COVID-19 pandemic, while even more job opportunities were expected to open in 2024, DMW Officer-in-Charge Hans Leo Caccad told reporters in Manila. —APP

Zelensky boasts Ukrainian strength amid ongoing war

Ukrainian president says he heard reports from country's Internal Affairs Ministry and Security Service of Ukraine indicating 'good results'

NEWS DESK

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky boasted about his country's current resilience, strength and results on the battlefield as the 22-month war between Russia and Ukraine entered its second winter with no end in sight. "Of course, there were reports from the frontlines today - Kharkiv, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, the left bank of Kherson. Our resilience, strength and results at this very moment determine the outcome of this winter of full-scale war and our expectations for next year," Zelensky said in his address, referring to a conference call earlier in the day. Zelensky said he had a conference call in the morning on the situation following Russian shelling in Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and other regions, as well as information on efforts to eliminate its consequences. Earlier in the day, two people were killed and three others were injured by Russian forces shelling in the Zaporizhzhia region, while two people were injured in the Kherson region, according to local officials. The Ukrainian president said he had heard reports from the country's Internal Affairs Ministry and the Security Service of Ukraine

indicating "good results" in efforts against "collaborators and spotters" as well as crime prevention. "The functioning of our export corridor in the Black Sea: over 12 million tons of cargo has already been handled. The results in December are particularly remarkable, and this is evident at the level of our entire economy," he added. Zelensky said he was also informed of the current situation on the frontline, particularly in the regions of Kharkiv, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. "In the afternoon, there were also meetings. In particular, with the Minister of Defense. On the development of our Defense Forces. Specific things that need to be done. And we will. Absolutely. To maintain our strength and to have the necessary arguments in a conversation with our partners. Increasing Ukraine's capabilities and maintaining the consolidation of the world is our task," he said. Meanwhile, Ukraine also urges increased support as Russia unleashes huge air assault against Ukraine, illustrating Kyiv's desperate need for additional defence capabilities. A wave of Russian strikes, using drones and several types of missiles, battered Ukrainian cities on Friday



in one of the largest and fiercest bombardments in recent months. With civilian areas across the country hit, Ukrainian officials said the broadside shows the need for increased support from its international partners, which it is struggling to secure. At least 16 people are reported to have been killed and nearly 100 injured as Russia targeted the capital, Kyiv, the northern city of Kharkiv,

the eastern city of Dnipro, Odesa in the south and Lviv in the west. With the front line largely bogged down in trench warfare, Russia has in recent weeks returned to its tactic from last winter, during which it targeted infrastructure, especially energy and heating, leaving millions of Ukrainians struggling to stay warm. Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal noted that the barrage on Friday tar-

getted critical infrastructure. The Ministry of Energy reported that four Ukrainian regions in the north and south were facing power cuts. Missiles and drones were also reported to have hit numerous civilian sites, including residential buildings. Falling debris caused fires in a residential building and a warehouse in Kyiv and blasts were heard in Lviv, officials said. A metro station building in Kyiv being used as a shelter was damaged, Mayor Vitaliy Klitschko said on the Telegram messaging app. Twenty-two Russian strikes were recorded in Kharkiv, damaging a hospital, residential buildings and an industrial facility, Mayor Ihor Terekhov said. "We understand that four areas have been hit here in the capital, Kyiv," Al Jazeera's Ased Baig reported. "Dnipro, we've heard from the mayor there that said there are dead and injured and that the rescue teams are working. Now in the western city of Lviv, we heard two sites were hit there, and again rescue teams are working through the damage." President Volodymyr Zelensky said that overall, 110 drones and missiles were fired at Ukraine overnight, the highest number in a single night. The air force later reported that it had destroyed 114 out of 158 missiles and drone.

Turkey should benefit from anticipated LNG surge

ANKARA : Türkiye could take advantage from an expected global liquefied natural gas (LNG) production boom projected for 2025 onward, thanks to its extensive infrastructure, according to the head of the International Energy Agency (IEA). Fatih Birol, executive director of the IEA, recommended that Türkiye avail of this anticipated LNG boom that is poised to start in 2025, reported Anadolu Agency (AA). According to Birol, this LNG upsurge will come with the commissioning of new facilities in many countries that will see an unprecedented rise in LNG supplies. Advising possible deals should be made in light of this data, Birol said that after 2025, "the hand of gas importer countries will become stronger" in gas agreement negotiations. He advised that Türkiye use its vast gas infrastructure to increase gas imports for export to Europe, a region that is in great need of LNG supplies.

Should Türkiye benefit from this opportunity, he said it could also play an important role in the region's gas landscape. Türkiye has seven international natural gas pipelines, five LNG facilities, including three floating storage and regasification units (FSRU), and two underground natural gas storage facilities. This year, Türkiye signed gas supply agreements with Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. —Agencies

World population up 75 million this year

WASHINGTON : The world population grew by 75 million people over the past year and on New Year's Day it will stand at more than 8 billion people, according to figures released by the US Census Bureau on Thursday. The worldwide growth rate in the past year was just under 1 percent. At the start of 2024, 4.3 births and two deaths are expected worldwide every second, according to the Census Bureau figures. The US growth rate in the past year was 0.53 percent, about half the worldwide figure. The US added 1.7 million people and will have a population on New Year's Day of 335.8 million people. If the current pace continues through the end of the decade, the 2020s could be the slowest-growing decade in US history, yielding a growth rate of less than 4 percent over the 10-year period from 2020 to 2030, said William Frey, a demographer at The Brookings Institution. The slowest-growing decade currently was in the aftermath of the Great Depression in the 1930s, when the growth rate was 7.3 percent. "Of course growth may tick up a bit as we leave the pandemic years. But it would still be difficult to get to 7.3 percent," Frey said. —APP

Tokyo shares open higher

TOKYO : Tokyo stocks opened higher on Friday, the final trading day of the year, as investors expected further gains in 2024 while cheering overnight rises on Wall Street. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index added 0.25 percent, or 84.35 points, to 33,623.97 in early trade, while the broader Topix index rose 0.48 percent, or 11.41 points, to 2,373.43. Investors have lacked major trading cues, and many have stayed away from participating in the year-end season. After concluding this year's trading on Friday, Tokyo's markets will reopen on Thursday, January 4. The major indices did not have a clear sense of direction, said Nomura Securities. Investors in Tokyo will be closely monitoring international news during the New Year holiday week, including trading in New York and the US Congress' efforts to avoid a government shutdown, the brokerage house said. For the time being, however, Tokyo players "cannot seem to find any meaningful clues" to move the market, Nomura said. Exporter shares generally gained, following gains in New York. —Agencies

N.Korea's new nuclear reactor operational next summer

WEB DESK

SEOUL: A light-water reactor at North Korea's main nuclear complex will likely be formally operational by next summer, South Korea's defense minister said, amid suspicions that the North may use it as a new source of fissile materials for nuclear weapons. Concerns about North Korea's nuclear program deepened recently as the UN atomic agency and foreign experts said they've detected signs indicating that North Korea had begun operating its light-water reactor at the Yongbyon nuclear complex. IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said last week that his agency had observed increased levels of activity at and near the reactor and since mid-October,

ber, a strong water outflow from its cooling system. He said the reactor is "a cause for concern" because it can produce plutonium — one of the two key ingredients used to manufacture nuclear weapons, along with highly enriched uranium. The South Korean Defense Ministry said Friday that Defense Minister Shin Wonsik told local reporters a day before that his country had also spotted similar cooling system-related activities associated with the reactor last summer. Shin said the reactor appears to be in the stage of a trial operation and that it's expected to be officially operational around next summer. North Korea has long produced weapons-grade plutonium from its widely known 5-megawatt reactor

at Yongbyon. The light-water reactor would be an additional source of bomb fuels, and observers say its bigger capacity could allow it to produce more plutonium. Yongbyon has a uranium enrichment facility as well. There are questions about the reactor's reported operation, as light-water reactors are best-suited for electricity generation. Shin noted there has been no country that has used light-water reactors to produce weapons-grade plutonium. However, many observers say North Korea could adapt one at Yongbyon to produce weapons-grade plutonium. "(North Korea's) commissioning of a new light water nuclear power plant raises serious concerns, including safety," the US Mission to

the UN in Vienna said Saturday in a message posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "(North Korea's) unlawful nuclear & ballistic missile programs continue to pose a grave threat to international peace & security." Grossi also noted the North's operation of the light-water reactor violates UN Security Council resolutions. The IAEA and foreign governments rely on satellite imagery and other methods to monitor activities at Yongbyon and other suspected nuclear facilities in North Korea. The North kicked out IAEA inspectors from the country in 2009. Outside estimates on the size of North Korea's nuclear arsenal vary, ranging from 2060 to more than 100. Experts say North Korea can add six to 18 bombs each year.

Spanish PM appoints new economy minister

MADRID: Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Friday appointed Carlos Cuerdo, who currently heads the treasury department, to be his new economy minister. Cuerdo, who studied at the London School of Economics, will replace Nadia Calvino, a heavyweight in his cabinet who is leaving to head the European Investment Bank, the bloc's lending arm, whose significance has grown since war broke out in Ukraine. The 43-year-old will have to deal with the phasing out of a series of inflation relief policies in the eurozone's fourth-largest economy, including cuts to the value-added tax on electricity and subsidies for transportation, as growth slows. Sanchez praised Cuerdo as an "honest professional" with "deep knowledge of public administration and economic policy". "His predecessor set the bar very high, but I am convinced that Carlos Cuerdo will brilliantly give continuity and depth to the exceptional work done by Nadia Calvino," the Socialist premier added in a televised address. Little known in Spain, Cuerdo worked closely with Calvino, 55, who served as economy minister since Sanchez came to power in 2018. Her appointment was seen as an attempt to send a message of stability to the markets which were concerned about the new minority Socialist government's reliance on the far-left and on Basque and Catalan separatist parties to pass legislation. —DNA

UN deeply alarmed by deadly Nigeria attacks

GENEVA: The UN human rights chief said that he was "deeply alarmed" by the string of attacks on villages in central Nigeria which left nearly 200 dead, according to local authorities. Armed groups launched attacks between Saturday evening and Tuesday morning in Nigeria's Plateau State, a region plagued for several years by religious and ethnic tensions. The region is on the dividing line between Nigeria's mostly Muslim north and mainly Christian south. "I am deeply alarmed by the series of attacks by gunmen on multiple rural communities in Plateau State," said Volker Turk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a statement. "I call on the Nigerian authorities to investigate this incident promptly, thoroughly and independently, consistent with international human rights law, and to hold those responsible to account in fair trials. "The cycle of impunity fueling recurrent violence must be urgently broken. The government should also take meaningful steps to address the underlying root causes and to ensure non-recurrence of this devastating violence." Northwest and central Nigeria have been long terrorized by bandit militias operating from bases deep in forests and raiding villages to loot and kidnap residents for ransom. Competition for natural resources between nomadic herders and farmers, intensified by rapid population growth and climate pressures, has also exacerbated social tensions and sparked violence. A jihadist conflict has raged in northeastern Nigeria since 2009, killing tens of thousands of people and displacing around two million, as Boko Haram battles for supremacy with rivals linked to the Daesh group. —DNA



MALÉ : Muhammad Fayyaz Gilani, High Commissioner had the pleasure of meeting H.E. Ibrahim Waheed, Minister of Youth Empowerment, Information and Arts, Maldives. Both sides discussed ways to enhance the cooperation in the relevant fields. —DNA

Venezuela launches military exercise over British warship 'threat'

Guyana and Venezuela have been engaged in a years-long dispute over their borders in oil-rich territory

FOREIGN DESK

CARACAS : Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro on ordered more than 5,600 military personnel to participate in a "defensive" exercise near the border with Guyana, in response to Britain sending a warship to the area. Maduro said he was launching "a joint action of a defensive nature in response to the provocation and threat of the United Kingdom against peace and the sovereignty of our country." Britain said Sunday it would divert the patrol vessel HMS Trent to Guyana, a former British colony, amid the South American country's simmering territorial dispute with neighboring Venezuela over the oil-rich Essequibo region. A Guyana foreign ministry source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told

AFP the ship was due to arrive Friday and would be in its territory for "less than a week" for open sea defense exercises. The ship will not dock in Georgetown. The television broadcast accompanying Maduro's announcement showed fighter jets participating in the Venezuelan exercise, as well as ships and ocean patrol vessels. The Venezuelan government earlier asked Guyana, in a statement, "to take immediate action for the withdrawal of the HMS Trent, and to refrain from involving military powers in the territorial controversy." Guyana President Irfaan Ali sought to soothe tensions, saying Thursday that "neither Venezuela nor any other State has anything to fear from activities within Guyana's sovereign territory or waters." "We harbor no ambitions or intentions to covet what does not belong to us. We are fully commit-

ted to peaceful relations with our neighbors and all countries in our Region," he said in a statement on Facebook, sending "best wishes to the people of Venezuela, our neighbors." Guyana Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo said earlier that the HMS Trent's visit was part of "long-planned" and "routine" measures



to build the country's defenses. "We are warriors" - Maduro claims that Essequibo - which makes up about two-thirds of Guyana's territory - is actually Venezuelan land, a decades-old contention that has flared since massive oil deposits were found in its waters. The rising tensions have raised fears in the region of a potential conflict over the remote area of 160,000 square kilometers (62,000 square miles). The South American neighbors, during a meeting between Maduro and Ali earlier this month, agreed not to resort to force to settle the dispute. "We believe in diplomacy, in dialogue, in peace," said Maduro. "But no one should threaten Venezuela, no one should mess with Venezuela. We are a people of peace, but we are warriors and this threat is unacceptable for any sovereign country," he said. "The threat

of the decadent, rotten, ex-empire of the United Kingdom is unacceptable." A UK foreign minister, David Rutley, visited Guyana earlier this month and reiterated sovereign borders "must be respected" and that London would work internationally "to ensure the territorial integrity of Guyana is upheld." Maduro's government held a controversial referendum on December 3 in which 95 percent of voters, according to officials in the hard-line leftist government, supported declaring Venezuela the rightful owner of Essequibo. He has since started legal maneuvers to create a Venezuelan province in Essequibo and ordered the state oil company to issue licenses for extracting crude in the region. Guyana's Ali has branded the moves a "grave threat to international peace and security."

Briefs

**Turkiye
detains 29
people with
suspected
Daesh ties**

DNA

ISTANBUL: Turkish authorities have detained 29 people suspected of having ties to militant group Daesh in operations across nine provinces, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said on Friday. Suspects captured in "Operation Heroes-37" on Friday were planning to attack churches and synagogues in Istanbul, Yerlikaya said on social media platform X. Citing security sources, Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency said three other suspects linked to the 29 detainees had been captured in the operations as well. It said the three were senior members of Islamic State, and added that one was planning an attack on the Iraqi Embassy in Ankara. Anadolu did not provide any further details on the suspects or the operations. Authorities have ramped up operations against Islamic State and Kurdish militants in recent weeks, after Kurdish militants detonated a bomb near government buildings in Ankara on Oct. 1.

**Yemen warns
foreign military
forces against
supporting
Israel**

SANA'A: Yemen's defense minister has warned regional military forces against offering support to the Israeli regime and securing passage of Israeli-owned ships or vessels bound to Israeli ports in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea waters. Speaking at a graduation ceremony of Yemeni cadets in the country's western coastal city of Hudaydah on Thursday, Major General Mohammed al-Atifi, warned the forces "against various movements in support of the Zionist entity in the maritime theatre that spans between the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea."

He noted that Yemeni Armed Forces "are closely and rigorously monitoring the movement of American, British and French military forces in both bodies of water." He underscored that the Ansarullah resistance movement, the Sana'a-based National Salvation Government, the Yemeni nation, and security forces will stand unwaveringly by the side of Palestinians until they liberate all their occupied lands, and establish a sovereign independent state with holy al-Quds as its capital. Yemen's Armed Forces in a statement on Tuesday announced targeting a ship as it was heading towards the occupied territories as well as regions deep inside those areas in support of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, who are subject to an unrelenting genocidal Israeli war. - Agencies

Donald Trump blocked from Maine presidential ballot

Maine now joins Colorado as the two states to ban Mr Trump from the ballot. The decisions increase pressure on US Supreme Court to weigh

NEWS DESK

Washington: Maine's top election official has ruled that Donald Trump cannot run for president next year in the state, citing a constitutional insurrection clause. Secretary of State Shenna Bellows said Mr Trump was not eligible because of his actions leading up to the US Capitol riot in 2021. Maine now joins Colorado as the two states to ban Mr Trump from the ballot. The decisions increase pressure on the US Supreme Court to weigh in. Colorado votes reliably Democratic, however Maine is more politically competitive and would be more significant for Mr Trump - the Republican frontrunner - to lose. The Trump campaign has already said it will lodge an appeal in the state's courts against the Maine ruling, which won't take effect while the legal process plays out. Hours after Maine's decision, California - America's most populous state - announced that Mr Trump would remain on the Republican primary ballot there. Courts in other states, including Michigan and Minnesota, have also recently dismissed efforts to block Mr Trump from running as a candidate. It is likely that the Supreme Court will make the ultimate decision as to whether Mr Trump can run for president or whether he is ineligible because of a Civil War-era amendment to the US Constitution. Mrs Bellows' 34-page ruling says Mr Trump must be removed from Maine's Republican primary ballot because of the 14th Amendment - which bans anyone who has "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" from holding federal office. In her order, Mrs Bellows, a Democrat, says that Mr Trump "over the course of several months and culminating on January 6, 2021, used a false narrative of election fraud to inflame his supporters and direct them to the Capitol". She added that his "occasional requests that rioters be peaceful and support law enforcement do not immunize his actions". Speaking to media after her ruling, Mrs Bellows said it was her duty to uphold election laws in her state, and that she hoped



the "Supreme Court will settle this matter nationwide". "I'm mindful that no secretary of state has ever deprived a presidential candidate of ballot access based on section three of the 14th Amendment. But I'm also mindful that no presidential candidate has, ever before, engaged in insurrection." She denied her decision was politically motivated, saying it was "thorough and based on the rule of law". Mr Trump faces upcoming trials in federal court and in the state of Georgia related to his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden. He has not been charged with inciting insurrection in either case. His campaign swiftly criticised Mrs Bellows' decision, having previously called for her to recuse herself from the process. Campaign spokesman Steven Cheung called Mrs Bellows "a hyper-partisan Biden-supporting Democrat" and claimed she was engaging in "election interference". He added that the campaign would "quickly file a legal objection in state court to prevent this atrocious decision in Maine from taking effect". Mr Trump's Republican rivals for the presidency also criticised Maine's decision. Florida governor Ron DeSantis said Maine's ruling "opens up

Pandora's Box", suggesting Republican secretaries of state could try to disqualify President Joe Biden over the issue of migrants at the southern border. "I don't think that this ultimately will be legally sustained by the US Supreme Court. But I do think that this is going to be a constant throughout the election year, where there's going to be different parts of these legal cases that are going to be front and centre," he told Fox News. Vivek Ramaswamy said "this is what an actual threat to democracy looks like". Writing on X, formerly Twitter, he restated that he would "withdraw from any state's ballot that ultimately removes Trump from its ballot". Mr Trump's 2024 presidential candidacy has been challenged in multiple states, on the grounds that the 14th Amendment bans him from holding office. The 14th amendment was ratified after the American Civil War in order to block Confederate secessionists from returning to power after southern states re-joined the Union. Colorado's ban was the first instance of the Constitution being used to disqualify a presidential candidate but legal experts say the Colorado ruling will have a tough time standing up when it reaches the conservative-leaning US Supreme Court. Media caption, Watch: Trump says indictments are "badge of honour" at campaign event following his removal from Colorado ballot The case to remove Donald Trump from the upcoming Republican primary contest in Maine - part of the process where Republican voters choose their candidate for president - was brought by a handful of former Maine lawmakers who argued that the former president had violated his oath of office. Former federal prosecutor Joe Moreno told media he believed there was "no way this holds up". "It's breathtakingly arrogant for her to unilaterally decide that someone has committed insurrection," Moreno said about Mrs Bellows' ruling. "This will create a political furor... that's the unfortunate outcome here," he said. It all leads to a Supreme Court showdown - which Mr Moreno said should take place "rapidly" to stop more states from individually determining Trump's eligibility.

Russia unleashes biggest-ever barrage on Ukraine

KIEV: Russia launched 122 missiles and 36 drones against Ukrainian targets on Friday, according to officials. At least 22 civilians were killed across the country according to a Ukrainian airforce official, who said it was the biggest aerial barrage of the 22-month war. Most of the incoming missiles and drones were shot down - but scores of people were reported injured. An unknown number were buried under the rubble of hit buildings. Zelenskyy said the Kremlin's forces used a wide variety of weapons, including ballistic and cruise missiles. Air Force commander Mykola Oleshchuk wrote on his official Telegram channel: "The most massive aerial attack" since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. According to the Ukrainian Air Force, the previous biggest assault was in November 2022 when Russia launched 96 missiles against Ukraine. This year, the biggest was 81 missiles on March 9, air force records show. The roughly 18-hour onslaught that began on Thursday and continued through the night hit six cities, including the capital Kyiv, and other areas from east to west Ukraine, according to authorities. - Agencies

Anti-Pakistan rumour mill in full gear on social media: COAS

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir has said that social media is rife with fabricated claims against the state of Pakistan as he came down hard on anti-national elements. "Social media is being used to create an environment of chaos, despair, and panic. Through fake news, an impression is being created that the state is losing its [writ], the army chief said in an address to the National Farmers Convention in Islamabad on Friday. Like many countries, Pakistan is also grappling with the growing challenge of fake news on social media - masquerading as truths and spreading like wildfire. The reports, despite being unfounded, are fuelled by emotional appeals and designed to exist societal divisions. A detailed report issued earlier this year by EU DisinfoLab showed that Indian media outlets have also been part of a smear campaign against Pakistan by quoting non-existent organisations, journalists, and bloggers. This is not restricted to other states being involved in smear campaigns

against Pakistan and its institutions, but investigations have also revealed that a political party - the Imran Khan-led PTI - was also involved in using state resources for spreading false propaganda against state institutions. In his address to the farmers, the army chief further said that "rumours" and "negative impressions" were being spread about Pakistan. "But you should know that only two states were established on the bases of the Kalima: the state of Madina and Pakistan," COAS Munir said, emphasising divine backing to the country. He added that Pakistan is rich in resources; it has glaciers, rivers, mountains, and fertile land that produces some of the world's best rice, fruits like kinnow and mangoes, and treasures like granite, gold, and copper. In the 1960s, he said, Pakistan was one of the fastest-growing countries in Asia, but "we forgot the three golden principles of the Quid-i-Azam - faith, unity, and discipline - which is why we saw a decline". Moving on, Gen Munir said that agriculture and animal husbandry were professions of almost every prophet because they included discipline, hardship, growth, and patience, which resulted in countless rewards. - DNA

MQM's Raza Haroon, Anis Advocate join PPP's ranks

Zardari welcomes former members of MQM Rabita Committee ahead of Feb 8 elections

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Senior politicians formerly associated with Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Raza Haroon and Anees Advocate, along with their comrades joined the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) on Friday, as electioneering picks up pace ahead of the February 8 general elections. The announcement of their affiliation with the PPP came after the duo met former president and party's co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari in Karachi. Haroon, who also served as a provincial minister, earlier joined former Karachi mayor Mustafa Kamal's Pak Sarzameen Party (PSP) in 2016, but later left this faction as well. On the other hand, Anees was also an MQM dissident who joined PSP in 2016. An official statement issued by the PPP on this occasion said that Zardari welcomed Haroon and Anees, who were former

members of MQM's Rabita Committee, to the party. The politicians discussed the "charter of Karachi" regarding the development, establishment of peace and security, and friendly environment in the port city during the meeting. "[Former] president Asif Ali Zardari said that the PPP's Charter of Karachi will have a far-reaching impact on the future of the city. He said that the PPP is the party of the people of Karachi. We are working to restore the lights which were taken away by the rivals of peace and the merchants of hate," the statement read. On the occasion, the ex-president mentioned the PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's 10-point election agenda, saying that the PPP will bring such developmental projects for Karachi and every other city and town of Pakistan after coming into power, which will provide relief to the common man in this time of inflation. As the country is about to stage its national-level polls next year in February, the PPP kickstarted the election campaign, with a 10-point agenda laid out by Bilawal on December 27. Pledging to introduce policies that prioritise people's welfare, the ex-foreign minister announced the plan, which his party is to enforce if they are voted into power by the people in the upcoming polls.

DCs' detention powers under 3-MPO declared 'illegal'

Powers should be restricted to just the federal cabinet, states high court

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: In a sigh of relief for the former ruling party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday declared the powers vested in the deputy commissioners to send anyone to jail under Section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) illegal. In recent days, a number of PTI leaders and workers, including the party's Vice Chairman Shah and senior leader Shehryar Afridi, were arrested under the 3-MPO. The PTI, however, sees the police actions as a denial of a level playing field in the run-up to the February 8 general elections. A single bench of IHC comprising Justice Babar Sattar reserved the verdict on November 23 on two separate petitions moved by PTI leaders Shehryar Afridi and Shandana Gulzar against their detention orders under 3 MPO. In the verdict announced today, the court ruled that the Islamabad deputy commissioner did not have the powers to issue 3-MPO and stated that the powers should be vested in just the federal cabinet. Declaring Section 18 of the 3-MPO 1980 illegal, the court wrapped up the PTI leaders' pleas. It is pertinent to mention here that the duo was taken into custody under Section 3 of the MPO in connection with their alleged involvement in the May 9 riots, which were triggered after the arrest of PTI founder Imran Khan.

'Pakistan's current economic model not working'

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's current economic model was not working, World Bank Country Director Najib Benhassine has said, underlining that the country needs to overhaul its economy and focus on generating alternative electricity instead of through expensive. The remarks by Benhassine came in an article, published in the latest UNDP publication. In his article, he portrayed a dismal picture of the economy, saying that the country lagged behind its peers, while the reduction in poverty had started reversing. He regretted that the benefits of growth had been limited to the elite. There had been a growing perception that policy change was necessary and defects in agriculture and energy sectors should be removed, he said. However, he warned that past experience showed that reforms were blocked. - DNA

Iran executes four accused of sabotage, links to Israel's Mossad

Intelligence put group under close surveillance for at least four months, from around Jan 2022 until their arrest

FOREIGN DESK

TEHRAN: Iran executed on Friday four people, including a woman, whom it accused of being "saboteurs" with links to Israel's Mossad intelligence service, the Mizan news agency affiliated to the judiciary said. The executions took to five the number of people put to death this month in a decades-long shadow war that has seen Iran accuse Israel of attacks on its nuclear effort, charges the latter has never confirmed or denied. "Four members of a sabotage team associated with the Zionist regime ... were executed this morning following legal procedures," the news agency said, accusing them of "extensive" actions, guided by Mossad officers, targeting Iran's security. Friday's executions in West Azerbaijan province followed Iran's mid-December execution of a fifth accused Mossad agent in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan. The semi-official Tasnim news agency identified the four executed on Friday as Vafa Hanareh, Aram Omari, and Rahman Parhaz, along with the woman, named Nasim Namazi. They were the principal convicts in a case that involved 10 offenders, it added, but

Syria repels Israeli aggression near Damascus

DAMASCUS: Syrian air defenses have intercepted most Israeli missiles near the country's capital city of Damascus, amid an upsurge in the regime's acts of aggression against the Arab nation following the bloody onslaught against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip. "At around 11:55 p.m. local time (2055 GMT) on Thursday, the Israeli enemy carried out an aerial attack from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights, and targeted a number of sites in the southern flank of Damascus," the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) quoted an unnamed military source as saying. The source added that Syrian air defenses shot down most of the missiles. The report noted that there were no injuries in the strike, but there were material losses. The strike comes a day after Damascus International Airport reopened following repeated Israeli strikes. Israel waged the bloody war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement launched Operation al-Aqsa Storm in the occupied territories in retaliation for the Tel Aviv regime's incessant crimes against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. - Agencies

it was not immediately clear if the rest would also face execution. The official IRNA news agency posted a video clip nearly eight minutes in length, that showed the men confessing to their alleged co-operation with a Mossad officer in neighbouring Turkey, who used two names, Tony and Arash. It said their mission entailed kidnappings, threat-

ening and setting fire to vehicles and homes of unnamed targets and stealing their mobile phones. Iranian intelligence put the group under close surveillance for at least four months, from around January 2022 until their arrest sometime that May, when they were "transferred from a neighbouring country" to Iran, the video clip showed.