



# Islamabad POST

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**Tokayev emphasizes Russia's crucial role in global issues**

Detailed News On Page-07

**Zartaj Gul issues apology over May 9**

Detailed News On Page-08



**Minaur breaks Djokovic's 6-year winning streak**

Detailed News On Page-06



## Soleimani's 4th anniversary

# Terrorist blasts in Iran leave over 103 dead

Iran's Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei vowed the perpetrators and those responsible for attack will be swiftly hunted down and brought to justice

CENTRELINE REPORT

TEHRAN: Hundreds of people have been killed and injured in two terrorist blasts near the burial site of Iran's General Qassem Soleimani in the city of Kerman during a ceremony marking his fourth martyrdom anniversary. Iran's emergency organization said that the explosions left 103 people dead and 188 more injured. Medical services said the death toll is expected to rise as ambulances were taking the wounded to hospitals, with Babak Yektafarast, deputy head of Iran's Emergency Organization, saying that some of the injured are in critical condition. According to Iranian state news agency, the first explosion occurred some 700 meters from the grave of General Soleimani and the second one about one kilometer away. Iranian media cited unnamed sources as saying that two bags loaded with explosives which were remotely detonated caused the explosions. IRNA also quoted an informed source as saying two bombed bags detonated by remote control caused the explosions. The first explosion occurred at 14:50 local time. The second one took place 10 minutes later, according Kerman Mayor Saeed Tabrizi, ISNA reported. Iran's Red Crescent Society said three rescuers were killed by the second blast. Some people were injured during a crowd crush following the first explosion. Officials say all the injured have been transferred to hospitals and the situation is under control. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi told the Islamic Republic of Iran's News Network that a crushing response will soon be given to the culprits. He said the bombing attacks were a continuation of various plots to kill innocent civilians at

Continued on Page 06

## Pakistan strongly condemns terrorist attack in Kerman

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has strongly condemned the dastardly terrorist attack that took place earlier today in the Martyrs Cemetery of the provincial capital of Kerman, Iran, resulting in large number of deaths and injuries. We extend heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and pray for the swift recovery of the injured. Pakistan stands in full solidarity with the Government and brotherly people of Iran in this hour of grief and tragedy. Pakistan believes that terrorism is a menace and threat to regional and global peace and security. It needs to be confronted through bilateral and regional cooperation.



Government and brotherly people of Iran in this hour of grief and tragedy. Pakistan believes that terrorism is a menace and threat to regional and global peace and security. It needs to be confronted through bilateral and regional cooperation.



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Foreign Minister, Jalil Abbas Jilani meets with Mullah Shirin, Governor of Kandahar and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to continued engagement & mutually beneficial ties with Afghanistan. – DNA

## FM Jilani meets Afghan Taliban official

FM reaffirms commitment to 'mutually beneficial ties' with Afghanistan

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: In a meeting with senior Afghan Taliban official Mullah Shirin Akhund on Wednesday, interim Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to "continued engagement and mutually beneficial ties with Afghanistan". In a post on social media platform (X), FM Jilani said he had a "productive meeting" with Akhund, who is the governor of Kandahar and the strategic intelligence deputy of the Afghan defence ministry. "Also stressed imperatives of addressing all issues to harness full potential for trade and connectivity," he said. Earlier in the day, the Afghan embassy said that the sixth meeting of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Coordination Committee would take place in Islamabad today. It said that Akhund would be leading the Afghan delegation. "During this meeting, as a follow-up to previous sessions, participants will engage in discussions and make essential decisions concerning the resolution of potential conflicts along the Durand Line and the establishment of essential facilities for people on both sides," it had said. Akhund, a key figure in the Afghan Taliban, has played various roles in the group's military and political spheres. His close ties to the senior leadership and involvement in significant Taliban activities make him a prominent and influential member of the Afghan rulers' leadership structure. He has previously been engaging with Pakistan and is known to have liaised with

Continued on Page 06

## Party to knock SC door

# No 'bat' for PTI as PHC restores ECP order

PTI witnessing 'worst-ever' discrimination, says Chairman Gohar Khan

SAID ALAM KHAN

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) on Wednesday revoked the stay order granted by its single-member bench, restoring the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decision to declare PTI intra-party polls null and void and stripping it of its election symbol – bat. A single-member bench comprising Justice Ejaz Khan announced the verdict that the court had reserved hours earlier. Election commission's lawyer Sikander Bashir Mohmand and PTI's legal team – comprising Advocates Shah Faisal Uthmankhel and Qazi Anwar – appeared in the courtroom. In its six-page order, the PHC noted that its earlier verdict had "prima facie created hindrance in the smooth process of the election which is to be conducted by the ECP". "...the interim order of this court passed in favour of the PTI is hereby recalled and consequently the Election Commission of Pakistan is directed to proceed with the

Continued on Page 06

## Level playing field SC issues notices to Punjab IG, CS

SC seeks detailed report in missing persons case

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued notices to the Punjab Inspector General of Police (IGP), chief secretary and advocate general on Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) petition seeking level-playing field ahead of the February 8 general elections. A three-member bench led by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice Musrat Hilali heard the matter and adjourned

Continued on Page 06

## Japan quake toll rises to 62

More than 31,800 people were in shelters, and at least 200 buildings had collapsed, with the number expected to rise, the government said

AGENCIES

TOKYO: Japanese rescuers scrambled to search for survivors on Wednesday as authorities warned of landslides from heavy rain after a powerful earthquake that killed at least 62 people. The 7.5-magnitude quake on January 1 that rattled Ishikawa prefecture on the main island of Honshu triggered tsunami waves more than a metre high, sparked a major fire and tore apart roads. The Noto Peninsula on the Sea of Japan coast was most severely hit, with buildings ravaged by fire and houses flattened in several towns, including Waji-

Continued on Page 06

## Briefs

### Mohsin Dawar survives gun attack

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Former member of National Assembly and National Democratic Movement (NDM) leader Mohsin Dawar's convoy came under a gun attack by terrorists in Tappi village North Waziristan on Wednesday. North Waziristan DPO Rohan Zaib confirmed to Geo News about the attack but noted that the politician remained safe due to the law enforcers deployed for his security. He said that the security personnel accompanying Dawar fired back at the assailants, which forced them to flee from the scene. According to the police, several gunshots were fired at Dawar's convoy but he remained safe because his car was bulletproof.

### PHC grants Zartaj Gul transit bail

SAID ALAM

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Zartaj Gul on Wednesday was granted bail by the Peshawar High Court Chief Justice. The court directed the police not to arrest her. Earlier, Speaking to journalists at the Peshawar High Court, as she appeared before the PHC for the hearing of her plea for a transit bail, the former climate change minister apologised over riots that erupted after the arrest of PTI founder Imran Khan on May 9, 2023, during which protesters targeted and vandalised security installations.

## Revival of economy Army Chief assures full support to govt

The PM directed all the stakeholders to vigorously pursue the various initiatives of SIFC to ensure their completion within the stipulated period

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The eighth meeting of the Apex Committee of the Special Investment Facilitation Council was held in Islamabad. The Chief of Army Staff, Federal Cabinet, Provincial Chief Ministers and high-level government officials participated in the meeting chaired by Caretaker Prime Minister Anwar-ul-Haq Kakar. Various Federal Ministries briefed the meeting regarding progress on projects in key sectors and timely completion of expected investments. The Army Chief assured the unwavering commitment of the Pakistan Army to support the government's initiatives for economic recovery of the country. Finally, the Prime Minister directed all the stakeholders to vigorously pursue the various initiatives of SIFC to ensure their completion within the stipulated period.

## Hamas leader's killing raises fears of wider war

The EU foreign policy chief says the international community must impose a solution to Israel's war on Gaza as both sides are unable to come to terms

NEWS DESK

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 89 on Wednesday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound and level whole blocks and homes and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza last night and on Wednesday morning, killing and injuring dozens of citizens. According to local sources, at least 15 civilians were massacred in successive Israeli attacks on Khan Yunis in southern Gaza in the morning. A child was also killed after the Israeli army bombed the entrance of a school in Jabalia. Red Crescent crews were also able to retrieve four bodies of civilians from the bombed Hamad City in western Khan Yunis. An Israeli attack on a house belonging to the family of Nahhal in

Continued on Page 06

## ECP indicts Imran, Fawad in contempt case

MEHTAB PIRZADA

RAWALPINDI: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Wednesday indicted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and former information minister Fawad Chaudhry in a case of contempt against the electoral body and the chief election commissioner. A four-member bench of the electoral body, headed by Sindh Member Nisar Ahmad Durani, conducted the hearing of the case in Adiala jail, where both the leaders are incarcerated. The former

Continued on Page 06

## Yemen claims fresh attack on Israel-bound vessel

AGENCIES

SANA'A: The spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces says the country's military has launched missiles targeting a cargo ship in the Red Sea as the vessel was heading towards a port in the Israeli-occupied territories to offload its cargo. Brigadier General Yahya Saree said in a statement on Wednesday that CMA CGM TAGE vessel was targeted after its crew members ignored calls from Yemeni naval units as well as warning shots. He underlined that Yemeni forces will continue to block passage of Israeli-owned and Israel-bound ships in

Continued on Page 06

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# Under-training ASPs meet CM Punjab

CM emphasised the need to change 'thana' culture, abandon the archaic policing system and embrace the new era of policing to serve the public better

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Around 34 under-training ASPs of the 50th common training programme at the Pakistan Police Academy called on Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi at his office, here on Wednesday. Addressing them, the CM emphasised the need to change 'thana' culture, abandon the archaic policing system and embrace the new era of policing to serve the public better. He highlighted that good conduct towards citizens and effective policing are the hallmarks of a successful police officer, making their tasks easier. He emphasized that Islamic teachings and basic human values encourage positive interactions with the public. The CM stressed the importance of maintaining a positive reputation and building a successful career through improved public handling and effective policing. Mohsin Naqvi urged police and administrative officers to pay attention to resolving the issues faced by citizens. He encouraged young police officers to engage in positive interactions with the public, demonstrating good behavior and dedication to problem-solving. He emphasized that both public handling and policing skills are equally essential, with a 50 percent focus on

each. Furthermore, he advised police officers to exhibit good behavior towards citizens, seniors, and visitors, and to handle situations that cannot be resolved according to the law with patience and empathy. He praised the efforts of district police officer (DPO) Dera Ghazi Khan, who won the hearts of the public through open kitchen sessions, showcasing the positive impact a police officer could have on the community. Discussing his efforts for departmental reforms, CM Naqvi added that over 20,000 policemen have been promoted in the past 11 months. He also highlighted the promotions of more than 40,000 officers and employees in various departments. The CM announced plans to upgrade 737 police stations, with 36 already completed. He also mentioned resolving the issue of government land allocation for 150 tented police stations in 11 months and asserted that every police station will be established on state land. Addressing the challenges faced in upholding the rule of law, Naqvi acknowledged the difficulties in enforcing certain laws but stressed the importance of maintaining good behavior and conduct. He expressed concern about individuals driving without licenses, citing a recent incident in which six family members lost their lives due to an underage driver in the DHA area. Con-

sequently, he announced strict action against individuals driving without licenses. The chief minister also shared achievements in traffic management, revealing a significant reduction in the time it takes to issue driving licenses. Earlier, 245 licenses were generated in Lahore every day, now 3 licenses are generated per second. During the last '60s or '70s, there were 6.5 million driving licenses, now their number has increased to 11.5 million; he remarked and noted that 200 crores have been earmarked for the police martyrs' families. Meanwhile, CTD and elite police training schools have been upgraded as well. Patrolling police has also done a good job for axle-load management. He highlighted cost savings in the construction of safe city projects in Faisalabad, Gujranwala, and Rawalpindi, underscoring the commitment to fiscal responsibility. The CM announced that 4.9 billion rupees will be spent to construct safe city projects in 18 other cities. It is hoped that safe city projects will be inaugurated in 21 districts by Jan 31. Alongside this, he highlighted the ongoing construction of a new GOR for the police comprising 313 houses and apartments being constructed at the Qurban Lines. He commended the reduction in crime rates by 30 percent and the high public satisfaction rate of 97% with police performance.



ISLAMABAD: In response to the biting cold wave currently enveloping the capital, resilient citizens have gathered around warming fires, seeking solace and comfort in the midst of the chilly weather.—Mudassar Raja

## Ulema call for religious harmony, tolerance and peace

QUETTA : Ulema and religious scholars at the Pakistan Aman Conference on Wednesday called for religious harmony, tolerance and peace in line with the teachings of Islam. "Islam is a religion of peace that teaches respect for humanity, religious harmony, tolerance and a society free from violence," Majlis Ulema Pakistan Chairman Maulana Abdul Khair Azad while chairing the conference, organized by the Majlis Ulema Pakistan at the Quetta Press Club. Maulana Azad, who is also Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Chairman, said that Pakistan was united and would always remain united. He said the nefarious designs of the enemy against the country had failed with the strong support of the mosque and the pulpit through promoting the 'Paigham-e-Pakistan'. The enemy powers wanted to weaken Pakistan by creating chaos, but "we will not allow their evil agenda to succeed," he vowed. Maulana Azad said the armed forces and security agencies had strengthened the defence of the homeland by rendering unprecedented sacrifices. All scholars and the entire nation stand with their brave armed forces and security agencies for the security and safety of Pakistan. "It is a great statement and Fatwa, which the scholars and the great Sheikhs will make the voice of every house through the pulpit and mehrab (the mosque and the pulpit), will make it (Pakistan) stable," Maulana Azad said.—APP

## CDA safeguards capital's natural beauty

ISLAMABAD : Under the direction of Chief Commissioner Islamabad and Chairman CDA Capt. (R) Anwar ul Haq, concrete and effective measures have been taken to protect the natural beauty of Islamabad from environmental pollution and smog. In this regard, the Enforcement Wing on Tuesday conduct a mega operation against the owners of the plastic factory in Islamabad's Sector I-13, Shams Colony, whose smoke was causing environmental pollution in the area. The owners were summoned and presented in the court of Senior Special Magistrate CDA.

The Senior Special Magistrate ordered the factories of the accused to be sealed immediately and sentenced the accused to imprisonment and fine and remanded in custody. According to the details, Chief Commissioner Islamabad and Chairman CDA had issued strict instructions to the Enforcement, Environment and Sanitation Wing a few days ago to take immediate action against those responsible for keeping the natural beauty of Islamabad free from environmental pollution and smog. The operation should be carried out without discrimination and without interruption,

otherwise departmental action will be taken against the concerned officials. Moreover, the two suspects who planted sand and gravel piles in the green areas were also ordered to be taken into custody by the police and sentenced to imprisonment and fine. On this occasion, the CDA administration said that no one will be allowed to destroy the natural scenery and beauty of Islamabad and also not allowed to play lives with the citizens of the Islamabad and whoever does this is destined for prison, no matter how effective he is.—DNA

## Pakistani workers sent abroad via official channels

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Pakistani workforce would be sent abroad through the agreed-upon channels under the supervision of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development and no body would be allowed to use illegal ways to go abroad for a job or business. An official source told APP here on Wednesday, he said that a well-educated and skilled workforce could play a vital role in the social development of the country to boost the fragile current economic situation of the state. The government was committed and took various steps to provide

and ensure the International Labour Organization (ILO) pattern rights to all Pakistani mine workers as soon as possible. He said that all concerned departments would ensure the true implementation of the rights of workers. So far, MOUs have been signed with about sixteen countries regarding employment in the Pakistani workforce. Some have more contracts under consideration. Going abroad illegally should be discouraged. Taking the illegal route is not only wasting money but also facing difficulties. To a question, he said that the OPF Regional Office Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has received a total of 151

complaints so far, out of which 114 have been resolved so far. Most of the complaints were related to lands and law and order. There is a need for awareness among people regarding overseas. The shortage of staff in OPF schools will be met in any case. OPF schools will be opened in North and South Waziristan. For the first time in history, four years of pending funds have been cleared with the full support of the Ministry of Overseas and HRD. In the year 2022-23, educational scholarships of 794.86 million to 3399 students, marriage grants of 122.8 million to 644 persons and death grants of 73.7 million to 130 persons have been provided.

## Zong 4G achieves CMMI maturity level 3

ISLAMABAD : Pakistan's leading telecom operator Zong 4G celebrates the attainment of Maturity Level 3 (ML3) of the prestigious Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) by ISACA. CMMI is a well-recognized framework for enhancing software development practices. The CMMI Maturity Level Appraisal represents a validated collection of best global practices that urge organizations to establish and measure essential capabilities, addressing prevalent business challenges. It aims at empowering organizations to consistently deliver high-quality products. By delivering consistent, high-quality software solutions, Zong is establishing itself as a leader in the digital landscape. This achievement marks a benchmark for Zong's digital journey and will also enhance its competitive edge. Zong's commitment to excellence extends beyond internal processes. The company actively invests in nurturing its talent pool, fostering a culture of innovation, and embracing cutting-edge technologies. This unwavering dedication positions Zong as a driving force in Pakistan's digital revolution. Appreciating this accomplishment, the official Spokesperson for Zong 4G stated, "This recent achievement is an outcome of the exceptional hard work and dedication exhibited by Zong 4G's team to ensure the enhancement of digital technology in Pakistan. We are confident in our capability to provide world-class software services and solutions always.—APP

## Cigarette industry drains Rs 567 billion potential revenue

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The pervasive influence of Pakistan's cigarette industry on policymaking has not only exacted a toll on both the nation's financial well-being and public health, but also caused a staggering Rs 567 billion loss in revenue over the last decade. The alarming loss of revenue was unearthed through a comprehensive study delving into the dynamics of the cigarette sector and scrutinizing Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) data by the SDPI. According to a study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) the total costs attributable to smoking-related diseases and deaths in Pakistan for 2019 reached an additional Rs 615.07 billion (\$3.85 billion), with in-

direct costs (morbidity and mortality) making up 70% of the total cost. However, the cigarette industry managed to influence decision making, which not only resulted in Rs 567 billion loss in potential revenue but also put extra burden on the country's fragile healthcare system, the SDPI study reveals. In its report titled "Pakistan: Overview of Tobacco Use, Tobacco Control Legislation, and Taxation", the World Bank has also revealed that the decline in government revenue in the 2016-2017 fiscal year was carefully planned by the powerful cigarette industry. The study brings attention to the influence of multinational companies and the introduction of a three-tier excise duty structure, raising concerns about tax evasion and its adverse effects on public health. The intricate

examination of associated factors indicates that safeguarding revenue streams while prioritizing public health requires a careful reevaluation of tax policies, it said. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the need to safeguard tobacco tax policies from vested interests of cigarette companies for effective development, implementation, and enforcement of public health initiatives. However, it did not happen in Pakistan, the study said. The study also highlighted how high and middle-income countries successfully imposed high taxes on cigarette products to decrease consumption and increase government revenues, but the fact remains that Pakistan still lacks a clear strategy on using cigarette taxation and prices as a public health tool.

## 10,000 E-Rozgar centers launch on January 11t

ISLAMABAD : Caretaker Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunications Dr. Umar Saif Wednesday disclosed that the government would initiate a project to establish 10,000 countrywide E-Rozgar centers equipped with the latest facilities to facilitate freelancers and start-ups from January 11. This historic initiative was aimed to address the current challenge faced by approximately 1.5 million freelancers who lacked suitable workspaces, he mentioned while speaking in an exclusive interview

with a Private news channel. The freelancers equipped with the tools and environment to thrive in the digital landscape is need of the hour, he further added. He explained that the establishment of joint e-centers will increase investment in the country and create new employment opportunities. Dr Umar also urged the youth to become entrepreneurs as they could easily earn more stipends per month through E-Rozgar. Replying to a question, the minister said from January 7 another project would be initiated

to introduce a standardized test for IT graduates through the Higher Education Commission to gauge their skills and offer them internships after passing the Test. "Those who pass the test will be given a mandatory internship in the IT industry. Pakistani universities produce around 75,000 IT graduates every year, out of which, only 3,000 are eligible to be employed by IT companies," he added. He also expressed hope that IT exports will increase to \$4 billion after the State Bank of Pakistan allowed the IT companies

to retain 50% of their receipts in dollar accounts. "We wanted to empower the youth of the country with info-tech skills and that it was making all-out efforts for the purpose", he added. "IT and Telecom is working on all those projects that will create employment opportunities in the country for youngsters in the future," he mentioned. The ministry is trying its best to move Pakistan forward in the field of education through the provision of IT skills and empowering skilled manpower in IT industries, he said.—APP



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## RPO visits RCCI, assure measures to eradicate crime

President RCCI Saqib Rafiq along with Group Leader RCCI Sohail Altaf in their welcome remarks said that the role of the police is not only to enforce laws but also to foster a sense of security and trust within the community

DNA

RAWALPINDI : Regional Police Officer (RPO) Syed Khurram Ali during his visit to the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) assured business community that all steps and measures are being taken to protect citizens and eradicate crime in the city. Safe City is an important project and informed that the 306 cameras will be installed before Feb 20. RPO said that the business community is the backbone of the economy. The first duty of the police is to protect the citizens. The role of the business community is very important in promoting economic activities. We strive to control street crime in the city, especially in the markets, so that customers can shop with their ease. President RCCI Saqib Rafiq along with Group Leader RCCI Sohail Altaf in their welcome remarks said that the role of the po-



lice is not only to enforce laws but also to foster a sense of security and trust within the community. President RCCI Saqib Rafiq gave a short overview of the Chamber's current and upcoming events and also acknowledged the challenges that our law enforcement agencies face in maintaining law and order. In the end Group Leader Sohail Altaf

said that RPO plays a vital role as a leader who sets the tone for a police force that is responsive, accountable, and community-oriented & also invited CTO & CPO to the chamber. Matters related to maintaining law and order, NOCs matter, Traffic issues, elimination of encroachments, professional beggars, safe city, underage FIR, parking issues, street

crimes and security issues were also discussed in the meeting. Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh, Vice President Faisal Shahzad, Former President Mr. Nasir Mirza, Executive Committee members, distinguished RCCI members, Shahid Ghafor Paracha, Chaudhry Iqbal, among others, were also present in the meeting.

## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### JANUARY

Jan 01 / CUBA	Revolution Day
Jan 01 / Palestine	Palestine Revolution Day
Jan 01 / Sudan	National Day
Jan 04 / Myanmar	Independence Day
Jan 06 / Iraq	Armed Forces Day
Jan 12 / Tanzania	Armed Forces Day
Jan 14 / Uzbekistan	Armed Forces Day
Jan 15 / Nigeria	Armed Forces Day
Jan 20 / Mali	Armed Forces Day
Jan 20 / Laos	Armed Forces Day
Jan 25 / Thailand	Armed Forces Day
Jan 26 / Australia	National Day
Jan 26 / India	Republic Day

### Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



### Emergency

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



### Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115  
PIA Flight Info.....114  
PIA Cargo.....9280979  
Railway Enquiry.....117  
Railway Exchange 9270831-5  
WASA Rawalpindi.5555864  
CAA.....9281092



### Hospitals

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



### Departments

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

### Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

## Mushahid hosts Christmas party for sanitary workers

Lauds 'poor, sanitary workers as our unsung heroes, terms them as the real VIPs'

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Senator Mushahid Hussain, who represents the Federal Capital in the Senate, held a Christmas-cum-New Year's Party in honour of sanitation workers at the E-7 Park, which was attended by about 150 persons. Lauding the hard work, role and contribution of sanitary workers to keep Islamabad 'clean and green', he said: 'you are the real VIPs, given your honesty, dedication and hard-work and we are proud of you'. He also awarded shields of appreciation to two retiring sanitary workers: Yaqoob Masih, who served for 42 years, and Saifur Rahman, who served for 38 years. Talking to the media, Senator Mushahid Hussain said that knowing Islamabad is a city of the elites, where VIP Culture is prevalent and only VIPs are acknowledged or honoured, he wanted to set a different example, by 'honouring our unsung heroes', the poor, underclass belonging to the Christian community, who are the weakest and most oppressed section of Pakistani society. He said 'usually, in Islamabad, we only honour VIPs or those holding high office'. He said the 'sanitary workers are the real VIPs, because they serve selflessly, above and beyond the call of duty, at meagre salaries, and it is because of them that our city is so clean and beautiful'. Senator Mushahid Hussain said that 'we must uphold Quaid e Azam's vision of equality for all Pakistan-



is, irrespective of religion, caste or creed' and respect the National Flag where the white colour honours non-Muslim Pakistanis. He also said 'humanity should be paramount and the real worship is

serving humanity, above any prejudices or any consideration of colour, caste or creed'. Last year too, Senator Mushahid Hussain arranged a similar function in honour of Manzoor Masih, a retiring san-

itary worker and other members of CDA Sanitation staff. The head of CDA Labour Union, Chaudhry Yasin, and Senator Fawzia Arshad, PTI Senator from Islamabad also participated in the function.

## CDNS collects Rs 950 bn targets in fresh bond

The CDNS surpassed the annual target and achieved the target of Rs 1.6 trillion in fresh bonds in the current fiscal year, the senior official of CDNS told

ISLAMABAD: The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) has realized a target of Rs 950 billion in fresh bonds in the current fiscal year, from July 1 to December 31st. The CDNS surpassed the annual target and achieved the target of Rs 1.6 trillion in fresh bonds in the current fiscal year, the senior official of CDNS told on Wednesday. The senior official said this was Rs 200 billion additional annual target than the target of Rs 1300 billion for the previous financial year

2021-22. "The CDNS has set a reviewed saving target of Rs 1.4 trillion for the current financial year (2021-22) which will promote savings culture in the country," he said. In view of the current market trend in the country, the ambitious target had been set to further improve the savings culture, he said.

The official said that work was being done on institutional reforms in CDNS and new reforms and innovations were being intro-

duced. "At this time Automated Teller Machine (ATM) has also been introduced in CDNS which will provide enough facilities to the users," he added. Replying to a question, he said the CDNS had collected an investment of Rs 50 billion by December 31st, 2023-24, through Islamic investment bonds. The official added that the directorate had set a target of Rs 75 billion for the new financial year 2023-24 for Islamic finance bonds. Replying to a question, he said

the CDNS aimed to introduce new dimensions in the Islamic finance sector. He informed the directorate that it had reviewed and set a target of Rs 60 billion in the fiscal year (2022-23) for Islamic investment to introduce the new products in the market. "Islamic finance has a very important role in the global financial sector at this time, and a large part of the economy of many major countries currently includes Islamic finance," he added. —Agencies

## RA starts comprehensive programme for training of prisoners

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Rahmatul-Lil-Alameen Wa Khatamun Nabiyyin (NRA), Khurshid Ahmed Nadeem has said the authority is starting a comprehensive program to improve the mental level and training of prisoners in jails across the country. Addressing a news conference here on Wednesday, Khurshid Ahmad Nadeem said that the main purpose of establishing the authority is to take practical steps in the society in light of the Last Prophet's life. Khurshid Ahmad Nadeem further said that there is a desire to start different level programs to improve the condition of the people imprisoned in the jails and in this process, the assistance and consultation will be taken from the government as well as the civil society. Rahmatul-Lil-Alameen Wa Khatamun Nabiyyin Authority (NRA) is preparing a special program for women and children in prisons under the title "Mercy for All" so that they can be a useful citizens of the society. He said the role of mosques and media should be very important and responsible in making the society a peaceful and dignified. The content regarding Seerat of Holy Prophet will also be ensured in spiritual places (Khanqahs'), adding, the training sessions will be held for journalists. However, the training programs are also being started for teachers. With the co-operation of National Curriculum Council (NCC), we are going to make Seerate-Nabi a part of the curriculum, he informed. Meanwhile, Chairman NRA said that the social media wing is being made active for public training and work has been started on the YouTube channel to create awareness about the teachings of the Holy Prophet. —APP

## Sanjrani writes letter to Otsuji

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani in a letter addressed to Mr. Hidehisa Otsuji, President of the House of Councillors, Japan, has expressed deep sense of grief over the devastating earthquake in friendly country Japan. The Chairman Senate, on his behalf and on behalf of Senate of Pakistan, expressed sincere condolences on the loss of precious lives in this catastrophe.

"I have full faith that legendary resilience and courage of the people of Japan would surely help them to surmount this catastrophe," Chairman Senate added. He sympathized with the bereaved families and others affected by the heart-wrenching earthquake. He extended his unwavering support and solidarity in these hard times.

The Chairman Senate termed Japan a great friend and said that both Islamabad and Tokyo have supported each other through thick and thin.

## Pakistani traders ride county's booming economy

BEIJING: More Pakistani traders are settling in the Tashikurgan Tajik autonomous county of Kashgar, China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, to tap the strong business potential. As the county is close to their homes, they said it's easy to commute and fit into the local community. Booming tourism also brings more tourists, which benefits their businesses. Murad Shah, a Pakistani jeweler, said his gemstone store in the county has welcomed about 100 to 200 tourists a day after it resumed operations in April. He said his business is starting to recover after China optimized its COVID-19 policies. "There are a lot of tourists. The county has a diverse culture and landscape, and so many good attractions to see," he said, adding he is hopeful about the future, China Daily reported. One good reason for him to open a store in the county is that his hometown, a small village in Pakistan, is just 200 kilometers away, which can be reached in only three hours by car. Another reason is that China is developing very fast with a sound economy, he said. "Many Pakistanis prefer to do business here because there is money here," Shah said. At the store of Pakistani merchant Nazar Karim Ali, visitors come to buy gemstones, jewelry, blankets, cotton bed sheets, clothes and handicrafts, all made in Pakistan. Karim is the second generation of business owners in his family. His father and uncle exported silk from China between 1989 and 1992. He said over the last 32 years, the county has made him feel at home, and he shares the same culture with local people. Many initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor have made it very easy to do business, Karim said. There are good opportunities for Chinese people to invest in Pakistan, which also benefits Pakistanis, he said. Located on the Pamir Plateau, the county, with an area of 25,000 square kilometers and a population of 41,000, is the only one in China that borders three countries — Pakistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. It has two land ports — the Khunjerab Pass is 125 km from Sust Port in Pakistan, and the Karasu Port is only 14 km from Kulma Pass in Tajikistan. Due to the ease of transportation, Tashikurgan Tajik trades with neighboring countries frequently, importing mainly minerals, agricultural products, and seafood while exporting textiles and clothing, mechanical and electrical products, and household goods, according to local authorities. The number of tourist visits reached more than 1.34 million from January to late December, up 86 percent year-on-year, with May to October the peak season. Tourists are lured by the county's many unique attractions such as the 7,546-meter Mount Muztagata and Mount Qogir, or K2, the world's second-highest peak at 8,611 meters, and a 2,000-year-old ancient stone city.—DNA

## 3 shops gutted as fire engulfs in Aabpara Market

The fire brigade was informed about the blaze around 9 o'clock

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A huge fire broke out here on Wednesday in Aabpara Market Islamabad and engulfed several garment shops, however no casualties were reported. Rescue spokesman said that the fire completely burnt three shops while materials in the adjacent shop were damaged. Fire brigade officials informed that smoke could be seen rising from Aabpara Market where fire spread quickly, and the police were informed of the incident by the area's residents, a private news channel reported. The fire brigade was informed about the blaze around 9 o'clock and fire tenders are actively participating in the operation.



## Illegal election hoardings erased from various constituencies

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The monitoring teams of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) persistently working to eliminate unauthorized campaign hoardings belonging to candidates vying for National and Provincial assemblies' elections. According to Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), nationwide monitoring teams have taken action to eliminate advertisement hoardings that surpass the prescribed limits.

In Peshawar and Mardan, the monitoring teams, in adherence to the code of conduct, have removed promotional materials of candidates who erected hoardings in violation of regulations. These teams are actively addressing the issue by removing unauthorized hoardings and promotional materials across different constituencies.

In accordance with the Election Commission of Pakistan's Code of Conduct issued on December 20, 2023, individuals and political parties are prohibited from affixing or distributing posters, handbills, pamphlets, leaflets, banners, or portraits larger than the specified sizes outlined by the ECP. The specified dimensions are as follows: posters should measure 18 inches by 23 inches, pamphlets, leaflets, and handbills can have a maximum size of 9 by 6 inches, banners should not exceed 3 by 9 feet, and portraits should be limited to 2 by 3 feet.

## ANF recovers 655 kg drugs in three operations

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting three operations across the country managed to recover 655 kg drugs and arrested three accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Wednesday. He informed that 640 kg hashish was recovered from a vehicle intercepted at Gahi Khan Chowk, Quetta and two suspects were arrested. In second operation, 14 kg hashish was recovered from Morgh border area in Khyber and 760 grams Ice was recovered from an accused netted at RCD Road Hub. Cases have been registered against the accused under Anti-Narcotics Act and further investigations are under process.

## NTDC replaces circuit breaker at Guddu switchyard

ISLAMABAD: The technical teams at National Transmission and Despatch Company Limited (NTDC) have accomplished the replacement of a damaged circuit breaker at the 500 kV Guddu Switchyard. According to NTDC spokesperson the direction of management, additional staff was deployed to ensure the swift completion of replacement works. NTDC has also successfully energized the 500kV Guddu-Muzaffargarh transmission line. The NTDC spokesman said that dense fog in the vicinity of Guddu caused the tripping of NTDC's 500kV and 220kV transmission lines. Consequently, one pole of the 500kV circuit breaker at the switchyard was also damaged. However, the NTDC team immediately isolated the damaged pole from the switchyard, while ensuring that the other two circuit breakers remained operational. To address this emergency situation, NTDC had a spare circuit breaker readily available in its warehouse, which was promptly utilized for the replacement.—APP

## Briefs

**President for increasing access of visually impaired to books, education**

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Wednesday directed to take necessary actions aimed at greater access of the visually impaired to books and knowledge. Chairing a meeting to review the role and performance of National Book Foundation at Aiwane-Sadr, the president said that intellectual and individual development was possible by promoting the culture of book reading in the country. He said the availability of books and knowledge in braille for the visually impaired was a welcome move. During the meeting, Managing Director NBF Dr Raja Mazhar Hameed briefed the president about the role and performance of the Foundation. He said the National Book Foundation was taking measures for the people affected by dyslexia. The meeting was told that the Foundation was preparing books for the dyslexic children from class prep to 8th that would be available during the academic year 2024-25. It was informed that the Foundation's Braille Press in Karachi was providing the books to the visually impaired for Rs 10 only. The books would help increase the access of visually impaired children to education. —DNA

**RDA gives concession to educational institutions**

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of Director General (DG) RDA, Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa has given concession to the educational institutions till end of the current academic year. According to a RDA spokesman, the Land Use and Building Control Wing of RDA on the requests of the owners of the schools had suspended the legal action against illegal educational institutions till the end of the current academic year. He informed that the authority on the directives of the DG had decided to give concession to the owners of the schools so that the educational activities of the children are not interrupted due to the legal action of RDA and the children could complete their academic year without any hindrance. The spokesman said that in the light of this decision, all school owners who had established schools in residential buildings without approval were directed by the DG RDA to immediately get regularized the schools as per law or stop the illegal use of the buildings in residential areas. The school owners had also been instructed to submit an affidavit. —APP

# ICCI and CAP demand rationalization of high taxes on construction industry

Engr. Sikandar Hayat Khattak former Chairman CAP, Malik Muhammad Azim Member Advisory Council, and other members of the delegation also spoke on the occasion and underscored the need to reduce taxes on the construction industry to revive the economy

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of the Constructors Association of Pakistan (CAP) led by its Chairman Engr. Syed Ashfaq Hussain visited the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and highlighted the issue of high taxes on the construction industry due to which this industry is facing a lot of problems in promoting construction activities. Engr. Sikandar Hayat Khattak former Chairman CAP, Malik Muhammad Azim Member Advisory Council, and others were in the delegation. Addressing the delegation, Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Acting President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the construction industry plays a key role in the economic development of the country as the business activities of around 70 allied industries are associated with the construction sector. However, the imposition of high taxes on this industry has badly affected its growth, discouraged new investment, and caused a slowdown in the overall economy. He said that the cut in taxes on this industry can attract investment of billions of dollars to the country and stressed that the government should rationalize



taxes on this sector in consultation with stakeholders, withdraw tax on deemed income on immovable property, and create a conducive environment to spur the economic growth of the country. Speaking on the occasion, Engr. Syed Ashfaq Hus-

sain, Chairman, Constructors Association of Pakistan said that many Overseas Pakistanis are interested in investing in the construction sector, but heavy taxes are discouraging them. He emphasized that the government should reconsider taxes on this sector

and offer more attractive incentives to this industry to boost foreign investment in the country. He said that the government can take the country's economy from recession to sustainable development by focusing on the real estate and construction sector. Engr. Sikandar

Hayat Khattak former Chairman CAP, Malik Muhammad Azim Member Advisory Council, and other members of the delegation also spoke on the occasion and underscored the need to reduce taxes on the construction industry to revive the economy.

## PTDC to hold big 'Tourism Education Conference' next month, State-of art health facilities for tourists soon

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Managing Director of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) Aftab-Ur-Rehman Rana Wednesday said that Pakistan has been making sustained efforts to boost tourism in the country, seeking a rise in footfall of both domestic and international tourists, after the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Talking to PTV news channel, he said PTDC in next month of February would hold a 'Tourism Education conference' where we will focus on introducing tourism as a subject in schools and establish more tourism academies to aware our youth for responsible tourists. He said that PTDC is introducing an awareness drive through social media and electronic media platforms on 'Responsible tourist' where we will engage our key stakeholders within the school ecosystem to ensure the success of

this transformative initiative. Talking about another project, PTDC MD said that the department with the coordination of the health ministry also identified five to six hospitals in various cities of the country for ensuring quality health facilities for tourists, adding, that we are focusing on the health wellness of tourists where they will get best surgery, transplant, Yoga and other medical treatments. He said that our objective is to promote local tourism by educating tourists, adding, that PTDC also introducing a 'National Calendar of Events' soon where tourist can easily plan their holiday trips, adding, Pakistan has a lot of potential to attract a huge number of foreign tourists and expatriate Pakistanis to explore and witness the country's culture, religious tourism, eco-tourism, and Sikh heritage. To another question, he said that the number of foreign tourists who arrived in Pakistan in the year 2023 is

a 115 percent increase in foreign tourists, adding, PTDC had also launched a new website for online booking of hotels and motels, adding that people have started to contact PTDC hotels and motels for advanced booking of rooms to avoid rush. Pakistan's hospitality is known for its warmth and generosity, which will create more welcoming environment for tourists in the coming days, he added. Pakistan also improving its infrastructure, including airports, roads, and public transportation, to make it easier for tourists to travel within the country, he mentioned. Pakistan will offer more effective tourism opportunities to international audiences through targeted marketing campaigns and partnerships with travel agencies and tour operators, MD highlighted. "We are introducing a project in which we will streamline our visa policies to make it easier for tourists to obtain visas and travel to the country", he concluded.

## Mobile Registration Centers of BISP to be operational soon

ISLAMABAD: The Mobile Registration Vehicle Centers to facilitate the registration process for the intending beneficiaries of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), belonging to the remote areas of the country, are likely to be operational soon. The Mobile Registration Centers will enable the deserving women residing in the far-flung areas to access the registration facilities through mobile vehicles. According to an official source, the process of induction of Mobile Vans, which started in August, has entered into its last stages. A total of 25 Mobile Vans is being included to serve as Mobile Registration Centers of the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) which will facilitate those who were unable to access the registration facility. The source revealed that as many as 19 Mobile Registration Centers are being established in the remote areas of Balochistan, five in Sindh and one in Islamabad in this phase. The Mobile Registration service is likely to be operational soon. —APP

## Experts warn pollutants, dense fog leading to 'Pneumonia, asthma attacks

ISLAMABAD: Health experts on Wednesday warned that the continued thick smog in various cities of the country has become a real threat to citizens' health, as the air pollution rate increasing to an alarming level and leading to multiple chest infection diseases like Pneumonia. Talking to a Private news channel, a specialist of ENT Dr Afnan Hayat children and elders are physiologically more vulnerable to air pollution than adults because their brains, lungs and other organs are still developing, adding, that hospitals were on high alert with beds and ventilators set aside for extra emergency cases. He advised that pneumonia is undoubtedly a risky respiratory health infection which can become a big problem when air pollution levels flare up. Citizens should keep themselves indoors during fog times, the risk of pneumonia and other severe respiratory problems doubled and also increases the risk of mortality, he added. "In case of fog and smog, people are advised to take some precautionary measures and vaccinate their children", he added. The expert also suggested plenty of rest, warm beverages, steam baths, or the use of humidifiers in houses for air moisture and timely consultations with doctors. Replying to a question, he mentioned that Pneumonia begins with symptoms of fever, cough and difficulty breathing. Not only adults can get pneumonia, but children and the elderly can also experience it. Interim Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare and Population Welfare Dr Jamal Nasir added that smog was an additional factor in the increased respiratory diseases. He confirmed that the number of pneumonia cases was higher than the previous year and asked citizens for timely vaccination. Talking about the shortage of vaccines. —DNA

## CDA to auction plots in next week

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has decided to conduct an auction of plots in Islamabad, alleviating the budgetary constraints faced by the civic body. According to the CDA official, the plot auction is set to take place from 10 to 12 January at the F9 Park in Gandhara Hall. Plots located on Blue Area, Centers, and Park Road will be included in the auction. The auction list includes petrol pumps, Class Three shopping centers, agro farms, and apartment plots, along with fruit and vegetable shops, IT centers, and hostel plots. A substantial 10 percent discount will be applicable for complete payments made within one month. —APP

## Transforming Trash into Treasure in Pakistan


DR. M. BILAL TAHRIR

The age-old saying, "Waste not, want not," has never rung truer than in today's world, where our planet is grappling with the consequences of rampant waste disposal. In Pakistan, a nation pulsating with vitality and resilience, there lies an incredible opportunity to redefine our relationship with waste. "Waste is Not Waste Unless We Waste It" — a simple yet profound mantra that beckons us to explore innovative ways to repurpose and rejuvenate the discarded items that often clutter our surroundings. The global community is increasingly recognizing the importance of converting waste into treasure as a sustainable approach to resource management. This paradigm shift involves turning waste materials into valuable resources through recycling, upcycling, and innovative technologies. Several initiatives, policies, and technologies are being implemented worldwide to address the challenges of waste management and promote a circular economy. Pakistan, like many countries, faces the adverse effects of improper waste management. Overflowing landfills, plastic pollution, and environmental degradation have become pressing concerns. However, within this seemingly dire scenario, there exists a wealth of untapped potential waiting to be unleashed. It's time for a paradigm shift — a collective realization that waste is not mere-

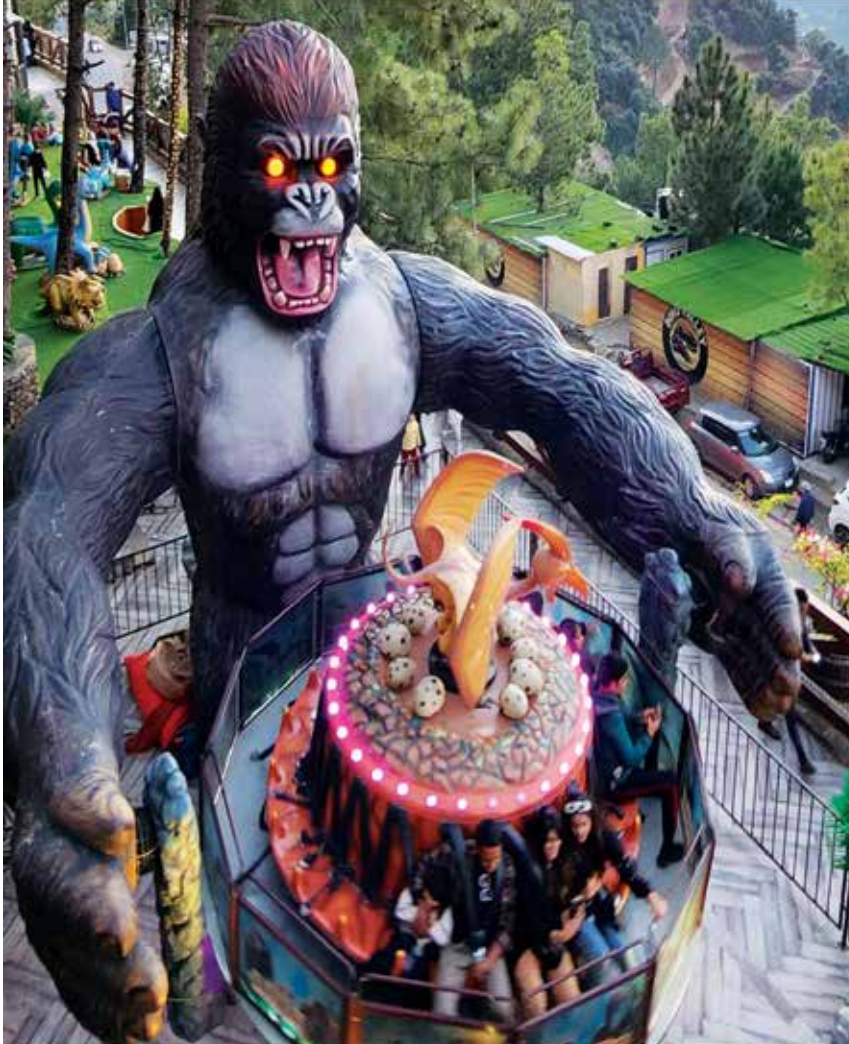
ly a burden but an opportunity for positive transformation. One of the most effective ways to address the waste issue is through creative reuse. In Pakistan, where craftsmanship and creativity are deeply ingrained in the culture, the possibilities are endless. From repurposing old textiles into vibrant rugs to transforming discarded containers into innovative planters, creative reuse not only minimizes waste but also adds a touch of uniqueness to our surroundings. The waste transformation industry can create employment opportunities in various stages of the waste management process, from collection and sorting to processing and manufacturing. The transformation of waste into valuable resources can also lead to the production of new and innovative products, contributing to economic growth and diversification. Communities play a pivotal role in the waste redemption journey. Initiatives such as community clean-up drives and waste-sorting programs empower individuals to actively contribute to a cleaner environment. Pakistan has witnessed the rise of inspiring community projects where citizens come together to collect, sort, and creatively repurpose waste. These initiatives not only mitigate the environmental impact but also foster a sense of shared responsibility. Embracing innovative technologies is another key avenue for waste reutilization in Pakistan. From converting organic waste into compost through efficient composting methods to exploring advanced recycling techniques for plastics, technology

can be a powerful ally in our quest for sustainability. Collaborative efforts between government bodies, private enterprises, and research institutions can drive the development and implementation of these technologies on a larger scale. Education serves as the cornerstone of any sustainable initiative. Schools, colleges, and community centers in Pakistan can play a pivotal role in raising awareness about the environmental impact of waste. Integrating waste management education into the curriculum, organizing workshops, and promoting sustainable practices can instill a sense of responsibility in the younger generation, creating a ripple effect of positive change. The public awareness on the transformation of waste into valuable resources provides opportunities for public education on waste reduction, recycling, and the importance of sustainable consumption. Governments play a crucial role in steering the nation towards sustainable practices. Pakistan has already taken strides in formulating waste management policies, but continuous and rigorous implementation is essential. Providing incentives for businesses adopting eco-friendly practices, imposing stricter regulations on single-use plastics, and investing in waste-to-energy projects can further catalyze the shift towards responsible waste management. Creating partnerships between government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and local communities is vital. Collaborative efforts can harness the collective expertise, resources,

and enthusiasm needed to tackle the waste challenge comprehensively. Public-private partnerships can foster innovation, enabling the development and implementation of sustainable waste management practices. The transformation of waste into a valuable resource in Pakistan can bring about various benefits for the country including Environmental Sustainability, Resource Conservation, Economic Opportunities, Reduced Pollution, Community Health and Well-being and Compliance with International Standards. It will also bring long-term cost savings. By efficiently transforming waste into valuable resources, the long-term costs associated with waste disposal and environmental remediation may decrease. Effective waste management practices can prevent the spread of diseases caused by the improper disposal of waste, benefiting public health. A cleaner environment and improved waste management contribute to better living conditions, which can positively impact the well-being of communities. The transformation of waste into a valuable resource is not just a possibility but a necessity for Pakistan's sustainable future. By redefining waste as an opportunity and embracing creative, community-driven, and innovative approaches, we can build a greener, cleaner, and more prosperous nation. The journey begins with a shared commitment to the belief that "Waste is not waste unless we waste it." Let's embark on this transformative voyage, turning trash into treasure for a brighter tomorrow.



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## Window of opportunity should not be wasted

IF the pullout of thousands of Israeli troops from the northern Gaza Strip starting from Monday can help to effectively reduce the intensity of the fighting in the Palestinian enclave, it merits a reserved welcome. If it leads to a cease-fire with Hamas that heralds the Palestinian issue returning to the negotiation table, then it is to be warmly welcomed. However, neither of those prospects appears likely. Shortly after Tel Aviv announced the withdrawal of the five brigades, senior Hamas official Saleh al-Arouri and two leaders of Hamas's elite al-Qassam military brigades were killed in an explosion in the southern Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh, reportedly caused by a targeted Israeli drone strike. Although Tel Aviv has not accepted responsibility, it said "whoever did this... it was a surgical strike against the Hamas leadership". That prompted Hezbollah to say that its finger "is on the trigger" as it promised vengeance for Arouri's death. With the conflict between the United States and Houthi forces escalating in the Red Sea, it appears more likely that the Gaza hostilities will expand into a broader conflict rather than reach a turning point. The withdrawal of the troops can be regarded as a strategic compromise of the Benjamin Netanyahu government. None of its objectives, ranging from pressing Hamas to release the remaining hostages it is holding to turning Gaza into a buffer zone after uprooting Hamas, has been realized or looks likely to be. It has also come under mounting pressure from the world, including the US, which is still putting tremendous inputs into supporting Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, as well as growing domestic opposition. All of which have prompted it to make the decision. In particular, the softening support of the enough-is-enough US in the face of the rising civilian death toll has been a major factor influencing its decision. Were it not for the US' support, Israel would not have been able to sustain its military operations in Gaza with such intensity for so long. That the US started withdrawing its USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier strike group from the Israeli coast in the Eastern Mediterranean on Monday, where it will be replaced by the amphibious assault ship the USS Bataan and its accompanying warships, the USS Mesa Verde and the USS Carter Hall that had been in the Red Sea, sends the signal that the Gaza conflict will enter a new phase of low-intensity campaigns, featuring surgical strikes against remaining Hamas strongholds and "pockets of resistance". The international community should seize the opportunity of the Israeli withdrawal to deliver humanitarian aid to the besieged civilians in Gaza. At the same time, the US should take advantage of its unique influence on Tel Aviv to prevent the conflict from expanding further into the southern Gaza Strip and help broker a cease-fire at an early date.



## Solid commitment to engagement with world

UNBOUND visitor numbers have been slow to recover after the COVID-19 pandemic, with the number of foreign visitors to China well down from the pre-pandemic level. Leaving no doubt that the country is still welcoming visitors from other countries, a little more than three months ago, on Sept 27, the State Council, issued a notice outlining measures aimed at unleashing the potential of tourism consumption and promoting the high-quality development of the tourism industry. Among these was a commitment to increase the number of flights to overseas destinations, the resumption of various visa-free policies, and measures to simplify travel and payment procedures for foreign visitors. The notice was swiftly followed by the introduction of a unilateral visa-free policy for ordinary passport holders from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia, which took effect on Dec 1 last year. According to the National Immigration Administration, there were around 214,000 visitors from these countries in December, an increase of 28.5 percent compared with November. Of these inbound trips, 118,000 were made by holders of ordinary passports without a visa, accounting for 55.1 percent of all inbound trips from these countries during the month. This highlights the significant boost the visa-free policy can give to inbound visitor numbers. Having signaled its intent to extend the visa-free policy to more countries, visitors from Thailand are also expected to be beneficiaries of the visa-exemption policy, with Thailand announcing a historic reciprocal permanent "visa-free" agreement with China, effective from March 1. With this year being designated as the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges, it seems likely that other ASEAN members besides Malaysia and Thailand will be among the future beneficiaries of the policy. A rebound of inbound tourism would spur the Chinese economy's post-pandemic recovery, benefiting various associated sectors. But just as importantly, it would reinforce China's commitment to opening-up and global engagement. Beijing has repeatedly emphasized the importance of exchanges and communication between people from different countries and cultures so as to clear misperceptions of one another and so lay a solid foundation for inter-country relations. By the end of June 2023, China had signed cultural and tourism cooperation documents with 144 countries under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Cities from 60-plus other countries involved in the BRI have formed more than 1,000 pairs of friendly cities with their Chinese counterparts. What China has achieved in its endeavors in promoting the BRI cooperation suggests how important it is for people from different cultures to conduct exchanges.

## SC's response to level playing concerns

Qamar Bashir



The Supreme court is playing a proactive role to ensure that elections are held in a free and fair manner. There are two possible and expected decisions by the supreme court. In one scenario the SC despite compelling arguments from PTI's legal counsel court may observe procedural limitations in directly attributing contempt. After thorough scrutiny and hearing the responses from the officials, SC might issue directives for better implementation of Election Commission orders but refrains from labeling actions as contempt due to lack of conclusive In an alternate scenario, Supreme Court may take a stern stance against the alleged disregard of Election Commission directives by Punjab administration and police

WITNESSING the live streaming of the Supreme Court's proceedings to ensure a level playing field for all political parties, notably PTI, was an exhilarating and rare opportunity for me and indeed a rewarding experience for the entire nation. The courtroom drama unfolded as a battle of wits, with arguments scoring points and constitutional provisions being quoted. The determined Chief Justice persistently opposed the contempt of court proceedings against the Election Commission, Chief Secretary, and IG Police of Punjab. This was based on the contention that the Election Commission had complied with the Supreme Court's directives by issuing letters to all provincial election commissioners and the government, emphasizing the need for a fair electoral landscape. Amidst this intense debate, Mr. Sardar Latif Khosa emerged as a persistent voice, asserting that the Election Commission's responsibility extended beyond mere letters; it was also tasked with ensuring the actual implementation of the Supreme Court's directives in both letter and spirit. He argued that the Punjab provincial administration's disregard for these instructions amounted to a violation of the court's order, constituting contempt. Just as Mr. Khosa's argument seemed to be faltering, an unexpected turn occurred. He drew attention to a paragraph in the Election Commission's report, revealing widespread allegations of abductions, constraints on PTI candidates and their supporters, and incidents where the RO office was inaccessible due to police cordoning, preventing PTI candidates from filing nomination papers. This revelation inadvertently bolstered Mr. Khosa's case, providing the Chief Justice with convincing evidence to admit the petition and issue notices to the Punjab advocate general, inspector general, and chief secretary. The Supreme Court sought explanations regarding the alleged lack of a level-playing field in the upcoming general elections. This pivotal moment led the court to also direct a report from officials concerning the implementation of its order, specifically addressing the party's concerns. The proceedings were adjourned till January 8, signaling the gravity and importance of the case and its potential implications for ensuring fair and transparent elections. It goes without saying that a fair and equitable political landscape in nascent democracies like Pakistan necessitates certain critical conditions. This includes equal access to resources, transparent electoral processes, freedom of expression, impartial institutions, and fair media coverage. These conditions foster a democratic environment where all political entities have an equal chance to present their policies, ensuring a level playing field. Such fairness isn't just a democratic ideal but a necessity for the country's stability and legitimacy. It encourages trust among citizens in the democratic system, promoting active participation and ensuring that the voices of all segments of society are heard and valued. The responsibility for creating and maintaining a level playing field is shared among various stakeholders. Government institutions such as the election commission, judiciary, and law enforcement agencies play a pivotal role in ensuring fair elections and opportunities for all parties. Political entities themselves bear the responsibility of upholding democratic principles and advocating for equitable competition. Civil society groups, along with the media, serve as watchdogs, monitoring and highlighting any biases or discrepancies in the electoral process. The absence of a level playing field during elections reverberates across multiple fronts, amplifying negative repercussions. Political parties suffer from eroded trust and diminished legitimacy, directly impacting their ability

to govern effectively and gain public confidence. Societal repercussions include unrest and disenfranchisement, eroding social cohesion. Countrywide, political instability disrupts policymaking and governance, affecting economic stability and deterring both foreign and domestic investment. Businesses grapple with uncertainty, impacting long-term planning and market stability. Internationally, a compromised electoral environment tarnishes a country's reputation, weakening diplomatic relations and eroding confidence in its commitment to democratic principles. Collectively, these consequences compromise long-term growth, stability, and global standing. The systematic targeting and imprisonment of a major political party's leadership severely disrupt the foundational principles of fair competition in elections. Such actions not only impede the functioning of the targeted party but also undermine the democratic ethos of the nation. Similarly, when another political faction faces harassment and violent obstructions to their activities, it exacerbates the lack of fairness and safety in the electoral arena. These instances paint a troubling picture of an imbalanced and unjust political landscape, challenging the very essence of a level playing field in democratic processes. The pathways for redressal and seeking justice amidst such allegations and injustices are entrenched within established institutional mechanisms. The Election Commission stands as a pivotal entity responsible for overseeing fair elections; thus, parties encountering discrimination or hindrances in the electoral process can formally report grievances to this body. Additionally, judicial avenues serve as vital forums for challenging unjust detentions, harassment, or violations of political rights, providing a means for legal recourse. Human rights commissions, both domestic and international, offer platforms to investigate and address such violations, safeguarding democratic principles. Yet, navigating these institutional channels might encounter obstacles when institutions themselves face compromise or influence. In such complex scenarios, mobilizing civil society becomes imperative, leveraging public support to advocate for fairness and justice. Engaging with international organizations, leveraging diplomatic channels, and bringing global attention to these violations serve as alternate avenues to spotlight injustices, applying external pressure to restore democratic norms. Effectively addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach, combining institutional redressal with public mobilization and international advocacy to safeguard the integrity of the democratic process. When a major political party approaches the Supreme Court of Pakistan seeking redressal for a lack of a level playing field, the court encounters certain limitations. Upholding political neutrality while addressing constitutional rights is paramount. However, the court's jurisdiction might be confined when matters directly fall under the purview of other institutions like the Election Commission or the government's executive actions. Operating within legal frameworks and past precedents, the court must tread cautiously, ensuring its interventions align with existing laws and constitutional provisions. The court's role mandates upholding the rule of law while respecting constitutional boundaries. It should safeguard constitutional rights without overstepping its jurisdiction. While intervening to uphold democratic principles is permissible, the court must refrain from excessive interference with the functioning of other branches of government or independent bodies, unless absolutely necessary. Many courts around the world were confronted with simi-

lar situations. In the United States, the pivotal case of "Citizens United v. FEC" marked a watershed moment in the U.S. Supreme Court's rulings on elections. The decision, affirming corporations' and unions' rights to unlimited independent political spending under the protection of the First Amendment, reshaped campaign finance regulations. Within India's legal landscape, "Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India" exemplified the Supreme Court's commitment to fostering free and fair elections. The petition challenged the existing electoral framework, arguing that voters should have the option to reject all candidates contesting in an election if they found none of them suitable or desiring of their vote. The Supreme Court, acknowledging the importance of voters' rights and the need for electoral reforms, ruled in favor of introducing the NOTA option on ballot papers, allowing voters to express their dissatisfaction with contesting candidates effectively. Kenya's Supreme Court made history with its ruling in "Raila Odinga v. IEBC & others", where the court nullified presidential election results due to irregularities. This landmark decision emphasized the critical importance of conducting transparent and fair elections, showcasing the judiciary's intervention to safeguard democratic principles and electoral integrity. The lack of level playing field will not only mar the result of the elections but also prompt the prolonged litigation in the post election scenario. The aggrieved parties are most likely to approach the Supreme Court to nullify election results due to concrete evidence of rigging will involve various potential outcomes. The Supreme court is playing a proactive role to ensure that elections are held in a free and fair manner. There are two possible and expected decisions by the supreme court. In one scenario the SC despite compelling arguments from PTI's legal counsel court may observe procedural limitations in directly attributing contempt. After thorough scrutiny and hearing the responses from the officials, the Supreme Court might issue directives for better implementation of Election Commission orders but refrains from labeling the actions as contempt due to lack of conclusive. In an alternate scenario, the Supreme Court may take a stern stance against the alleged disregard of Election Commission directives by the Punjab administration and police. Despite the administration's counter-arguments and explanations, the court finds substantial evidence suggesting deliberate actions hindering PTI's participation, thus constituting contempt. The Chief Justice may express strong displeasure over the reported incidents of hindrance faced by PTI candidates during the electoral process, highlighting the criticality of ensuring a level playing field for all political parties. The court, after careful consideration and thorough examination of the evidence presented, holds the IG Police and Chief Secretary accountable for failing to uphold the Election Commission's directives. The Supreme Court may reprimand, possibly imposing fines or penalties, and issue stringent directives to ensure strict adherence to Election Commission orders in future elections. However, the final verdict of the Supreme Court in such scenarios would largely hinge on the evidence presented, and the court's interpretation of contempt in this context, and the extent of the officials' compliance or disregard for the Election Commission's directives. It would aim to reinforce the sanctity of fair electoral processes while balancing accountability with procedural considerations.

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

## Serbia's election crisis threatens EU aspirations

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

The consequences of a delayed resolution extend beyond Serbia's borders, casting a dark cloud over the stability of the entire Balkan region. The Western Balkans have long been a tinderbox of historical tensions and geopolitical complexities. Any sign of democratic backsliding or political instability in one nation has the potential to reverberate across the region, threatening the delicate balance achieved through years of diplomatic efforts and reconciliation

IN the heart of the Balkans, Serbia finds itself at a critical juncture following disputed elections that have cast a shadow over the nation's democratic credentials. The outcome of these elections not only holds significant consequences for Serbia's domestic political landscape, but also poses a threat to the country's aspirations of joining the EU, potentially destabilizing the entire region. As the stakes escalate, it is imperative that a swift and transparent resolution is reached to safeguard Serbia's democratic future and foster regional stability. Last month's elections in Serbia were marred by allegations of irregularities, voter suppression and concerns about the integrity of the electoral process. Such disputes not only undermine the trust of the Serbian people in their democratic institutions, but they also raise eyebrows among EU member states, which closely scrutinize aspiring members' adherence to democratic norms and the rule of law. As well as being an internal affair, the resolution of this electoral quagmire is a litmus test for Serbia's commitment to democratic principles — a key criterion for EU accession. For Serbia, the EU represents a beacon of economic prosperity, political stability and the promise of a brighter future. The bloc's accession process is a transformative journey that demands unwavering dedication to democratic values, the rule of law and transparent governance. The current electoral impasse threatens to derail this journey, potentially jeopardizing the dream of EU membership that has been a driving force behind the country's political and economic reforms. The EU, wary of potential parallels with Hungary's democratic challenges, has consistently emphasized the importance of upholding democratic standards as a prerequisite for membership. Brussels has closely monitored the electoral processes

in aspiring member states, demanding fair and transparent elections as a fundamental criterion. Serbia's inability to resolve the disputes surrounding last month's elections not only calls into question the adherence to these principles, but also risks alienating the country from the path toward EU integration. The consequences of a delayed resolution extend beyond Serbia's borders, casting a dark cloud over the stability of the entire Balkan region. The Western Balkans have long been a tinderbox of historical tensions and geopolitical complexities. Any sign of democratic backsliding or political instability in one nation has the potential to reverberate across the region, threatening the delicate balance achieved through years of diplomatic efforts and reconciliation. Regional stability is a key concern for Brussels and any disruption in the Balkans could have far-reaching consequences. The EU has a vested interest in fostering peace and cooperation in the region, as evidenced by its historical involvement in mediating conflicts and supporting postwar reconstruction. A destabilized Serbia not only risks reigniting historical animosities but could also open the door to broader regional instability. The government must demonstrate a commitment to the rule of law by conducting an impartial investigation. The unresolved electoral disputes in Serbia have the potential to become a rallying point for political polarization, further dividing the nation along ideological lines. In a region where historical grievances still simmer beneath the surface, a fractured political landscape can be a catalyst for unrest. The EU, cognizant of the fragility of the Balkans, cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the internal political dynamics of aspiring member states. To salvage its democratic reputation and maintain its course toward EU accession, Serbia must prioritize a swift and transparent resolution to

its electoral disputes. The government must demonstrate a commitment to the rule of law by conducting an impartial investigation into the alleged irregularities and ensuring that the electoral process is free from manipulation and coercion. The Serbian people deserve the assurance that their voices are heard and their votes count, laying the foundation for a credible and legitimate government. Simultaneously, the EU must proactively engage in facilitating a resolution to the electoral crisis. The bloc's commitment to the stability of the Western Balkans necessitates a hands-on approach, leveraging diplomatic channels and encouraging all relevant stakeholders in Serbia to prioritize the democratic process. The EU's role as a mediator and guardian of democratic values is crucial in guiding Serbia toward a path of reconciliation and political stability. While the resolution of the electoral disputes is paramount, the EU must also acknowledge the broader challenges facing Serbia and the Western Balkans. Economic development, social cohesion and regional cooperation are equally vital components of the accession process. Brussels should provide tangible support, both in terms of financial assistance and technical expertise, to help Serbia address the underlying issues that may have contributed to the current electoral crisis. Serbia stands at a crossroads, with the outcome of its electoral disputes having far-reaching implications for both its domestic political landscape and the stability of the entire Balkan region. A swift and transparent resolution is not just a prerequisite for Serbia's EU aspirations, but also a crucial step in safeguarding the hard-earned peace and stability in the Western Balkans. The EU, as a beacon of democratic values and regional stability, must play a proactive role in guiding Serbia through this challenging period, reaffirming the shared commitment to a prosperous and united Europe.

— Sourced by Arab News

## Briefs

## Terrorist blasts in Iran leave over...

FROM PAGE 01 ceremonies across the country, many of which had been foiled by Iranian security services. He said the situation is now under the control of security forces. Iran's Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei vowed the perpetrators and those responsible for the attack will be swiftly hunted down and brought to justice. He blamed the attacks on terrorists backed by the world arrogance who harbor deep grudges against General Soleimani, saying they've chosen to take revenge on the people after their various plots to insecure the country were foiled. General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by then-US President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

## Hamis leader's killing...

FROM PAGE 01 Khirbet al-Adas in northern Rafah claimed the lives of three civilians and injured 10 others. Casualties were also reported when an Israeli attack targeted a house behind an UNRWA school in the east of al-Maghazi. Yesterday, three citizens from the family of Abu Lahiya were martyred in an Israeli attack in al-Qarara town in Khan Yunis. Dozens of casualties were also reported following Israeli attacks on other areas of Gaza last night and today. In a related context, the health ministry in Gaza said in the afternoon that the Israeli army committed, over the past 24 hours, 10 massacres against families, which resulted in the martyrdom of at least 128 civilians.

## Yemen claims fresh...

FROM PAGE 01 the Red Sea and the Arab Sea until Palestinians in Gaza receive the food and medicines they need. Saree noted that Yemeni Armed Forces will continue to allow all international shipping companies to sail their vessels in the waters of both seas, except for ships bound for ports in the Israeli-occupied territories. The senior Yemeni military official highlighted that any US act of aggression against the Arab nation will not go unanswered, warning Washington and its allies against any measure aimed at protection of vessels destined to the ports in the Israeli-occupied territories. This was the latest in Yemen's retaliatory operations in support of Palestinian in the Gaza Strip amid relentless Israeli strikes.

## ECP indicts Imran, Fawad in...

FROM PAGE 01 prime minister and ex-minister were present in the courtroom during the hearing and denied the allegations mentioned in the charge sheet. The ECP then adjourned the hearing on the contempt case till January 16. The electoral body had initiated contempt proceedings against the former PTI chairman, former party leader Asad Umar and Fawad for insulting the commission and its chief during various public meetings, press conferences and several interviews. According to the notice, politicians face the charges of passing unparliamentary, intemperate, and contemptuous remarks against the ECP on various occasions. The political leaders were asked to either personally appear before the commission bench to clear their position or through their counsel. Instead of appearing before the bench, they challenged the commission's jurisdiction in several high courts.

## Jamal, Rizwan, Agha shine as Pakistan scores 313

Aamer Jamal scored a crucial fifty lower down the order to help Pakistan post a competitive total on the board

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

SYDNEY: Pakistan were dismissed for 313 on the opening day of the third Test against Australia in Sydney. In reply, Australia safely negotiated an over to head to stumps at 6-0. Warner, playing his first Test, smashed a four on the first ball by Sajid Khan to begin his innings. Pakistan team gave a guard of honour to Warner with the entire crowd applauding the star batter as he made his way out to the middle. Aamer Jamal scored a crucial fifty lower down the order to help Pakistan post a competitive total on the board. Jamal and tailender Mir Hamza added 86 runs for the last wicket to get Pakistan past 300 despite being reduced to 227-9 at one stage. Jamal scored 82 runs in 97 balls, which included nine fours and four sixes. Hamza provided Jamal with able support from the other end and remained not out on seven runs in 43 balls. Earlier, Mohammad Rizwan and Agha Salman took the attack to Australia to help Pakistan recover from a rocky start. After slipping to 96 for five soon after lunch, Rizwan and Salman stitched a pul-



sating 94-run partnership before Rizwan was dismissed just before tea for 88. Rizwan, who was left out for the first Test, smashed two sixes and 10 fours off 103 balls before he fell to a legside trap set by Pat Cummins. Rizwan top-edged a pull shot for Josh Hazlewood to take the catch at fine leg after posting the highest individual score by a Pakistan batter of the series. After the tea break, Mitchell Star got rid of Agha Sal-

man after the latter had scored 53 runs in 67 balls. Cummins, who was the pick of the bowlers with figures of 5-61, became the first Australian to take three consecutive five-wicket hauls in Tests since Nathan Lyon in 2017. Pakistan made a disastrous start after winning the toss, losing four wickets in the opening session and skipper Shan Masood shortly after lunch for 35. It was a rousing morning session for

the Australians, who are looking to send off 37-year-old opening batter David Warner as a winner in his home city in his 112th and final Test match. Openers Abdullah Shafique and debutant Saim Ayub were dismissed inside the first two overs. The out-of-form Shafique fell to the second ball of Mitchell Star's opening over, needlessly playing a loose drive and nicking a catch to Steve Smith at second slip for a duck.

Ayub, brought in for Imam-ul-Haq to make his Test debut, only lasted two balls before he fell to a Hazlewood outswinger in the next over, snapped up behind by Alex Carey. Pakistan lurched to four for two and for a time looked to be consolidating with Babar Azam playing three glorious cover drives to the ropes before he was out on first-hour drinks for 26. Cummins appealed vociferously for lbw but was turned down by the umpire, only to seek a review and get the verdict he sought, leaving the tourists tottering at 39 for three. Saud Shakeel copped a nasty blow on the collarbone from a Cummins lifter and in the Australian skipper's next over he prodded a catch behind to Carey for five, leaving his side further in the mire at 47 for four. Masood had a big moment on 32 in the second over after lunch when he was caught by Smith at second slip but it was ruled a no-ball from bowler Mitchell Marsh. Marsh got the last laugh two overs later when Masood, on 35, again edged the medium-pacer to Smith in almost identical fashion to leave Pakistan at 96 for five. Australia bagged the three-match series with a 79-run win in the second Test in Melbourne.

## Mohammad Siraj destroys South Africa in second Test

DNA

CAPE TOWN: A ferocious spell of bowling by pacer Mohammad Siraj put India in the driving seat against South Africa on the first day of the second Test in Cape Town. By the time this story was filed, South Africa were reeling at 46-7 with Siraj the chief destroyer with the ball. The right-arm has already claimed six wickets for 15 runs while bowling nine overs on the trot. Siraj claimed the wickets of Dean Elgar (4), Aiden Markram (2), Tony de Zorzi (2), David Bedingham (12), Kyle Verreynne (15) and Marco Jansen (0). Earlier, South Africa captain Dean Elgar opted to bat first in the second and final Test against India at Newlands on Wednesday. The hosts are eyeing a series sweep

against the number one side in the world. South Africa made three changes to the team after winning the first Test by an innings and 32 runs in Pretoria. Middle order batter Tristan Stubbs makes his debut in the place of injured regular captain Temba Bavuma. Spinner Keshav Maharaj received his 50th cap in the place of injured Gerald Coetzee and seamer Lungi Ngidi replaced Keegan Petersen. "It looks an interesting wicket, a few snakes in it, hopefully it comes to the fore when we bowl," Elgar said. "It is a big hurdle for us and a big test, this is our marquee game for the season. We have to start well." India captain Rohit Sharma admitted he would have batted first had he won the toss as the visitors made two changes. Fit again left-arm spinner Ravindra

Jadeja replaces Ravichandran Ashwin, while seamer Mukesh Kumar comes in instead of Shardul Thakur. "There will be enough in the pitch for the seamers, so hopefully we can cash in on it," Rohit said. "It is important for us to forget what has happened in the past, it is about the present." The match is a final in his 12-year Test career for Elgar, who decided to bring the curtain down ahead of the series. **Teams:** South Africa: Dean Elgar (capt.), Aiden Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Tristan Stubbs, David Bedingham, Kyle Verreynne, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Nandre Burger, Lungi Ngidi **India:** Rohit Sharma (capt.), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Mukesh Kumar.

## Cricket SA defends inexperienced squad NZ Tests

JOHANNESBURG: The Board of Cricket South Africa (CSA) on Tuesday, responded to the ongoing concerns regarding their inexperienced squad for the Test series against New Zealand. CSA named seven uncapped players in their 14-member squad for the New Zealand series, scheduled to commence on February 4. Uncapped batter Neil Brand will lead South Africa on the New Zealand tour which will be played at the same time as SA20 league, featuring the frontline Proteas players. Their decision to name an inexperienced squad drew backlash from the cricketing world while former Australian captain Steve Waugh has blamed the International Cricket Council (ICC) and leading cricket boards for not 'caring' about Test cricket. The CSA finally responded to the concerns and stated that it has utmost respect for the format. "We reassure the fans that CSA has the utmost respect for the Test format as the pinnacle of the game we love," the cricketing body said in a statement. CSA further shared that it tried to reschedule the two-match Test series against New Zealand but could not reach an agreement with the fellow cricket board. - Agencies

## SL name different captains for Test, ODI and T20Is

"I would have preferred to have the same captain for all three formats," chief selector Upul Tharanga told reporters in Colombo. "But we are unable to do that at the moment with the players we have."

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka cricket selectors on Wednesday named three different captains for the Test, ODI and T20I sides ahead of tours by Zimbabwe and Afghanistan. Batting all-rounder Dhananjaya de Silva, 32, will be the Test skipper while Kusal Mendis, 28, will lead the ODI team and Wanidu Hasaranga, 26, will captain the Twenty20 squad. It is the first time that Sri Lanka will have separate skipper for all three formats. "I would have preferred to have the same captain for all three formats," chief selector Upul Tharanga told reporters in Colombo. "But we are unable to do that at the moment with the players we have." Selectors had resolved to retain Mendis through to the next ODI World Cup in 2027, Tharanga said, despite finishing second from bottom at last year's showpiece in India. Mendis took over after the last-minute injury withdrawal of Dasun Shanaka and Tharanga said Shanaka had not considered for the captaincy due to performance issues over the past two years. Hasaranga will lead the side for the T20 World Cup starting in June in the West Indies and United States. The latest selection announcement came ahead of the white ball series against Zimbabwe starting Saturday. Following that Sri Lanka will host Afghanistan for three T20s, three ODIs and one Test match.

**Sri Lanka ODI squad to play Zimbabwe:** Kusal Mendis (captain), Charith Asalanka, Pathum Nissanka, Avishka Fernando, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Sahan Arachchige, Maheesh Theekshana, Dilshan Madushanka, Dushmantha Chameera, Dunith Wellalage, Pramod Madushan, Jeffrey Vandersay, Akila Dananjaya, Wanidu Hasaranga. - DNA

## Shaheen Shah opens up about resting for Sydney Test

SYDNEY: Shaheen Shah Afridi has shed light on the decision behind his exclusion from Pakistan's third Test against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground. While talking to foreign sports channel, Shaheen acknowledged the necessity of resting and explained that the management opted for "workload management" due to the significant number of overs he bowled in the first two Tests in Perth and Melbourne. Despite missing the Sydney Test, Shaheen had a notable performance in the earlier matches, securing eight wickets, including a four-wicket haul in the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. "I played two games, and a lot of overs to be honest. They're just managing my workload, the medical team and team



management decided to take a rest for this (Test)," Shaheen said. Expressing his disappointment about missed opportunities on the field during the Australian tour, Shaheen highlighted the impact of dropped catches. "I think that I can take more wickets, but unfortunately, catches win matches, and unfortunately we missed those opportunities on the field most of the time. It has been a good tour so far and the last game that we played was quite awesome. As a bowling unit, and as a team, we gave our best, the result was not in our hands, but we tried," he further added. Despite their efforts, Pakistan, led by Shan Masood, is currently trailing the series 0-2, enduring a challenging streak of 18 consecutive Test losses on Australian soil. - Agencies

## Osaka's Brisbane comeback ended by big-serving Pliskova

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA: Defending champion Karolina Pliskova used her big serve to full advantage to end Naomi Osaka's return to tennis in the second round of the Brisbane International on Wednesday. Pliskova, who won the tournament the last time it was held in 2020, bounced back from losing the first set to grind down the Japanese star 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4. Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka had not played a tournament since September 2022, citing mental health concerns. She had a baby daughter in July before deciding to make a comeback. After an impressive first-round win over Germany's Tamara Korpatsch, Osaka started strongly against the 39th-ranked Pliskova, breaking the Czech's opening ser-

## Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka had not played a tournament since September 2022, citing mental health concerns

vise game. Pliskova, a two-time Grand Slam finalist, levelled but Osaka broke again to take a 4-2 lead then held on to bank the opening set. The momentum began to shift in the second set as the tall Pliskova began to find the mark with her serve. She won the second set tiebreak then got an early break in the third, holding on with ease to take the match in 2hr 13min. "I thought I played quite well - there are a lot of things to improve but it's a good start," said Pliskova, adding that after a first-round bye and having not played since September, she needed time to find her feet. "You can practise as much as you want but in matches it's always a little bit different," she said. "It's been a long break but I've been doing this sport for many, many years. I've been training for a couple of months and I think I'm in pretty good shape." - Agencies

## Minaur breaks Djokovic's 6-year winning streak

The 24-year-old stunned the Serb ahead of the Australian Open 2024. De Minaur broke Djokovic's whopping 43-match winning streak in Australia

SPORTS DESK

PERTH: Alex de Minaur recorded arguably the biggest and most astonishing win of his career by stunning Novak Djokovic in straight sets 6-4, 6-4 at the United Cup in Perth on Wednesday. Minaur's heroics gave Australia a 1-0 lead over Serbia in their quarter-final match and Ajla Tomljanovic can now claim the tie for the hosts by beating Natalija Stevanovic in the women's single match. De

Minaur broke Djokovic's whopping 43-match winning streak in Australia and he couldn't be more happy. "It's extra special," de Minaur said of the win. "Novak is an unbelievable competitor and what he's done for the sport is pretty special. It feels surreal, amazing and I'm very happy to do it here in Perth and Australia. "When you go up against Novak you have to go out and enjoy it and back yourself and no matter what keep fighting until the end. Today was my



day and I'm happy that I was able to get the win. "I'm here to prove a lot of people wrong and to try and get better. Ultimately I won't be the biggest or the strongest. I will show I have variety in my game and I'm glad I could bring this level today." It was

Djokovic's first loss in Australia since 2018 when he lost to Hyeon Chung at the 2018 Australian Open. De Minaur was defeated by Djokovic 6-2, 6-1 and 6-2 in the fourth round of the Australian Open 2023 but that was not the case today. Djokovic entered the match with a wrist injury he suffered during Tuesday's encounter with Jiri Lehecka which he eventually won 6-1 6-7(3) 6-1 after losing the second set. It is worth mentioning that Djokovic dominated the

2023 season as he appeared in the final of all four Grand Slams Djokovic, and won three of them - Australian Open, French Open, and US Open - while he was handed a defeat by Carlos Alcaraz at Wimbledon. After winning the ATP Finals win win over Jannik Sinner in straight sets in the final, Djokovic confirmed that he has no intention to stop and is now aiming for a "Golden Slam" - winning all major titles and a gold medal in the Olympics - for the next year.

## No 'bat' for PTI as PHC restores ECP order

FROM PAGE 01 election process as per its constitutional mandate." The party's candidates would now, given the order, have to contest elections "independently". Ahmed Bilal Mehboob, chief of the think tank Pildat, told Geo News. The electoral body had filed a review petition at the high court against the PHC's December 26 decision, which had suspended the ECP's order and restored the party's 'bat' symbol till a final decision on the matter. The ECP, in its order on December 22, had declared PTI's intra-party polls "illegal" and stripped it of using the 'bat' symbol. Following its order, the former ruling party approached the PHC, seeking to restore its electoral symbol ahead of the general elections slated for February 8, as it is a major voter driving force. In its petition, the ECP requested the court review the PTI's intra-party elections and its decision related to the election symbol. Barrister Asad Rahim Khan told Geo.tv that following the setback in the PHC, the party can still knock on the doors of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

## SC issues notices to Punjab IG...

FROM PAGE 01 the hearing of the case till January 8. The proceedings of the case were broadcast live on SC's website and YouTube channel. PTI lawyer Latif Khosa presented arguments on behalf of Advocate Shoab Shaheen, who filed the appeal in the court. On December 22, the top court directed the ECP to address the PTI's concerns regarding the level-playing field on the former ruling party's petition. In line with the court's order, the ECP representatives met the PTI delegation and assured them of addressing its grievances in the lead up to the February 8 national vote. However, the party filed another petition on December 26, seeking contempt of court proceedings against the ECP over the electoral body's alleged failure to ensure a level-playing field.

## Japan quake toll rises to 62

FROM PAGE 01 there are people waiting for help," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Wednesday after an emergency task force meeting. The number of military personnel sent to the area on rescue missions has been doubled, with more rescue dogs also deployed, he added. The operation was given extra urgency as the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) issued a heavy rain warning in the region, advising people to be on alert for landslides until Wednesday evening. There were "almost no houses standing" in one town in the Suzu area, said municipal mayor Masuhiro Izumiya. "About 90 per cent of the houses (in that town) are completely or almost completely destroyed [...] the situation is really catastrophic," he said, according to broadcaster TBS.

## FM Jilani meets...

FROM PAGE 01 the TTP on behalf of the Taliban administration. Today's meeting between Jilani and Akhund comes at a time when relations between the two countries have suffered due to a spike in terrorist attacks, mostly claimed by the outlawed militant TTP group. Islamabad has stated that the TTP and other groups use Afghan soil against Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban have denied the charge and have stated they will not allow anyone to use Afghan soil to be used against the neighbour. But authorities remain unconvinced and have demanded action against the TTP, its sanctuaries and the handover of its leaders. In November, Caretaker Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar said there was a 60 per cent increase in terrorism and a 500pc spike in suicide bombings since the Afghan Taliban came to power in August 2021.

## Briefs

## ICJ to hear SA genocide case against Israel next week

JOHANNESBURG : South Africa will appear before The Hague-based International Court of Justice (ICJ) next week to present its case against Israel's alleged genocide in Gaza, a Foreign Ministry official said. The hearing is scheduled for Jan. 11 and 12. "We will be appearing in court of the ICJ on the 11th of this month. We will be presenting our case as to why we think based on all the evidence including the special intent of the crime of genocide, we have found that based on many statements from leaders that a special intent is available," Zane Dangor, director general of the Foreign Ministry, told national broadcaster SABC late Tuesday. South Africa, which has backed the Palestinian cause for decades, launched the case late last month, requesting the ICJ to investigate alleged acts of genocide committed by Israel in Gaza, and declare on an urgent basis that Israel is in breach of its obligations in terms of the 1948 Genocide Convention. It requested the court to ask Israel to immediately cease all acts and measures in breach of the obligations. Israel will appear before the ICJ to contest South Africa's genocide accusations, an Israeli government spokesman said on Tuesday. Anadolu recently published a book titled 'The Evidence, containing visuals that expose possibly criminal actions by Israel in Gaza.—DNA

## US base in Syria comes under drone attack

TEL ABYAD : The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group representing several Iraqi armed factions, claimed responsibility for launching a kamikaze drone attack Tuesday against the Al-Shaddadi base in Syria's northeastern Hasakah province, where US forces are stationed. The group issued a statement citing its commitment to "resisting the American occupation forces in Iraq and the region" and linked the attack to its response to the "Zionist entity's (Israel's) massacres" of the people of Gaza. It is not known whether there are casualties in the attack and the US has not issued a statement so far on the incident. Earlier in the day, a rocket attack was carried out on the base. Recently, attacks using kamikaze drones and ground-to-ground weapons have targeted US military bases in the Al-Tanf region in southeastern Syria, Malkiyya district near the Iraqi border, town Al-Shaddadi in Hasakah province and in Deir ez-Zor province. Territories of Deir ez-Zor, located east of the Euphrates River, are under the occupation of the US-backed PKK/YPG terrorist group, while the provincial capital and other rural areas are controlled by Syria's Bashar al-Assad regime and Iran-backed groups.—APP

## President votes early in BD amidst opposition boycott

DHAKA : Bangladeshi President Mohammed Shahabuddin and his wife on Wednesday cast their votes through postal ballot as the South Asian nation heads for Jan. 7 election amid an opposition boycott. Shahabuddin hoped the election would be held in a peaceful atmosphere with people's participation, according to the presidential press service. Meanwhile, armed forces and the Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB) have been deployed across the country ahead of the election on Jan. 7 to help the civil administration maintain law and order. Many popular figures, including Bangladesh national cricket team captain Shakib Al Hasan, former captain Mashrafe Bin Murtaza, film star Ferdous Ahmed, media personality and artist Asaduzzaman Noor, and singer Mumtaz Begum, have joined the election fray on the ruling Awami League party's nomination.—APP

## Ethiopia's sea access crucial for regional integration

The Ambassador said signing of a MoU with the Government of Somaliland for sea access was a true reflection of the strong commitment of the Government of Ethiopia

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Wednesday said the Government of Ethiopia had achieved aspirations of its people by securing access to the sea which was crucial for regional integration, peace and prosperity. The Ambassador said signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Somaliland for sea access was a true reflection of the strong commitment of the Government of Ethiopia to the regional integration, collective peace, security and socio-economic development. He said the credit for this breakthrough goes to H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister of FDR Ethiopia, who already won the Nobel Peace Prize for his strong commitment to peace and prosperity.



H.E. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had a clear vision not only for the development in Ethiopia but for the entire Africa and the world, the ambassador remarked. The Ambassador said Ethiopia was already sharing its resources with the neighboring countries in Africa fostering strong connections with the brotherly countries. Currently, Ethiopia was exporting energy to Djibouti, Kenya and Sudan contributing to the regional integration and development in a massive way, he added. The work on Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam was almost completed which would not only produce more than 5,150 Megawatts of the electricity, but also supplement efforts of the Government of Ethiopia in promoting regional development and prosperity, the Ambassador noted. Ambassador Jemal Beker expressed gratitude to H.E. Muse Bihi Abdi, President of Somaliland, for supporting Ethiopia's quest for access to the sea.

## China embraces first batch of Pakistani beef

Pakistan is a viable export partner of China due to its proximity and logistics advantages. We are also the cheapest nation in providing goods to the world

DNA

ISLAMABAD : In a notification to the Pakistan Stock Exchange, the Organic Meat Company Limited reported that it had successfully exported cooked/heat-treated frozen beef to China on the last day of 2023. In June 2023, General Administration of Customs of China (GACC) granted access for Pakistani heat-treated beef to be exported to China. In October, Organic Meat was approved to export

standards-compliant beef to China. The Organic Meat has become the first and only company from Pakistan to secure approvals from China. Gwadar Pro quoting an official announcement of GACC, reported on Wednesday that the imported Pakistani cooked/heat-treated beef must originate from cattle younger than 30 months. Additionally, the meat must be boneless and have undergone a rigorous heat treatment process. The center of the meat should reach a temperature of at least 70 degrees Cel-



sus for a minimum of 30 minutes. In 2022, global beef consumption reached 56.961 million tons, with China's beef consumption reaching 9.87 million tons, accounting for 17% of the total. In contrast, Pakistan only contributes 0.5% to the world's beef consumption, as reported by the media. According to a report released by China Animal Agriculture

Association, China's beef consumption is projected to continue increasing until 2025. It is expected that by 2035, China's beef consumption will reach 14 million tons, with a projected gap of more than 3 million tons. Pakistan is a viable export partner of China due to its proximity and logistics advantages. We are also the cheapest nation in providing goods to the world. The quality and price of Pakistan's beef are far superior to those of many other countries," CEO of Organic Meat said.

## EU Urges Respect for Somalia's Sovereignty

BRUSSELS : The European Union has insisted Somalia's sovereignty should be respected after Ethiopia signed a controversial deal with breakaway Somaliland. The EU said in a statement on Tuesday that it "would like to remind the importance of respecting the unity, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia pursuant of its constitution, the Charters of the African Union and the United Nations." "This is key for the peace and stability of the entire Horn of Africa region," the statement from an EU spokesperson said. The memorandum of understanding signed by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somaliland leader Muse Bihi Abdi on Monday gives Ethiopia access to the Red Sea port of Berbera and a leased military base. Abiy's office hailed the pact as "historic," saying it is "intended to serve as a framework for the multisectoral partnership between the two sides." It said the agreement will also strengthen the security, economic and political partnership between the two sides. However, Somalia branded the accord an "aggression" and vowed to defend its territory. "As a government, we have condemned and rejected the illegal infringement of Ethiopia into our national sovereignty and territorial integrity yesterday," Mohamud said. "Not an inch of Somalia can or will be signed away by anybody. Somalia belongs to the Somali people. This is final." The government in Mogadishu also recalled its ambassador to Ethiopia and issued an appeal to the international community to stand by its side over the "blatant assault" on its sovereignty.—DNA

## Record-breaking heat sweeps across China in 2023

The heat in China was relentless in 2023 with temperature records broken from Beijing to Shanghai, echoing the global heat-wave phenomena that also engulfed most of the world and raised more concerns about global climate change. China's searing heat led to 127 national weather stations breaking records for daily high temperatures in 2023, state media reported on Tuesday. Beijing smashed a 23-year-old record in July with 27 consecutive days of temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius (95 Fahrenheit). The national average temperature of 10.7 degrees Celsius (51.3 Fahrenheit), the highest since 1961 and 0.8 degrees Celsius higher than a normal reading of 9.9 Celsius (49.8F), broke the record of 10.5 Celsius (50.9F) set in 2021, state broadcaster CCTV said. Most of the country was 0.5-1 degrees Celsius warmer. The average temperature in 13 provinces, cities or regions including Beijing, Shandong, Liaoning, Xinjiang and Henan were all at the highest since 1961, CCTV said. China experienced a stretch of record-breaking heat and extreme weather, with readings at one weather station in the far northwestern region of Xinjiang on July 16 hitting an all-time high of 52.2 degrees Celsius (126 Fahrenheit).—DNA

## Taiwan detects 4 Chinese balloons ahead of election

TAIPEI : Four Chinese balloons were detected moving across the median line separating Taiwan from China, with three flying directly above the island, Taipei's defence ministry has said. A graphic released by the ministry on Wednesday showed three balloons headed northeast above Taiwan after appearing "southwest of Ching-Chuan-Kang", home to a military airbase in the western city of Taichung. The lowest altitude measured for one of them was 12,000 feet (3,658 metres). Tuesday's balloon incidents came less than two weeks before the self-ruled island will hold a pivotal election and was the second consecutive day such objects were detected above Taiwan. The ministry began reporting them for the first time in December, publicly identifying six incidents. It said on Wednesday it was "closely monitoring and will take appropriate measures" on the balloons, depending on the "nature, altitude and possible hazards of the targets".—APP

## Storm henk Causes flooding in UK

LONDON : Hundreds of flood warnings were in place in the UK on Wednesday, after strong winds and rain lashed large parts of the country, hitting travel and cutting power. The strongest gusts from Storm Henk were recorded on Tuesday afternoon on the Isle of Wight, off England's south coast, where the wind reached 94 miles (151 kilometres) per hour. The wind got up to 81 mph at Exeter airport, along the south coast in Devon, the Met Office weather agency said. Gloucestershire Police in western England said a man in his 50s was killed when a tree fell on his car during the storms near Cirencester. On Wednesday morning, the Environment Agency said it had issued 294 flood warnings - where flooding is expected - and 341 flood alerts - where flooding is possible - in England. Several residents had to be evacuated from houseboats and caravans on the River Nene near Northampton, 70 miles north of London, because of rising waters. Eight flood warnings and 32 flood alerts were in force in Wales, as well as a severe flood warning, indicating a danger to life, Natural Resources Wales said. According to the Energy Networks Association, an industry body of gas and electricity suppliers, some 10,000 customers were without power. National Highways, which operates and maintains motorways and major roads in England, said several main routes were closed because of flooding.—Agencies

## Sudan RSF open to immediate ceasefire talks

ADDIS ABABA : Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) said on Tuesday it was open to an immediate, unconditional ceasefire through talks with the Sudanese army as it signed a declaration with the Taqadam civilian coalition and invited the army to do the same. A nine-month war in Sudan, which now faces the world's largest displacement crisis, has devastated the country's infrastructure and prompted warnings of famine. Attempts to end the conflict through negotiations, led by the United States and Saudi Arabia, have so far come to nothing and previous agreements to protect civilians have gone unheeded. By signing the so-called Addis Ababa Declaration, which is intended to serve as the basis for further negotiations and a political settlement, the RSF has made its clearest commitment to ending the war so far. "If the army came with this same document I would sign it immediately," RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo said of the declaration, which also included commitments to return millions of displaced people to their homes, create safe passages and include civilians in peace talks. But with the RSF, which is accused by the US of crimes against humanity, gaining an upper hand in recent weeks, it is unclear to what extent Dagalo will implement the declaration's commitments. He apologised on Tuesday for violations and has said rogue actors will be dealt with. Although the RSF has publicised the return of police and markets in some areas under its control, residents and human rights monitors say soldiers have occupied and looted homes and detained and sometimes killed civilians. Meanwhile, artillery fire between the two sides in the capital Khartoum has intensified in recent days. The army, which has launched extensive air strikes, has also been accused of war crimes by Washington, which it denies. It was not immediately clear whether the army, much of which is hostile to Sudan's pro-democracy movement and accuses it of being allied with the RSF, would welcome the declaration. Dagalo, who is known as Hemetti, denied any such alliance. "We invited the leadership of the armed forces. We expect, we hope they will respond to our invitation positively," Taqadam coalition leader and former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said.—DNA



BRUSSELS : Ambassador Amna Baloch called on Chairman HEC Pakistan Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed. They discussed ongoing academic collaborations and also ready to explore pathways for facilitating scholars.—DNA

## Tokayev emphasizes Russia's crucial role in global issues

Moscow plays important role in world politics, Russian presidential election will have great international significance, says Kazakh President

WEB DESK

ISTANBUL : Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on Wednesday said that not a single world problem can be solved without the participation of Russia. "The opinion of Russia is taken into account throughout the world; without the participation of this state, not a single world problem can be solved, and this is a fact," Tokayev said in an interview published by the Egemen Qazaqstan newspaper. To a question about the upcoming Russian presidential election in March 2024, Tokayev said Moscow plays an important role in world politics and that his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin is a leader

who "shapes the global agenda" through his words and actions. "Therefore, a presidential election in a country like Russia will have great international significance and will attract the attention of most countries in the world," Tokayev said. For Kazakhstan, Tokayev said, the Russian presidential election is of particular interest due to the high-level relations between Moscow and Astana. He further said that 2024 will be a landmark year not only for Russia but also for other countries that will be holding elections such as the US, the UK, India, and Azerbaijan. Regarding Kazakhstan's relations with China, Tokayev said he and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping launched a new "golden 30 years" of cooper-



ation between the two countries. Expressing that Kazakh-Chinese relations are developing in the "spirit of friendship, good neighborliness, and eternal strategic

partnership," Tokayev said that it is important for Astana to cooperate with Beijing and effectively use all the advantages of their friendly relations and mutual trust. Tokayev also talked about Kazakhstan's foreign policy approach for 2024, saying that Astana will continue a constructive and balanced foreign policy, taking into account the national interests of the state. Tokayev also said that Russia is the main strategic partner and ally of Kazakhstan. Over the past 30 years, we have built an impressive architecture of interstate relations, which includes over 300 treaties and agreements. Bilateral cooperation mechanisms operate in almost all areas, the President said, emphasizing that trade turnover between the two

countries reached \$21.4 billion in 10 months of 2023. According to Tokayev, the presidential election in Russia will have great international significance and will attract the attention of most countries in the world. "We must realize that Russia plays an extremely important role in world politics and has the status of a permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council. Russian President Vladimir Putin is a leader who, with his words and actions, essentially shapes the global agenda. The opinion of Russia is taken into account throughout the world; without the participation of this state, not a single world problem can be solved, and this is a fact," the President said.

## Briefs

### Daniyal rejects party's show-cause notice

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz senior leader Daniyal Aziz has rejected the show-cause notice given to him by the party. On a three-page long response by Aziz to the party, he mentioned that he has not violated the party's code of conduct and policy. For the clearance of any misunderstanding, he also requested a meeting with the party's leadership. He said he only highlighted the discrepancies in various projects started by former minister Ahsan Iqbal that created economic issues in constituency. Earlier, on December 2, PML-N Punjab president Rana Sanaullah issued a show-cause notice to Aziz stating that the politician violated the party rules by making a 'rhetorical statement' against the PML-N leadership and damaged the reputation of the party.

### Zardari, Bilawal condemn terrorism in Iran

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Former President of Pakistan and President Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari and Former Foreign Minister of Pakistan and Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari have strongly condemned the terror act in Iran, which took the lives of innocent civilians. President Zardari and Chairman Bilawal expressed sympathy with the people and government of Iran, and also extended their condolences over the martyrdom of citizens.

### Even UC chairman 'can deliver more than' Imran

DNA

NAROWAL: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Ahsan Iqbal said on Wednesday that even the UC chairman could deliver better than the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder. Addressing the workers' convention in Narowal, the former planning minister said, "Four out of the five years had been wasted by the PTI. Few persons were involved in orchestrating the conspiracy to impose the PTI founder in 2018." "The PTI founder had harmed the country," Iqbal said. Speaking about the forthcoming elections, Iqbal said, "I have three basic principles of staging the politics, which are peace, education, and development."

## Commission on enforced disappearances

# SC directs to submit 'comprehensive' report

State needs to change its mindset as court verdicts alone are not enough to end such practices, says CJP Isa

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) QaziFaez Isa on Wednesday asked the federal government to give in writing that there would be no more enforced disappearances in the country. The development came as a three-member bench led by Justice Isa and comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar and Justice MusarratHilali, heard the petition of Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan and other petitioners on the unlawful practice of enforced disappearances, praying for declaring it as violative of various articles of the Constitution. "We do not want a statement from any section officer. The Government of Pakistan should give us in writing that no one will be illegally disappeared anymore," the CJP said during a hearing of the case. Aitzaz had prayed the court to declare that enforced disappearances are violative of Articles 4, 9, 10, 14, 19, and 25 of the Constitution besides declaring that the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances does not adequately comply with legal and international standards. Similarly, he asked the apex court to set up an effective and purposeful commission. He prayed the apex court that the commission should be headed by a judge of the

## IHC bars police from harassing Baloch sit-in

COURT REPORTER

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday stopped local authorities of the federal capital from harassing and removing Baloch protesters by force from the National Press Club. Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani issued directives to authorities in the federal capital while hearing a case pertaining to the alleged harassment and the use of force against Baloch families protesting against extra-judicial killing and enforced disappearances. Additionally, the high court also ordered in-person appearance of Islamabad's deputy commissioner (DC) and senior superintendent police (SSP) Operations in the next hearing on January 5. Justice Kayani was hearing a petition filed by a Baloch activist SammiDeen Baloch against alleged harassment of protesting families by police. At the outset of the hearing, AtaullahKundi Advocate, who appeared as Sammi's lawyer, apprised the court that Baloch families have staged a sit-in outside the National Press Club in Islamabad. The police had arrested several women and children after lodging cases before the court ordered their release, he added. Authorities later attempted to vacate the sit-in venue by forcing women to sit in buses, said the lawyer, adding Islamabad policemen were continuously harassing them by seizing speakers and sometimes by creating tense situations of relaunching crackdowns. The judge questioned whether the protesters were advancing to somewhere other than their venue. The lawyer replied that Baloch marchers were not advancing anywhere. The judge remarked that Shahra-e-Dastoor, in other words, Constitution Avenue has a history of hosting big demonstrations and sit-ins.

## Justice Mazhar Naqvi submits reply

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Justice Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi of the Supreme Court on Wednesday submitted his detailed reply to second show-cause notice issued to him by the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC). Justice Naqvi stated in his reply that complaints against him were baseless. He adopted the stance that while the petitions were already being heard in open court, the SJC's proceedings were not justified. The SJC had given a last chance to Justice Naqvi to submit his reply. The council will meet again on Jan 11 to hear complaints against Justice Naqvi. It may be recalled that on Dec 15, the SJC had turned down Justice Naqvi's request to halt council's proceedings against him immediately.

## Zartaj issues apology over May 9

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Zartaj Gul on Wednesday issued an apology over the tragic events that unfolded following the arrest of Imran Khan on May 9. Talking to the media at Peshawar High Court following submitting a transit bail plea, Zartaj Gul expressed uncertainty about the upcoming election, stating, "I don't know whether I am contesting the election or a war." She also stressed her extensive work in Dera Ghazi Khan, claiming that no one else had accomplished as much. Concerns about her potential arrest were raised as she revealed the presence of the police force outside, prompting her to appeal for bail. "I can go to any court; the whole country is ours. I will not leave here until I get bail," she asserted. Addressing voters, Zartaj Gul urged them not to panic, maintaining faith in the constitution and the law. The leader issued an apology for the May 9 incidents, expressing regret for any disturbances caused.



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Jali Abbas Jilani received Rwanda's Chief of Defence Staff Lt Gen MubarakhMuganaga at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. - DNA

## Faizabad sit-in probe

### Faiz Hamid 'skips' hearing for the 3rd time

#### PML-N president Shehbaz Sharif fails to appear before Faizabad Dharna Commission

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Despite repeated summons, former ISI chief Lt Gen (retd) Faiz Hamid Tuesday again failed to appear before the Faizabad inquiry commission formed to probe the 2017 protest sit-in staged by Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). According to sources, the commission had summoned the former spy chief at 10.30am on Tuesday but he did not appear before the panel. The commission is now considering a proposal to record his statement through video link, the insiders added. This was the third time that the former ISI chief remained absent from the hearing being conducted by the inquiry commission, which earlier summoned him in the second week of December last year and then on December 29, sources said. However, the first notice couldn't be delivered. In November last year, the caretaker feder-

al government constituted the inquiry commission for the implementation of the top court's 2019 Faizabad verdict. The probe panel was constituted on the order of the Supreme Court of Pakistan under the chair of retired IGP Akhtar Ali Shah after the apex court rejected the fact-finding committee report constituted by the government. On November 15, Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa had remarked that the commission would be empowered to summon anyone, including former army chiefs, prime ministers and chief justices. The inquiry commission is required to submit its report to the top court on January 22. The probe panel has also summoned Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President and former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif on January 3 (today), sources had told Geo News on Monday. Earlier, former prime minister ShahidKhaqan-Abbasi, ex-interior minister Ahsan Iqbal, then-secretary to PM Fawad Hasan Fawad and other senior officials serving in Islamabad and Punjab who were involved in episode had appeared before the probe panel. In November 2017, the top court had taken suo motu notice of the three-week-long sit-in, which was held against a change in the finality-of-Prophethood oath, termed by the government as a clerical error, when the government passed the Elections Act 2017. The sit-in was called off after the protesters reached an agreement with the government. On February 6, 2019, a two-member bench of the apex court comprising the now-CJP Isa and Justice MushirAlam recommended that persons, issuing an edict or fatwa to harm another person or put another person in the harm's way must be dealt with iron hand and prosecuted under relevant laws. It also ruled that the intelligence agencies must not exceed their respective mandates. Later, the bench disposed of a suo moto case regarding the 2017 Faizabad sit-in staged by the TLP.

## Ji huddle discusses forthcoming polls

"Those who are creating uncertainty in connection with the elections are violating the SCP order"

LAHORE: The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) huddle discussed on Wednesday the country's situation and forthcoming elections. JI Emir SirajulHaq had chaired a top-level meeting of the JI. On this occasion, matters in line with the upcoming elections were underscored. The JI spokesperson said, "The JI will contest the elections from 535 provincial constituencies. The masses will take part in the election process on February 8 with great verve." The JI will also contest elections in 231 constituencies of the National Assembly. Haq said on Monday urged people to cast votes for his party in the forthcoming elections, slated to be held on February 8. Addressing the public gathering in Lower Dir, Haq said: "Those who are creating uncertainty in connection with the elections are violating the Supreme Court of Pakistan's (SCP) order." "The nation is having the golden opportunity to embrace the democratic process in the New Year," Haq said. Haq took a swipe at the political opponents, saying, "The rulers who have been imposed on the country over the years have done nothing but leave the masses to face poverty, ballooning inflation, and unemployment." He urged the need to steer the country's economy towards stability. "The JI will end the system of usury in the country and steer the country out of its economic woes by embracing Islamic principles," he added. - DNA

## Second ACI heads of mission meeting held



DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador Azhar as the Chair of ASEAN Committee in Islamabad (ACI) presided over the second ACI Heads of Mission meeting at the High Commission of Malaysia, Islamabad. The meeting was attended by Heads

of Mission from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Also present were officials from the ACI working group. In his opening remarks, Ambassador Azhar expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the ASEAN Mission in Islamabad for their cooperation in promoting ASEAN in Pakistan. He also welcomed the new High

Commissioner of Brunei Darussalam to Islamabad. He apprised the participants of the meeting that the handing over of the Chairmanship of ACI would be done in early January 2024. Ambassador Azhar also thanked all the ASEAN Head of Mission for their contribution to the meeting and hoped that next year would bring more activities of ASEAN in Pakistan.

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