



# Islamabad POST

Saturday, January 06, 2024

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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**German FM warns against Israeli occupation of Gaza**

Detailed News On Page-07

**Fawad's physical remand in NAB custody extended**

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**Jamal in elite company after 6-wicket haul**

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## Briefs

**PTI completes elections preparations**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Core Committee announced that the party gave finishing touches to its preparations for the upcoming general elections including the finalisation of the lists of the potential ticketholders in the face of the worst state coercive measures and blatant interference in the election process. PTI Core Committee, in its meeting held on Friday, held a detailed deliberation on the issues pertaining to the distribution of tickets for the general elections in the light of the instructions of PTI Founding Chairman Imran Khan. The forum revealed that the party was all-set for the general elections slated to be held on February 8 and all preparations including the lists of final ticketholders of National and Provincial Assemblies were completed in this regard. PTI Core Committee lauded the efforts of the candidates to submit their nomination papers on a large scale and to get them approved despite the worst state oppression and suppression and blatant interference in the election process. The participants strongly condemned and rejected the passage of the unconstitutional, illegal and undemocratic resolution in the senate seeking postponement of the elections. PTI Core Committee recalled that the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faiz Isa, had given a clear order for holding free, fair and transparent general elections on February 8, 2024 in its decision of November 3, 2023. The forum emphasised that at this juncture, the country could not afford instability created as a result of unconstitutional efforts like postponement of elections. They expressed apprehensions that the unconstitutional steps to delay polls beyond the scheduled date of February 8 would push the country into the quagmire of socio-economic crises.

**Ishaq Dar wants unity**

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Leader of House in Senate Ishaq Dar said on Friday the provinces should be agreeing with the federation on spending resources on health and education. He was speaking at the Senate meeting presided over by Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani. The provinces are so rich in resources that people say one should be chief minister of any big province instead of becoming the prime minister, Dar said. Senator Dilwar said the 18th amendment was not a divine scripture and the government should pay attention to WHO certificate. Senator Barrister Ali Zafar said a committee should be made for effective coordination between the federation and the provinces.

## Holiday Notice

The offices of daily Islamabad POST shall remain closed on Saturday on account of weekly off therefore there will be no newspaper on Sunday. - Editor

# Senate seeks delay Feb 8 in elections

Senator Dilwar Khan tables resolution; PML-N calls it "boot-polishing"; caretaker government opposes move

KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Senate Friday approved a non-binding resolution seeking a delay in the general elections, set to be staged on February 8, drawing strong criticism from major political parties. Senator Dilwar Khan, an independent lawmaker, moved the resolution in the upper house of the parliament, which got the approval during the presence of 14 senators – who were the only lawmakers present in the house of 100. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Senator Gurdeep Singh and Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) BehramandTangi abstained from voting. Following the vote, the Senate chairman adjourned the session indefinitely. The elections are set to take place in 90 days when an assembly is dissolved, but the polls in all five legislative are yet to be held and they've already surpassed their constitutional limit. The polls for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab assemblies – dissolved in January last year – have not been held for around a year, while the national, Balochistan, and Sindh assemblies have been pushed past their limits as well already. With the fears rife of delays, a petition was moved in the Supreme Court, following which the apex court directed the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and President ArifAlvi to announce a date, which they did: February 8. However, some political actors have been raising concerns about the security situation as well as the weather conditions.

Continued on Page 06

## Political parties slam Senate resolution

Show Cause Notice to Senator Baharamand Tangi

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: After the Senate adopted a resolution seeking a delay in general elections with just a month left in the much-awaited polls, political parties Friday rejected the non-binding resolution, saying that further deferring the electoral process would be "unconstitutional". The majority of the lawmakers present in the legislature approved the resolution – seeking polls delay in the light of extreme weather in hilly areas and the deteriorating security situation – moved by independent lawmaker Senator Dilwar Khan earlier in the day. Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Senator Sherry Rehman, while addressing a press conference after the resolution was approved in the upper house of parliament, said that the party has a clear stance that the elections should not be put off. "We absolutely do not support the delay in elections,"

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# US can't dictate Pak how to conduct polls

On December 12, 2023, US acknowledged Pakistan's significance as a "major" ally and plans to partner with it on regional security and defence cooperation

DNA

WASHINGTON: State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller on Thursday said the United States would continue to support the democratic expression and vibrant democracy in Islamabad. To a query, while briefing the media, Miller said it was not for the US to dictate to Pakistan the exact specifics of how it conducted the upcoming polls. Evading answering exactly to the question of the alleged creation of hurdles for some political leaders coming to file nomination papers, the spokesperson said the US wanted to see the polls held in a free, fair and peaceful manner "that includes freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association and ultimately a full, open, reliable, vibrant democratic process". He said Pakistan's future leadership was for the Pakistani people to decide. "Our interest is in the democratic process. We want to see free and fair elections conducted in accordance with Pakistan's laws and we don't support one candidate or party

over another in Pakistan or anywhere else in the world," he added. Responding to a question about the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder Imran Khan's allegation of so-called American interference in ousting his government over refusing to let the US establish a military base in Pakistan, the spokesperson said that, "the former prime minister's accusations are baseless". On December 12, 2023, the US acknowledged Pakistan's significance as a "major" ally and plans to partner with it on regional security and defence cooperation. Responding to a question during a presser, Miller had said Pakistan was a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ally and a NATO partner.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Permanent Representative in UN Muneer Akram calls on caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar in Islamabad. – DNA

## PM reiterates Pak support for Kashmiris

Pakistan's permanent representative to UN calls on PM Kakar

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Friday reiterated that Pakistan would continue to extend its full political, diplomatic, and moral support to the valiant Kashmiri people in their just struggle for their rights including the inalienable right to self-determination, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). "Today, Kashmiris around the world are observing the 75th anniversary of the Resolution adopted by the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP), providing that the

Continued on Page 06

## Security forces kill 2 terrorists in Tank IBO

STAFF REPORT

TANK: Security forces killed two terrorists in an intelligence-based security operation in Tank. According to Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), a media wing of the Army, security forces killed two terrorists in a fierce exchange of fire in Tank district. The ISPR said that Gul Yusuf aka Toor, was involved in various terror acts against the security forces in Dera Ismail Khan and Tank. The terrorist commander was also involved in the targeted killing of civilians. According to ISPR,

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# Lifetime disqualification SC reserves judgement

"No one has challenged five-year disqualification law," says CJP during hearing of lawmakers' disqualification case; Justice Amin says court is being asked to do Parliament's job i.e amending the Constitution to deal with Article 62 F

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Friday reserved the verdict in the case pertaining to the lifetime disqualification of lawmakers under Article 62(1)(F) of the Constitution after arguments were completed. While reserving the verdict, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa said that a short order would be announced soon. A seven-member larger bench – headed by CJP Isa and comprising Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Yahya Afridi, Justice Aminuddin Khan, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhel, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, and Justice MusarratHilali – conducted the hearing. The apex court had taken notice of contradictions regarding

Continued on Page 06

## Nomination papers of Qureshi, Omar Ayub approved

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The nomination papers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) senior leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi were cleared Friday, allowing him to contest in the upcoming general elections scheduled to take place on February 8. Qureshi's papers were approved after the Election Appellate Tribunal conducted a hearing of appeals against the rejection or acceptance of

Continued on Page 06

# PPP will continue ZAB's mission of supporting the poor: Bilawal

Chairman Bilawal addresses ceremony held in honour of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's birth anniversary in Lahore

ABID RAZA



LAHORE: Chairman Bilawal addressing a ceremony held by the PPP's Women Wing in the honour of Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on the occasion of his 96th birth anniversary in Lahore said that the women of Pakistan, that constitute 50 percent of the population are aware of the country's woes. They have a better understanding of the unprecedented increase in inflation and poverty as well as its impact. They know that no one in Pakistan currently can survive just on the monthly wage and limited ration. The women are aware how expensive it is to access healthcare for their elders, educational and employment opportunities for their children. Chairman Bilawal said that the women workers of the Party need to act as his advocate, ambassador and 'voice',

Continued on Page 06

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# Education support from TIKA to Pakistan

We are extremely glad to inaugurate these 2 schools belonging to the o Veraval Turk Community furnished by TIKA: Cemal Sangu

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The inauguration ceremony of primary and secondary schools, which belong to the Veraval Turk Community, renewed by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, was held with the participation of Sindh Province Care Taker Minister of Education Rana Hussain, Consul General of Türkiye to Karachi Cemal Sangu, T KA Karachi Programme Coordinator Halil Ibrahim Başaran and other guests. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Care Taker Education Minister of Sindh, Rana Hussain said that the classrooms of these newly renovated schools were very attractive and interactive. Such an environment helps students grow. She also thanked T KA and Türkiye for their support. Consul General of Türkiye to Karachi Cemal Sangu conveyed his wishes and said, "We, as Türkiye, always support

and give important education. In three-gardds, 28 Pak Turk MaariSchools are active in Pakistan. We are extremely glad to inaugurate these 2 schools belonging to the o Veraval Turk Community furnished by T KA." T KA Karachi Programme Coordinator Halil Ibrahim Başaran expressed his thoughts and said "Between 2019 and 2023, T KA realized nearly 30 projects in the education sector in Sindh and Balochistan Provinces. Veraval Turk Community schools are one of those. We will continue to support the education sector with the cooperation of the f Sindh Education Ministry." Veraval Turkish Community Secretary General Hussain Ghulam said, "Veraval Turk Jamais t in debt of Turkish sisters and brothers sitting thousands of miles away for helping the people of Veraval Turk Community. This School currently educates 450 students which will accom-

modate more 450 students now in morning and evening shifts." T Krenovatedin two schools, whose capacities were increased with the construction of additional floors, renovation of old buildings as well as the provision of school furnitureestablishment of computer laboratory, modern science laboratory, library and the installation of solar energy at the premises to fulfill the l energy requirement of the said schools. After the ribbon-cutting ceremony and school bell ringing by Minister Rana Hussain and Consul General Cemal Sangu, nearly five hundred students resumed education in their newly renovated schools. Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, with its two offices in Pakistan, continues to contribute to the development of friendly and brother country Pakistan in the field of education with the projects which have been carried out since 2010.



RAWALPINDI: Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi giving instructions on the occasion of visiting Holy Family Hospital Upgradation Project.—DNA

## Dr. Jamal announces crackdown on harmful beauty products

## Pak-Afghan traders meet director on banned items

STAFF REPORT

LAHORE : Caretaker Punjab Minister for Primary and Secondary Health, Dr. Jamal Nasir has announced a crackdown on harmful beauty creams and cosmetics. Operations will be conducted against unqualified individuals administering beauty injections or performing any kind of surgery. Joint teams from the Punjab Healthcare Commission (PHC) and the Drug Control Directorate are being formed for this purpose. The Drug Control will determine the registration status of beauty creams and cosmetics, while experts from the PHC will assess clinical practices.

This information was shared by the minister in a press conference held here on Friday. He stated that non-standard creams claiming to lighten skin are causing diseases, adding that the use of substandard beauty creams is causing severe damage to the skin of hundreds of individuals. He said that some cosmetics contain dangerous amounts of lead, toxins, and other harmful chemicals, leading to life-threatening diseases such as liver and kidney cancer. Dr. Nasir revealed that drug testing is being conducted on 24 well-known brands in a laboratory, and strict action will be taken against them if harmful chemicals are found. Emphasizing health preservation principles, Dr. Jamal Nasir mentioned the screening of beauty parlors to ensure compliance with health standards. He expressed concern about the increasing use of harmful cosmetics in Pakistan.—APP

PESHAWAR: Businessmen dealing in Pak-Afghan trade held a meeting with Director Transit Trade Customs, Arbab Qaiser Hameed to discuss banned items in Afghan Transit Trade. The delegation of stakeholder was led by prominent businessman and Coordinator of Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi. Other members of the delegation included Engr. Manzoor Ellahi, Ex. SVP Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Farooq Ahmad, President Torkhem Custom Agents Association and Aimal Khan Shinwari, President All Torkhem Custom Association. Director Transit Trade, Arbab Qaiser Hameed was accompanied by Wajid Ali, Additional Director, Shams Wazir, Additional Director, Ms. Maleeka Ahmad, Deputy Director

and Superintendent Transit, Sadiq Akbar. The meeting held thorough discussion on one point agenda of banned items of Afghan transit trade and suggestions were given by business community for redressal of issues. Director Transit shared the list of banned items and delegates of stake holders proposed that the items with negligible imports in transit may be excluded from list. The also made a recommendation that items like raw material used in Afghan industries may also be excluded from negative list in order to stream line the transit trade removing the impression of unnecessary restrictions which in retaliation impact Pakistani exports to Central Asian countries via Afghanistan in transit. Arbab Qaiser Hameed gave patient hearing to the issues and held out assurance of giving serious consideration to suggestions presented in the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi thanked Custom officials for giving them time to listen to problems causing impediments in Pak-Afghan Trade. He said businessmen are fully against smuggling of goods from Afghanistan but were of the view that vigilance and monitoring should be enhanced instead of imposing ban on trade. He said livelihood of thousands of people in both Pakistan and Afghanistan are attached with trade between the two countries and this historic link of commerce has a vast untapped potential if business is extended to Central Asian Republics. He also appreciated the efforts made by Director General Transit Trade, Wajid Ali in promotion of trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Zia extended an invitation to DG Transit Trade, Wajid Ali for visit to Peshawar and meeting with stakeholders of Pak-Afghan trade.



## SBBWU organizes awareness walk on female waste management

PESHAWAR : The Compost Club of the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, (SBBWU) here on Friday organized an awareness walk to highlight the pivotal role of women in waste management, as part of its 'Sustainable Campus Operation' initiative. The initiative aimed to cultivate a culture of sustainability by empowering women to take leadership roles in waste management practices. The Club sought to harness the potential of female leaders through education, training and community engagement to create a more resilient and environmentally conscious society. Speaking on the occasion, Vice-Chancellor, Prof Dr Safia Ahmed said that fostering the female empowerment was a holistic and empowering approach that recognized the pivotal role of women in driving positive change. "By fostering female empowerment, we not only contribute to sustainable waste practices but also pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future," she noted. The participants of the walk and members of the Compost Club, actively participated in this walk. The guests lauded the sustainability efforts of members of Compost Club by highlighting their collective commitment for a greener future. The goal of the event was to reduce organic waste on the campus and motivate other academicians to embrace sustainability.—APP

## Educational ministry honors 509 teachers with HTS

ISLAMABAD : The Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training granted the Higher Time Scale (HTS) to the teachers during a meeting of the departmental promotion committee held here on Friday. The promotion landscape for teachers witnessed a notable transformation. The committee convened to deliberate on the grant of Higher Time Scale (HTS) to teachers in the BPS-18 to BPS-20 range, and a total of 509 time scale cases were meticulously reviewed and discussed. Among the notable outcomes, a total of 14 teachers of BPS-20 were granted the HTS of BPS-21.

Among them were 3 male and 4 female Professors of BPS-20 from Federal Government Colleges, while Model Colleges saw 2 male and 2 female Professors of BPS-20 achieving the coveted BPS-21 status. Additionally, from the school side, 2 male and 1 female Principals were granted HTS of BPS-21. The impact of the decisions reached in the meeting extended to teachers in BPS-19, with 138 individuals successfully attaining HTS of BPS-21. Notable grant of HTS included 23 male and 25 female Associate Professors from Federal Government Colleges, 22 male and 29 female Associate Profes-

sors from Model Colleges, and 8 Deputy Headmistresses from Model Colleges, all upgraded to BPS-20 (HTS). Similarly, 12 male and 19 female Principals from the school side were elevated to BPS-20 (HTS). Furthermore, 357 teachers in BPS-18 saw progress in their careers as they were granted HTS of BPS-19. This included 36 male and 36 female Associate Professors from Federal Government Colleges, along with 34 male and 36 female Assistant Professors from Model Colleges. Moreover, 40 Assistant Headmistresses from model colleges, 83 male.—APP

## Dr. Riaz renews commitment to eradicate polio

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Caretaker Chief Minister on Health, Dr. Riaz Anwar renewed government's commitment for stamping out the crippling virus of polio from the region at the outset of the new year saying that despite competing priorities and challenges the government will continue its course with reinvigorated spirit for delivering its promise on ensuring healthier and safer future for the children of the country. He expressed these views while inaugurating the first National Immunization Days (NID) of the year at the provincial level here at Police

Services Hospital on Friday. The inauguration ceremony was also attended by Deputy Coordinator Emergency Operation Center Muhammad Zeeshan Khan, Dr. Syed Bawar Shah, President Pakistan Paediatric Association KP, Dr Sarfaraz Khan team lead WHO KP and other relevant officials. While talking to media he emphasised the government's commitment to achieving the complete eradication of the poliovirus across all segments of society. Dr. Anwar stated that despite the hard-weather challenges, polio teams are dedicated to reaching every household with eligible children to ensure their vaccination in every campaign. He further

highlighted that comprehensive preparations for the five-day polio eradication campaign, consisting of two phases, have been completed at the Provincial Emergency Operations Center. Starting on January 8, this campaign aims to administer polio drops to all children up to the age of five. Dr. Anwar stressed the importance of collaboration from parents and other community members to eliminate this infectious disease. Providing details about the campaign, Dr. Riaz Anwar informed that Lalki Marwat, South Waziristan Upper, and Lower will initiate the polio eradication campaign from January 15. Deputy Coordinator of the

Emergency Operations Center, Zeeshan Khan, shared campaign details with the media, stating that over 7.4 million children in the province will receive polio drops during this initiative. "To ensure the success of the campaign, a total of 31,505 trained polio workers have been organized into teams, including 28,049 mobile teams, 1,964 fixed teams, 1,321 transit teams, and 171 roaming teams. Additionally, 7,151 area in-charges have been appointed for effective monitoring," he added. For the security of the polio teams during the campaign, approximately 50,000 personnel have been deployed, Zeeshan Khan concluded.

## Hazara police registers 6008 FIRs on illegal weapons

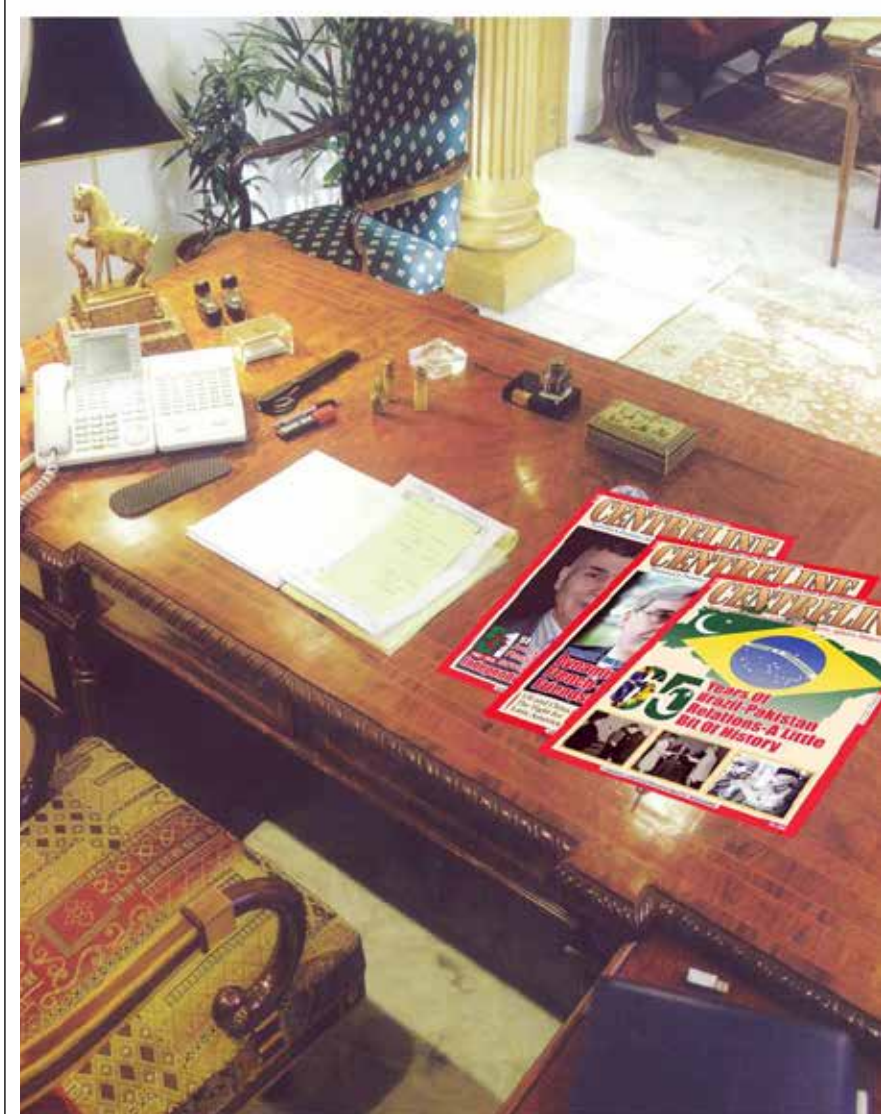
ABBOTTABAD: In a significant crackdown on unlawful activities, the Hazara Police registered a total of 6008 First Information Reports (FIRs) in 2023. The FIRs were filed against individuals involved in illegal possession of weapons, aerial firing, and the public display of arms. This was disclosed in the yearly report of Hazara police. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Hazara police

Muhammad Ijaz Khan while talking to the media on the occasion shared the details of recovered arms and ammunition, said that 180 Kalashnikovs, 573 rifles, 2260 shotguns, 6652 pistols, and a staggering 778925 rounds of ammunition were confiscated during the year 2023. He said that the drive conducted across the eight districts of Hazara division including search and strike operations, check-

points, aerial firing incidents, and regular patrols, led to the identification and subsequent registration of FIRs against criminals possessing illegal weapons. Ajaz Khan announced stringent actions against those participating in the illegal buying and selling of weapons and those found in possession of firearms without the necessary licenses. Emphasizing the importance of

responsible firearm ownership, the DIG urged licensed weapon owners to ensure proper documentation of their arms at the relevant police stations. The DIG also highlighted the legal and ethical implications of displaying weapons on social media platforms. He stressed the need for compliance with the National Action Plan, which guides the police in conducting regular search and strike operations, any

individual found with illegal weapons during these operations will face immediate legal consequences. DIG cautioned even individuals with licensed weapons about the potential dangers of engaging in aerial firing or showcasing their firearms on social media. He issued a stern warning, underscoring the lethal consequences of aerial firing, which could result in the loss of valuable lives.—APP



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## 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
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## Emergency

Rescue (Police).....	15
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Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....	1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance.....	1122
& Rescue Services.....	4451122
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Rawalpindi.....	9270601-20



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Shifa International.....	4603666



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TMA.....	5770886
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Islamabad.....	0321-5744480
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# Unveiling "A mirror's tale" PNCA celebrates Hussain Jamil's reflective artistry

The inauguration, graced by His Excellency, Mr. Mohamed Karmoune, Ambassador of Morocco to Pakistan

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Today, the Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) proudly presents the highly anticipated solo exhibition by acclaimed artist Hussain Jamil, titled "A Mirror's Tale." The exhibition, hosted by the Visual Arts Division, opened its doors on Friday, January 5th, at 3 PM, marking a significant cultural moment in the capital's art scene. The inauguration, graced by His Excellency, Mr. Mohamed Karmoune, Ambassador of Morocco to Pakistan, and Mr. M. Ayoub Jamali, Director-General of PNCA, received an enthusiastic reception. This esteemed event showcased Jamil's masterful manipulation of reflective surfaces, captivating patrons and art enthusiasts alike. Spanning the prestigious Grand Hall and Gallery 1 of PNCA, the exhibition, despite the artist's absence at the opening ceremony, conveyed Jamil's profound appreciation for PNCA and its patrons through a heartfelt video message. His insights into the works and admiration for the institution resonated deeply with the audience. Jamil's artistic finesse navigated the enigmatic world of reflections, transforming reflective surfaces into canvases that mirrored reality while transcending into realms beyond. His creations, more than mere arrangements of reflective materials, served as symphonies of storytelling, weaving narratives through fractured and crum-



bled sheets, whispering tales of depth and intrigue. "Welcome to a mesmerizing journey through the realms of perception and illusion," shared Jamil. "My art aimed to explore the multifaceted nature of reality, where reflections became gateways to understanding the layers that cloak our perceptions." Each artwork in this exhibition invited introspection, prompting

viewers to contemplate the essence of existence as fragments and reflections converged to compose narratives laden with hidden stories. "We invited art enthusiasts, patrons, and the curious-minded to immerse them in this collection," invited Mr. M. Ayoub Jamali, Director-General of PNCA. "Hussain Jamil's profound artistic expression captured the beauty found in

imperfections, beckoning us to explore the complexities of the human experience." The exhibition, running until January 20th, provided a unique opportunity to engage with the reflective artistry of Hussain Jamil. Additionally, upon the artist's arrival in Pakistan, the Visual Arts Division planned to host an artist talk, offering complementary insights into his works and artistic

journey. As viewers wandered through this thought-provoking collection, they were encouraged to allow the reflections to guide them through a labyrinth of interpretations, discovering the beauty within the fractures and folds of Jamil's remarkable creations. For further information and updates on PNCA events, please visit the PNCA social media platforms.

## Pak-China EV organized training session fostering sustainable energy practices

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A joint venture company Pak China Huazi Green Energy (Private), organized an Electric Vehicle (EV) training session here with the cooperation of National Skills University (NSU). Talking to Gwadar Pro, Khalid Mahmood, CEO of Huazi Green Energy said the two-day EV Repair and Maintenance Introductory Course this week, showcased the collaborative efforts between NSU and Pak-China Huazi Green Energy Pvt Ltd. The course, led by esteemed Chinese technicians, marked a significant stride towards fostering sustainable energy practices and knowledge exchange in electric vehicles. The event, witnessed a convergence of industry experts, educators, and students, creating a dynamic platform for disseminating knowledge and insights into the rapidly evolving landscape of electric vehicles. The collaborative initiative between NSU and Pak-China Huazi Green Energy Pvt Ltd aims to bridge the knowledge gap in electric vehicle technology and promote adopting eco-friendly transportation solutions. Besides creating thousands of jobs in the near future, this initiative will help overcome the smog problems that Pakistan is continually facing. Highlights of the event included interactive sessions, hands-on workshops, and comprehensive presentations by Chinese technicians, who shared their expertise and experiences in the field.

## PRMI Cross fertilization of reform interventions

ISLAMABAD: The speakers in seminar have discussed the Pakistan Regulatory Modernization Initiative (PRMI) and its pivotal role in enhancing the regulatory landscape of the country. Representatives from across Pakistan gathered in Islamabad for an enlightening seminar organized by ReMIT to discuss the Pakistan Regulatory Modernization Initiative (PRMI) and its pivotal role in enhancing the regulatory landscape of the country, said a press release issued here on Friday. The event served as a platform for provinces and regions to showcase progress, share success stories, address challenges, and outline future plans regarding regulatory reforms. Secretary Board of Investment, Dr. Sohail Rajput expressed the paramount importance of regulatory reforms in adapting to changing circumstances and optimizing governance structures. As Pakistan strives to enhance its investment climate,

the focus lies in reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens and streamlining business processes at provincial and local levels, he said. Addressing the audience of the seminar, Secretary Rajput expressed gratitude for their presence and underscored the importance of the gathering, emphasizing the need to discuss the evolving regulatory landscape in the country. He highlighted that in an era marked by rapid technological advancements, shifting economic landscapes, and evolving societal expectations, regulatory reforms have gained paramount significance. Secretary BOI said that such reforms are deemed vital for adapting to changing circumstances, fostering innovation, and ensuring the efficient functioning of both public and private sectors. Acknowledging the diligent efforts of provincial and regional governments in the past year, Secretary Rajput commended positive changes brought about through

business reforms in various economic sectors. He stressed the role of reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens and streamlining business processes at the provincial and local levels to enhance the investment climate in Pakistan. The seminar provided each province and region with the opportunity to present progress in areas like PRMI, key regulatory reform successes, ongoing challenges, and plans for the future. Secretary Rajput highlighted the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing between provinces and regions to establish uniform best practices and ensure regulatory coordination across Pakistan. "With continued support from our development partners like FCDO and ReMIT, I am confident that our collective efforts will make Pakistan an even more attractive destination for investment and business over the coming years," said Secretary Rajput. —APP

## Power suspension schedules

DNA

ISLAMABAD: According to Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO)'s spokesman, System Maintenance/Development Work is in process. Therefore power supply of below mentioned feeders/areas will be temporarily suspended as per given schedule: On Dated 06th January 2024, From 09:00 AM to 02:00 PM, Islamabad Circle, Islamabad Club 1, CDA Flats, G-6, Diplomatic Enclave, G-8 Markaz, Wahidabad, UC Road, F-10/4, G-9/1, H8, Karor, Old Exchange, I-10/4, G-11 Markaz, F-11 Markaz, Shahpur, PHED, Dahian, Kotli Sattian, Balawara, Bari Imam, Sharifabad, Burma, Khanna Dock, Soudran Road, Feeders, Rawalpindi City Circle, Raja Sultan, New Malpur, Muzamal Town, Khanna Road, Farooq Azam, Airport, Dhok Hekmad, Iqbal Road 2, Major Masood, Jama Masjid, Gwalmandi, Rajaabad, Quidabad, Khayaban Sir Syed, Eid Gah, People's Colony, Dhok Chaudharyan, Officer.

## Chinese companies increase investment in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Chinese companies in collaboration with their local partners in Pakistan have increased investment for copper production in the recent years. Copper and articles thereof have seen an increase in export to China from Pakistan as well. In the first eleven months of 2023 increased by 9%, crossed one billion dollars mark, sources from Commerce Ministry told China Economic Net. Qadir, Commercial Counsellor at the Pakistan Embassy in Bei-



jing, told CEN that the Pakistani government is keen to boost copper and associated product exports to China. He also mentioned that Pakistan's exports of copper to China have increased recently, and he anticipated that the value of these exports will rise as a result of refined cop-

per products. "Pakistan has been actively seeking foreign investments, particularly from big Chinese companies, to bring in value addition and produce more valuable products for the global market. Having Chinese companies invest in Pakistan would not only provide a boost to the country's economy but also open doors for advanced technologies and expertise. This would enable Pakistan to enhance its manufacturing capabilities and produce high-quality.—DNA

## The vital role of media literacy and critical thinking in education

HALEEMA

In the contemporary digital era, the imperative to incorporate media literacy into educational curricula has significantly heightened. Navigating the complex and information-rich landscape necessitates the development of critical analysis skills among students, enabling them to scrutinize various media forms, such as news articles, social media content, and videos. This comprehensive approach seeks to empower students to evaluate the credibility, bias, and intentions embedded in the media they encounter. In a world saturated with information, fostering critical thinking becomes paramount. Instructing students to interrogate sources, evaluate evidence, and discern between reliable and unreliable content equips

them to navigate the digital realm with discernment. This skill set is especially relevant in an era characterized by misinformation and fake news, where the swift dissemination of inaccuracies can influence public perceptions and pivotal societal decisions. By integrating media literacy into educational curricula, educators establish an environment wherein students not only critically consume media but also learn to responsibly create and share content. Media literacy surpasses conventional literacy concepts, encompassing an understanding of persuasive techniques in advertising, the impact of media on societal attitudes, and the ethical considerations surrounding media production. This integration readies students to be informed consumers and

responsible producers of media content, promoting digital citizenship and ethical media practices. Integral to media literacy, critical thinking skills empower students to engage with information thoughtfully. They acquire the ability to question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, and make informed judgments. In an era where information is easily accessible but not always accurate, these skills prove indispensable. Armed with critical thinking abilities, students are better equipped to navigate the intricacies of online discourse, identify misinformation, and contribute meaningfully to discussions. Furthermore, critical thinking extends beyond media consumption; it is a versatile skill applicable to various facets of life, including problem-solving,

decision-making, and effective communication. As students refine their ability to analyse and evaluate information, they develop resilience to manipulation and a better capacity to engage with diverse viewpoints. In conclusion, the integration of media literacy into educational curricula represents a vital step in preparing students for the challenges of the digital age. By placing weight on critical thinking skills, educators empower students to navigate the vast and sometimes complex information landscape with discernment and responsibility. These skills not only enhance students' capacities to consume and produce media thoughtfully but also contribute to their overall development as informed and engaged citizens in an increasingly interconnected world.

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# Lawmakers reaffirm to continue unyielding support for Palestine

Senator Mushtaq Ahmed of JI acknowledged the significant sacrifices made by the innocent people of Gaza and Palestine, expressing confidence in the eventual freedom of Palestine, with Al Quds Sharif as its capital

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Lawmakers in the Upper House of Parliament on Friday reaffirmed continued unyielding support for Palestine and also emphasized Pakistan's unwavering support for its people. Speaking in Senate here on Friday, Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed asserted that the entire Pakistani nation including parliament will

stand resolutely until the independent state of Palestine is established, with Al Quds Sharif as its capital. Senator Mushtaq Ahmed of JI acknowledged the significant sacrifices made by the innocent people of Gaza and Palestine, expressing confidence in the eventual freedom of Palestine, with Al Quds Sharif as its capital. He called on the international community to hold Israel accountable for its aggression in Palestine,

urging the OIC to conduct a public hearing on Israel's war crimes and crimes against humanity. He further advocated for Pakistan's continued support for a ceasefire in Palestine and overall peace in the region. Leader of the House, Senator Ishaq Dar, echoed the sentiments expressed by Senators Mushahid Hussain Syed and Mushtaq Ahmed, affirming full support for Palestine. He emphasized that Pakistan is

committed to standing behind Palestine in its quest for sovereignty. Senator Maulvi Faiz Muhammad expressed his steadfast support for the Palestinian cause and pledged to continue backing it. Speaking on a point of public importance, Senator Dost Muhammad Khan urged the government to address the issues facing ex-FATA, emphasizing the importance of providing the region with its committed share.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistani High Commissioner in the UK Dr. Muhammad Faisal called on caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar in Islamabad. —DNA

## Briefs

### ANF recovers over 243 kg drugs in six operations

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in its crackdown against drug traffickers conducted six operations across the country and managed to recover over 243 kg drugs and arrested six accused including a foreigner, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday. He informed that 220 kg hashish was recovered from a trailer near Indus Chowrangi, Karachi area and an accused was arrested. 10 kg hashish was recovered from the bag of an accused rounded up near Zero Point, Gwadar. 8 kg hashish and 4 kg Ice were recovered in two operations near Chongi No. 26 Islamabad while two accused were arrested. In fifth operation, 1 kg hashish was recovered near Shershah Toll Plaza Multan and an accused was arrested. In sixth operation, a capsule containing 17 grams cocaine was recovered from the stomach of an accused, a Nigerian national arrested from Lahore. Cases under the Anti-Narcotics Act have been registered against the arrested accused and further investigations are underway.

### 3 hurt, house damaged in Rawalpindi gas explosion

DNA

ISLAMABAD: At least three family members suffered serious injuries after a gas explosion that partially damaged the house in Rawat a small town located outside Rawalpindi city on early Friday morning. A private news channel reported that the incident took place in a house located in Rawat, as a result, three persons were injured. The police called a Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) team to assess the nature of the explosion and damages. The injured were immediately shifted to hospital for medical treatment while rescue teams rushed to the spot.

### Police arrest two bike lifters with 11 stolen motorcycles

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Police have arrested two bike lifters and recovered 11 stolen motorcycles from their possession, said a Police spokesman here on Friday. He informed that a team under the supervision of SHO, New Town Police Station managed to net two bike lifters namely Hassan and Husnain and recovered 11 stolen motorcycles and other items from their possession. A case has been registered against the accused while further investigation is underway. Superintendent of Police, Rawal Faisal Saleem said the accomplices and facilitators of the accused would also be sent behind bars.

## Pakistan secures global recognition as premier tourist destination in 2023

ISLAMABAD: In a significant milestone, the collaborative efforts of the Pakistani government and the Pakistan Association of Tour Operators have propelled the country to be hailed as the best destination for tourism by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2023. A recent meeting between the delegation of tour operators and the Secretary of Interior marked a pivotal moment in advancing Pakistan's tourism sector, said a public relations officer on Friday. The delegation, representing the Pakistan Association of Tour Operators, engaged in a

constructive dialogue with the Secretary of Interior, addressing key challenges and presenting innovative suggestions for boosting tourism. A breakthrough emerged as both parties reached a consensus to streamline and expedite the tourist visa procedure, a move aimed at enhancing accessibility for global travellers. During the meeting, the Home Secretary affirmed the government's unwavering commitment to play a proactive role in promoting tourism. Expressing dedication to resolving pertinent issues, the Home Secretary echoed the sen-

timent that the growth of tourism stands as a top priority on the national agenda. This commitment to fostering tourism has yielded remarkable results, as evidenced by the recent announcement from the UNWTO. The international organization's recognition of Pakistan as the best country for tourism in 2023 underscores the nation's newfound status as a premier global destination. The collaborative synergy between the government and the tour operators has not only addressed existing challenges but has also paved the way for a more welcoming

environment for tourists. The streamlined visa procedures and the dedication of key stakeholders signify a collective determination to position Pakistan as a go-to location for travellers worldwide. As Pakistan basks in the accolade bestowed by the UNWTO, it marks a turning point in the nation's tourism narrative. The journey towards becoming the best country for tourism reflects not just a singular achievement but a testament to the concerted efforts of a nation embracing its potential as a global tourist haven, he added.

## Trade deficit shrinks by 34.29 per cent

ISLAMABAD: The country's merchandise trade deficit contracted by 34.29 per cent during the first half of the current fiscal year compared to the corresponding period of last year, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported. The Trade deficit from July-December (2023-24) was recorded at \$11.148 billion as against the deficit of \$16.965 billion in July-December (2022-23), showing negative growth of 34.29 per cent. During the period under review, the exports increased by 5.17 per cent to \$14.981 billion compared to the exports of \$14.244 billion during the corresponding period of last year, according to the latest PBS data. On the other hand, the imports narrowed by 16.28 per cent and were recorded at

\$26.129 billion compared to \$31.209 billion last year. Meanwhile, on a year-on-year basis, the exports from the country increased by 22.21 per cent in December compared to the exports of the same month of last year. The exports during the month were recorded at \$2.812 billion as against the exports of \$2.301 billion in December 2022. On the other hand, the imports during December 2023 were recorded at \$4.514 billion compared to the imports of \$5.144 billion in December 2022, showing a decrease of 12.25 per cent, according to the data. On a month-on-month basis, the exports from the country increased by 9.29 per cent when compared to the exports of \$2.573 billion during November 2023. The imports into the

country went down by 0.55 per cent when compared to the imports of \$4.539 billion in November 2023, PBS reported. Meanwhile, the services' exports during July-November (2023-24) earned foreign exchange worth \$2,986 million as compared to exports of \$3,089 million during the same period of last year, showing negative growth of 3.33 per cent. The services' imports into the country however increased by 20.67 per cent by going up from \$3,406 million last year to \$4,110 million during the first five months of current fiscal year. Based on the figures, the services' trade deficit increased by 254.51 percent during the period under review by going up from \$317 million last year to \$1,124 million this year.

## 'Ample stock of fertilizer available to meet domestic demand'

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs, Murtaza Solangi, Friday informed the Senate that there is an ample stock of fertilizer available in the country to meet the domestic demand. In response to a calling attention notice moved by Zeeshan Khanzada regarding the problems being faced by the farmers due to the shortage of urea fertilizer and its soaring rates, he expressed hope that, due to steps taken by the caretaker government in the coming days, there would be a further noticeable reduction in urea prices in the country. The minister said that urea prices, which had previously exceeded Rs. 5,000 per bag, have now decreased to Rs. 4,451 per bag due to the government's interventions. Emphasizing the significance of agriculture in the country, Murtaza Solangi highlighted that approximately one-fourth of Pakistan's GDP is attributed to agriculture, with 40% of the labor force linked to this vital sector. Regarding the steps taken by the government, he informed that around 220,000 tons of urea had been recently imported by the government. He shared estimates indicating that urea supply during the Rabi season was projected to be 3.5 million tons, with an initial balance of 770,000 tons and local production of 3.28 million tons. —APP

## Solangi reiterates Pakistan's commitment to Kashmir cause

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Murtaza Solangi said on Friday reiterated the commitment of the government and people of Pakistan to contribute support for Kashmir cause. "Today we reiterate our commitment that Pakistan will continue to support Kashmiris politically, diplomatically and morally till they get their rightful rights and the success of their freedom struggle," Murtaza Solangi said in a message on the occasion of Kashmir Self-Determination Day. Kashmiri people on both sides of the Line of Control and around the world were celebrating the right to self-determination today, Murtaza Solangi said. The minister said that United Nations Security Council, through a resolution on January 5, 1949, gave the Kashmiri people the right to decide their future as per their wishes. Today, 75 years have passed since this promise made to the Kashmiri people, but unfortunately this promise has not been fulfilled till date, Murtaza Solangi lamented. The minister urged the United Nations to honour the promises made to the Kashmiri people and support their struggle for self-determination. The people of Jammu and Kashmir were waiting for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute as per the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, he maintained. The minister said the UN Security Council should fulfill its commitments. India was trying to strengthen its grip on occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Murtaza Solangi said adding the decision of the Supreme Court of India on 11 December 2023 regarding the status of the disputed territory was the latest step in this direction. India, he said was leaving no stone unturned to change the demography of Occupied Jammu and Kashmir based on religion. —APP

## 'Govt. issues directives for election of PCB chairman's slot'

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Parliamentary Affairs, Murtaza Solangi, informed the Senate on Friday that the government has issued directives for the elections of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman's slot. In response to Senator Mushtaq Ahmad's question during question hours in the Senate, he said that the appointment of the PCB Chairman was made by the previous government, not by the caretaker government. The Minister said that the current Chairman of the PCB has previously worked in this position. He added that the present government has limited the powers of the PCB Chairman, and the chairman of the PCB cannot make vital decisions independently under the current government's directives. —APP

## RDA issues notice to illegal housing scheme 'Aamin Housing One'

RAWALPINDI: Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) on the directives of the Director General (DG) RDA, Muhammad Saif Anwar Jappa has issued a show cause notice to the illegal housing scheme 'Aamin Housing One' located in mouza Bajnal. According to an RDA spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering Directorate RDA also advised the citizens not to invest in the illegal housing scheme 'Aamin Housing One Pvt Ltd' located in mouza Bajnal, Tehsil Rawalpindi which was marketing an unapproved housing project through media. He said that the housing scheme is illegal as RDA had rejected and returned the file submitted by the owner of the scheme, Muhammad Raziq, and a show cause notice was issued. The RDA spokesperson further said that the DG had also advised the citizens not to invest in illegal housing schemes. He sponsors and developers of this scheme were illegally advertising the housing scheme and selling the plots without obtaining approval from the RDA. He said the MP&TE Directorate RDA had also directed the owner of the illegal housing scheme to stop all kinds of development works, advertisements, sale, and purchase of the plots. In case of non-compliance, due legal actions would be initiated as per rules against the violators, he added. He said that the DG had also directed the MP&TE Directorate to take strict action against illegal advertisements and marketing of illegal housing schemes. —APP

## Determinism

NAIRA ESHAAL

Physiological Determinism It is the belief that human behaviours, actions, and traits are primarily influenced or dictated by biological factors or bodily functions. It suggests that our biology such as genetic hormones and brain structure largely determines our thoughts, behaviours and capabilities. Examples include genetic disorders, hormonal influence on behaviour, neurological injuries and inherited traits. Reli-

gious Determinism It is the belief that all events, actions and outcomes are predetermined by a divine force or a higher power in accordance with religious principles or beliefs. Examples include predestination in Christianity, fate in Islam, Karma in Hinduism and Buddhism, and Divine will in Judaism. Sociological Determinism It emphasizes the impact of social structures, institutions and cultural norms on shaping human behaviour and society. Environmental determinism It proposes

that the physical environment including geography, climate and resources all highlight the importance of external influences on shaping human behaviours, societies and cultures. Examples include gender roles and expectations, education and social mobility, and cultural norms and values. Along with all these, there are also examples of agriculture and settlement patterns, climate and cultural practices, resource availability and economic development, geographical barriers and isolation.

## Talented Science students can apply for Olympiads

ISLAMABAD: The talented Science students can register through the STEM Career Programme for participating in the upcoming International Science Olympiads (ISOs) scheduled to be held in the month of July, 2025. International Science Olympiads include 66th International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO) in Australia, 57th International Chemistry Olympiad (ICHO) in UAE, 36th International Biology Olympiad (IBO) in Philippines and 55th International Physics Olympiad (IPhO) in France. According to an official source, the STEM Career Programme is a joint ven-

ture of HEC and PIEAS and aims to inspire youth of the nation to opt for careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and prepare them for participation in the annual International Olympiad in Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics, exhibiting the country's natural talent in these competitions. About the eligibility criteria, the official source revealed that the students must have aggregate marks of 60 percent or more in core subjects i.e. Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics in last exam while the age should be less than 20 years at the time of

participation in ISOs. The current students of Pre-9th, 9th, 10th and 11th (Matric/O Level, or F.Sc-I/A-Level-1) can apply for the programme. While students who are currently studying in F.Sc (Part-II)/A-Level (Part-II) and University Students are not eligible to apply. The intended participants can register through [www.stem.edu.pk](http://www.stem.edu.pk) till the last date February 18, 2024 while the nationwide screening test will be conducted in the major cities of the country on March 03, 2024. Top 50 students are invited for one week fully residential training camp in each of

the NSTC subject on the basis of their performance in the Screening Test. The grooming/selection process gradually narrows down this number to 4-6 best students in each of these subjects. Olympiad teams of 4-6 students are selected through a series of subsequent training camps during a year for participation of International Science Olympiads to represent their country. Pakistan is regularly participating in the International Physics Olympiad since 2001, in the Mathematics Olympiad since 2005 and in the Biology and Chemistry Olympiad since 2006.

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## BRICS enlargement can help boost confidence

Despite newly elected Argentinian President Javier Milei announcing that his country would not become a member of BRICS for now, that regrettable decision will not diminish the bloc's appeal, which is only set to increase with the strong message of inclusiveness that was sent on Monday with its expansion. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Ethiopia joined Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa to start a new chapter for the group. The doubling of its membership is testament to the group's strong global appeal as it turns 18 years old this year and also to the cohesiveness of developing countries despite their different sizes, development stages and political systems. Apart from the five new members, dozens of countries have signed up to join BRICS, including Kuwait, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Bolivia. Over the past 17 years, BRICS has been a platform for the five BRICS countries to strengthen their cooperation, helping to foster the rise of the Global South. The Shanghai-based New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement exemplify the fruitful and pragmatic nature of the bloc's cooperation. Amid the increasingly complex international environment and lackluster global economic recovery, many developing countries are facing such woes as debt pressures, high inflation and sluggish growth. The five new members, as representatives of the Middle East and Africa, will help extend the bloc's global reach and influence, giving it greater weight as a global economic stabilizer. The newly expanded BRICS can coordinate efforts to promote shared growth, safeguard multilateralism, and make greater contributions to realize more just and equitable global governance. The world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation, and the international order is undergoing major shifts, divisions and regrouping. The conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have not only disrupted the global supply chains but also brought huge risks to peace and development both regionally and globally. Painting an even gloomier picture, some Western countries, entrenched in a Cold War mentality, have been sparing no effort to sow the seeds of division and confrontation so as to maintain the West's hegemony. Under such a gloomy backdrop, the BRICS cooperation mechanism is being looked to as a means to serve the common aspirations of emerging economies and developing countries for a fairer share of the global pie, and to shore up the global trend toward multipolarity. As a developing country, member of the Global South and founding member of BRICS, China is confident in the development of the cooperation mechanism. It is ready to deepen cooperation across the board in the spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation to jointly shape a brighter future for peoples of the BRICS members and the world at large.



## The view on Starmer's speech

Just before Christmas, Labour's shadow cabinet received a salutary briefing on recent political comebacks that defied polling predictions. As the party's poll lead over the Conservatives hovers close to 20 points, the message was clear: however dispirited, despairing and divided Rishi Sunak's Conservative party appears to be, Labour needs to maintain its discipline, avoid complacency and keep on doing what it has been doing. In essence, this is exactly what Sir Keir Starmer did on Thursday at the Bristol and Bath Science Park – a venue designed to project a future-facing vibe, in contrast to 14 years of economic stagnation under five Tory prime ministers. Sir Keir's heavily trailed speech contained no new policy; the point of it – in a year when Labour has a chance of achieving its most significant election victory since 1997 – was to paint with a broader brush, outlining a vision of necessary national renewal. Sir Keir was on the money in highlighting the need to clean up politics, after a chaotic and disreputable period in which Partygate, financial misconduct and lobbying scandals have contributed to a collapse in trust. He was also right to say that Britain needs to find a release from the divisive and cynical populism that has become the Tories' default mode of government since Brexit. And after being subjected to various forms of mismanagement since 2010, it is incontestable that the country is, as Sir Keir said, "in a total mess" with "services on their knees". Yet armed with this powerful diagnosis of the nation's ills, Labour continues to exhibit extreme caution regarding the detail of proposed cures. Sir Keir's speech notably omitted any mention of an already watered-down pledge to borrow £28bn a year to invest in green jobs and industry. Previously a cornerstone of Labour's plan for economic growth, this commitment is now, it seems, contingent on that growth. Similarly, Sir Keir and his shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, have ruled out major changes to income or wealth taxes, while highlighting the raised tax burden under the Conservatives. Labour plausibly promises a more honourable and competent administration than that which has come before, but when it comes to crucial political dividing lines, it hugs its opponents close. The logic of this small-c conservatism is clear: way ahead in the polls, and justifiably hopeful that the country simply wants to see the back of the Tories, Labour's exclusive preoccupation is to close off traditional lines of attack on its stewardship of the economy. Anyone who recalls fatal "Labour tax bombshell" headlines from past campaigns will sympathise with the impulse. But there are also risks attached to not taking any risks. The emphasis on "hope" in Sir Keir's speech responded to an emerging sense that, if it is to inspire the huge swing required to win a majority, Labour needs to show more than a dour devotion to "fiscal responsibility". The best way to do that in the coming year would be to boldly make the case for public investment as a catalyst for economic revival. Importantly, such an approach would also secure a stronger mandate for front-foot government, in challenging times which will demand precisely that. After suffering the effects of unnecessary and prolonged austerity, the public rightly has no appetite for more of the same. That is a truth which could, and should, be a winning argument for Labour in the year ahead.

## PTI Sans BAT and playground

Qamar Bashir



The analogy mirrors a cricket game where one team is equipped with guards, safety gadgets, their own umpire, a favorable ground, and a bat, while the other team is denied safety equipment, the BAT, and access to the field, effectively barring them from even entering the playground. Consequently, it's akin to handing a walkover victory to the favored team, unjustly declaring them the winners. This scenario was painted in the Supreme court by the PTI's lawyer Sardar Latif Khosa around first jeopardy

The PTI's plight can be likened to facing double jeopardy in a rigged match. Initially, they were denied a fair playing field, and subsequently, they were stripped of the emblematic BAT symbol. The analogy mirrors a cricket game where one team is equipped with guards, safety gadgets, their own umpire, a favorable ground, and a bat, while the other team is denied safety equipment, the BAT, and access to the field, effectively barring them from even entering the playground. Consequently, it's akin to handing a walkover victory to the favored team, unjustly declaring them the winners. This scenario was painted in the Supreme court by the PTI's lawyer Sardar Latif Khosa around first jeopardy where relying on the report filed by the Election Commission, he pleaded that political scenario in Pakistan reveals a disturbing asymmetry in the political landscape, where one party faces a relentless onslaught from the state machinery while others glide through their election preparations with ease. While rivals conduct candidate interviews in opulent drawing rooms accompanied by lavish feasts, this singular party battles each day for mere survival. Their access to political and administrative arenas has been systematically barred—a calculated strategy aimed not just at crippling but annihilating them. Another scenario was painted by the PTI's lawyers in the Peshawar High Court around second jeopardy where the PTI lawyers pleaded that following a directive from the Election Commission, the party held the intra party elections strictly in accordance with the party's constitution yet, within days, these very elections were branded unlawful. Worse, the party was denied the emblematic BAT symbol, laden with the historic significance of the Chairman's leadership, notably marked by the cricket World Cup triumph in 1992. This symbol wasn't just a party emblem; it encapsulated the aspirations and pride of the electorate, the Peshawar High Court first allowed the retention of the bat by PTI but rethought its decision and took away the BAT as a symbol. PTI now is all set to prefer appeal before the supreme court with the hope to get its symbol back which is a distant possibility albeit worth trying. According to PTI lawyers, denial of an emblem

goes beyond mere symbolism but effectively dissolves the party for practical intents, forcing the party's candidate to contest election in their individual capacity with separate symbols for each individual leading to a fragmented struggle. Such a calculated suppression undermines not just the party's identity but also erodes the democratic fabric by silencing diverse voices. They argued that separate symbols for hundreds of party's candidates in the federal and provincial levels would create confusion among voters who may struggle to recognize or locate the party on the ballot, resulting in potential loss of votes. Additionally, this last-minute change undermines the party's campaigning efforts, stripping them of a vital visual tool integral to their promotional materials. The sudden absence of their symbol creates a void that's challenging to fill in the eleventh hour of a political race. It erodes the morale of party workers and supporters. Legal battles to reclaim the symbol can drain resources and attention, diverting crucial focus away from campaigning efforts. Ultimately, the loss of a symbol doesn't just impede current electoral success; it can cast shadows over the party's credibility and standing in future elections. This means that a party will be contesting elections on the face of an uneven playing field and without its symbol in the lead-up to general elections impeding fair representation, distorting the ability of parties to reach voters on an equal footing. This distortion not only skews public perceptions but also undermines the electorate's capacity to make informed choices. The erosion of a level playing field corrodes trust in the democratic process, fostering disillusionment and cynicism among citizens. This disillusionment, if left unaddressed, can result in reduced voter turnout, weakening the legitimacy of election outcomes and threatening the very foundation of a robust democracy. PTI's vehemently uphill efforts in Supreme Court to secure a level playing field and restore its symbol may not go in waste as there are many examples in the judicial parlance of many countries where the parties deprived of symbols and level playing field were provided with remedy. In India - Sampath Kumar v. Union of India (2000), the Supreme Court of India addressed a case where a political party was

denied its election symbol. The court ruled that the Election Commission's decision to freeze the symbol violated natural justice and ordered the restoration of the symbol to the party. In Bangladesh - Jamaat-e-Islami v. Bangladesh Election Commission (2013), the Bangladesh Supreme Court dealt with a case involving a political party whose registration was canceled, thereby denying them the right to participate in elections. The court upheld the Election Commission's decision, stating that the cancellation was justified due to violations of the country's election laws. In the United States - Bush v. Gore (2000), the U.S. Supreme Court was involved in deciding the outcome of the presidential election. The case centered on the recounting of votes in Florida and whether it was being conducted fairly. The Court ruled in favor of George W. Bush, effectively ending the recount and deciding the election outcome. In Zimbabwe - Movement for Democratic Change v. Zimbabwe Election Commission (2018), the Zimbabwean courts heard cases regarding allegations of election irregularities and lack of a level playing field. While some cases were dismissed, others led to calls for electoral reforms, highlighting concerns about fairness and transparency. Seeking recourse in the Supreme Court of Pakistan offers a potential avenue for a political party unfairly deprived of a level playing field and denied their election symbol. However, the outcome of such appeals is intricate, resting on several critical factors. The success of the appeal hinges on the legal arguments presented, demanding clear evidence of constitutional or electoral law violations. The court's independence and impartiality, coupled with strong evidence supporting the party's claims, are pivotal. Past legal precedents, public perceptions, and political pressures also subtly influence the environment, shaping the court's decision-making process. If the case finds favor, possible remedies might include corrective measures in the electoral process or fair allocation of symbols, yet the complexity of judicial proceedings means outcomes aren't guaranteed.

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

## Iranian strategy and militarization in Eastern Syria

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



The goal seems to be exploiting the discontent with the United States and Israel, aiming to expand Iranian influence in Syria. This tension coincides with the ongoing conflict in Gaza between Israel and Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas. In the last two weeks, there have been frequent assaults on American forces' bases in eastern Syria. These attacks target various locations

In the past three weeks, there has been a significant increase in attacks on international coalition bases in northeastern Syria. These attacks are carried out by militias supported by Iran, operating in both Iraq and Syria. There are reports suggesting the establishment of centers to coordinate these strikes. The goal seems to be exploiting the discontent with the United States and Israel, aiming to expand Iranian influence in Syria. This tension coincides with the ongoing conflict in Gaza between Israel and Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas. In the last two weeks, there have been frequent assaults on American forces' bases in eastern Syria. These attacks target various locations, including the al-Omar Field, Conoco plant bases, Kharab al-Jir base, Tal Beydar, al-Shaddadi, and the al-Tanf base near the Syria-Iraq-Jordan border. The attacks involve different methods, such as drone strikes, improvised missiles, and mortar shells. Similar activities have also been reported in Iraq, with threats of further escalation. The U.S. military conducted airstrikes against Iranian militias in Deir ez-Zor on Oct. 26, Nov. 9, and precision strikes on Nov. 12 in Abu Kamal and al-Mayadin. The Pentagon states that these actions are in self-defense to protect U.S. forces and not intended to escalate the conflict. Groups claiming responsibility for the attacks on American forces in Syria identify themselves as "The Islamic Resistance in Iraq." This choice of name, similar to Lebanese Hezbollah's designation, appears to avoid implicating specific Iraqi or Syrian factions, preventing political pressure on their governments. A meeting in al-Bukamal aimed at coordinating the activities of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq involved various militia factions, including Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, Fatemiyoun and Zainabiyoun militias, Lebanese Hezbollah, the 47th Regiment, Saraya al-Khorasani, and local factions. The operations center coordinates activities along

three strategic axes involving missile and drone strikes, focusing on coalition bases, particularly in the eastern bank of the Euphrates River and the al-Tanf base. Elite forces trained in Dimas Camp near Damascus and training camps near al-Mayadin city carry out these operations. The goal is a calculated escalation against American bases, coordinating attacks effectively while avoiding substantial U.S. retaliation. The strategy resembles Hezbollah's approach in southern Lebanon against Israel. The threat of further escalation depends on the international coalition forces' response to current attacks and leverages American reluctance to widen the conflict. In recent months, more weapons have been brought into the Qamishli countryside and al-Hasakah city. Every week, supplies arrive from Damascus to Qamishli Airport using Ilyushin aircraft. This is part of a plan to strengthen the military forces in Qamishli and the surrounding areas. The shipments mostly include accurate sniper rifles, night vision gear, small drones, explosive devices, medium-sized machine guns, and mortar guns. Local groups are also getting intensive training, and some are sent to Damascus and Deir ez-Zor. Additionally, members of the Saraya al-Khorasani militia have been moving to the Deir ez-Zor countryside, and security units are now near al-Shaddadi and Tal Hamis, keeping an eye on coalition forces at the al-Shaddadi and Kharab al-Jir bases in the al-Hasakah countryside. The recent increase in Iranian actions was expected. Reports from the Middle East Institute last year talked about Iran's efforts to strengthen its influence in eastern Syria. This involves plans to target international coalition bases by using "popular resistance" and security operations against American forces. The goal is to make them leave and create more room for Iranian presence. The Saraya al-Khorasani militia, connected to the IRGC and active in al-Hasakah city, and Hezbollah's Task Force militia in the southern country-

side of Qamishli, are crucial to these efforts. Iran is also trying to gain support by supporting Arab tribal leaders, tapping into tribal dissatisfaction with the Syrian Democratic Forces' actions and the coalition's seeming indifference. Recent events suggest that Iran, through its proxies in eastern Syria, is getting ready to keep attacking international coalition bases. They seem to be choosing the right times to make more impactful attacks causing significant losses. This strategy might take advantage of the coalition's slow response to these attacks. According to sources, these militias might be preparing for larger attacks from areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), near the American bases. This escalation is dangerous, putting both coalition forces and local people at risk. As these militias try to turn the local population against American forces, linking them to the Israeli offensive in Gaza, they create a widespread sense of popular resistance. This growing resistance might force coalition forces to think about leaving the region or staying within their bases. If this happens, it could give Iranian-backed militias the chance to make the region less secure and increase their influence, to the disadvantage of the SDF. The coalition's long silence on the issue of Iranian reinforcements, along with Washington ignoring Tehran's efforts to expand its influence in the eastern Euphrates region, has brought us to a critical point. It might be too late to change things now, and there's a risk that the region could become a hotspot for an international conflict, with the local population caught in the middle. Through recent actions, Iran is trying to show the extent of its influence and its control over operations from southern Lebanon through eastern Syria to Iraq and even reaching the Houthis in Yemen. This strategic positioning could give Iran an advantage in any future political negotiations, making it the main beneficiary of the ongoing troubles in the region, to the detriment of the local people.

## Briefs

14 Senators  
seek  
delay in  
elections

FROM PAGE 01  
They say that they don't want a delay, but called for the redressal of their problems. The resolution passed today has also cited extreme weather in hilly areas and the deteriorating security situation, especially in KP and Balochistan, which have been at the receiving end of terrorists. Interim Information Minister Murtaza Solangi, representing the caretaker government which is appointed to over the country's affairs till the elections, opposed the move. Senator Dilwar, talking on the floor of the house, said most of the areas in the country were currently experiencing harsh cold weather, hence, the participation of voters in those areas was unmanageable.

Political  
parties  
slam...

FROM PAGE 01  
she said, adding that the PPP didn't favour the Senate resolution. Meanwhile, PPP Senator Shahadat Awan — who was not present during the session — said that his party wants elections to be staged under any circumstances. "This is rebellion against the Constitution. It was a [pre-planned] move and a conspiracy because the polls must be held on time," he said. He reiterated that the resolution was tabled under a "plan" as the matter was not part of the Order of the Day today. Senator Awan said that the PPP is fully prepared for the polls. "Those who can see their defeat [in elections] want to delay the polls," he added. Sher Afzal Marwat, central leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which also abstained from voting on the motion today, told Geo News that the Constitution was "violated" in the Senate.

PPP will  
continue  
ZAB's...

FROM PAGE 01  
and go to every doorstep and apprise the people of the PPP's ideology. They need to tell the common people that the PPP is the sole party that has been representing the downtrodden since three generations while the rest of the parties only cater to the elite. Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto represented the poor, which is why the PML-N and PTI were imposed on Punjab, because they only cared for the elite. If we wish for a rule of the people, labourers, farmers, students and women, we need to make the PPP victorious.

SC  
reserves  
judgement

FROM PAGE 01  
the duration of disqualification in the Election Act, 2017, and an apex court verdict during a past hearing on a petition filed by former PML-N provincial lawmaker Sardar Meer Badshah Khan Qaisrani last month. Qaisrani had challenged his lifetime disqualification over a fake degree in 2007. Proceedings were broadcast live on SC's website and YouTube channel. In the previous hearing on Thursday, CJP Isa remarked that disqualifying anyone for life from parliament was "against Islam", adding that the court was seeking "clarity" on whether the disqualification period for a lawmaker was five years — as per the amendment in Election Act 2017 — or a lifetime ban under the aforementioned article which deals with criteria to contest elections.



ISLAMABAD: Former minister and well-known personality Ijaz Durrani will give a farewell dinner in honor of the ambassador of Italy, group photo with Senator Palusha Khan and Kifayat Malik barrister Ayesha of Morocco Austria, Czech Republic Romania. — DNA

# Pak on the ropes as Australia eye Test series whitewash

## Hazwood claimed a total of four wickets, meanwhile Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Starc and Travis Head bagged one each

DNA

SYDNEY: Australia are on the cusp of a Test series whitewash against Pakistan after the visitors slipped to 68-7 in their second innings in Sydney on Friday. Pakistan lost two wickets for just a run in their second innings with opener Abdullah Shafique and captain Shan Masood both going back to the hut without scoring. However, Babar Azam (23) and Saim Ayub (33) added 57 runs for the third wicket to keep Pakistan in the hunt. But Pakistan lost five wickets for just nine runs to slip to 67-7 as Australia took control of the match. Pacer Josh Hazwood took three wickets, Saud Shakeel (2), Sajid Khan (0) and Agha Salman (0), in the penultimate over of the day to push Pakistan on the backfoot. Hazwood claimed a total of four wickets, meanwhile Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Starc and Travis Head bagged one each. Earlier, Pakistan dismissed Australia for 299 in the first innings, taking a lead of 14 runs, in the ongoing third Test in Sydney. Pacer Aamer Jamal bowled superbly and claimed a six-wicket haul. He is the first bowler in Pakistan's Test history to take 18 wickets in debut series (3 matches or less). Pakistan bagged the remaining four wickets, while giving away just 10 runs, af-



ter the tea interval. Mitchell Marsh scored 54 runs before presenting a simple catch to Shan Masood on mid-off as Jamal picked up the crucial wicket. Earlier, Pakistan reduced Australia to 289-6 at tea on day three with the home side still trailing by 24 runs in the first innings. Spinner Sajid Khan cleaned up Alex Carey, 38, on the stroke of tea to provide a much-needed breakthrough to Pakistan. Mitchell Marsh holds key for the Aussies as he is unbeaten on 50 runs

in 109 balls. Travis Head, 10, was the other wicket to fall in the second session after he was trapped in front of the stumps by Aamer Jamal. Earlier, Pakistan edged ahead of Australia after the visitors grabbed the prized wickets of Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne on the third day of the third Test in Sydney on Friday. Australia were 199-4 at lunch with Travis Head and Mitchell Marsh both on six to trail Pakistan by 114 runs. Smith and Labuschagne looked in

good touch in the extended morning session before a stunning late double-wicket breakthrough. Smith fell into a carefully laid Pakistani trap of stacking a trio of fielders around short extra cover off medium pacer Mir Hamza's bowling. Smith duly walked down the wicket next ball to play an aerial drive, only to be caught by Babar Azam above his head. Australia's premier batter made 38 off 86 balls and looked stunned as he glared at a patch in the pitch, before walking disconsolately from the ground 30 minutes before lunch. He was followed six balls later by Labuschagne, bowled for 60 by offspinner Agha Salman. Labuschagne played forward only to be beaten by a sharply turning ball out of the rough and spearing through the bat-pad gap to knock over his middle stump. Pakistan celebrated two quick wickets for no runs after Australia had looked primed to wear away at the tourists' first-innings total of 313. It was grinding cricket in the morning session with 83 runs coming off 33 overs at a run rate of 2.49 per over. It was deserved reward for the toiling Pakistanis, who have battled away with disciplined bowling and determined fielding despite already losing the three-match series. Australia clinched the series with a tense 79-run win in the second Test in Melbourne over Christmas.

Nomination  
papers of  
Qureshi...

FROM PAGE 01  
nomination submissions by the returning officers (ROs) in the run-up to the polls. The nomination papers by the PTI politician were approved by the tribunal for the NA-214 constituency in Sindh's Umartok city, while his son Zain Qureshi's papers were also cleared for contesting in the same constituency. Meanwhile, a petition filed by PTI leader Omar Ayub Khan against the rejection of his nomination papers for NA-18 was dismissed in Abbottabad. However, he has been allowed to contest polls from NA-18 in Haripur. The tribunal also allowed Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) Babar Nawaz to contest the election from NA-18. Both Ayub and Nawaz withdrew their objections against each other, after which their papers were approved. PTI leader in Sindh, Haleem Adil Sheikh, has also been cleared to contest from NA-238. Another PTI candidate Arsalan Khalid's papers were also approved from NA-241 after the tribunal heard his appeal.

PM reiterates  
Pak support  
for Kashmiris

FROM PAGE 01  
Jammu and Kashmir dispute will be decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite under the UN auspices, the prime minister said in a message on the occasion of Self-Determination Day. In essence, he said it was a reaffirmation of the inalienable right of Kashmiris to self-determination, which is enshrined in international law and upheld by international human rights instruments. He regretted that despite more than seven and a half decades, the oppressed people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) have not been able to exercise this fundamental right. India continues to oppress the people of Jammu and Kashmir to break their will. Since August 5, 2019, the prime minister said India was engaged in a vicious exercise, aimed at altering the demographic structure and political landscape of IIOJK, to turn Kashmiris into a disempowered community in their land. The Indian Supreme Court's recent verdict on the status of IIOJK is yet another step towards the denial of the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination. The genuine aspirations of the Kashmiris cannot be wished away through domestic legislation and engineered judicial verdicts, he added.

Security  
forces kill...

FROM PAGE 01  
The terrorist commander Gul Yusuf was the most wanted with a bounty of Rs 2.5 million on his head. The ISPR said the local people had appreciated efforts of the security forces for peace and stability. The media wing added that the security forces were determined to eradicate the scourge of terrorism from the country with the support of the nation.

## Arshad Nadeem gears up for Paris Olympics

LAHORE: Pakistan's star javelin thrower Arshad Nadeem said that he has set his eyes on the Paris Olympics as he is eager to take part in the world's biggest event this year. "Yes, injury is there and its treatment is also in progress. I hope that by the middle of next month I will be able to achieve top fitness and inshaAllah nation will see me in the Paris Olympics," Arshad told The News in an exclusive chat. "I will get five to six months which will be enough to prepare vigorously for the Olympic Games. It's my main target as I failed to finish at the victory podium in the Tokyo Olympics. "I am taking care as I want the injury to heal completely so that I do not face any problem during the Olympics. But there is no issue. I can play even despite injury. I also played with injury in the World Championships in Hungary where I won silver medal," said Arshad, whose injury forced him to skip the 19th Asian Games held in Hangzhou last summer. He had developed this injury in the 34th National Games in Quetta last May. He then underwent rehab and was able to appear in the World Championship in Hungary where he created history for the country by becoming the first ath-

"Yes, injury is there and its treatment is also in progress. I hope that by the middle of next month I will be able to achieve top fitness and inshaAllah nation will see me in Paris Olympics"

lete to claim silver medal with a throw of 87.82 metre, just below India's Neeraj Chopra who won gold with a throw of 88.17m. During the event, he also qualified for the Paris Olympics. However, last year he missed the Asian Championship, Asian Games and Asian Throwing Championship because of fitness issues. Arshad has also started training at his hometown in Mian Channu. "For the last two days I have been training here in Mian Channu. I run and have also kept equipment at my home for weight training," said Arshad, also the Commonwealth Games record holder. He plans to resume his training and rehab at the Punjab Stadium, Lahore, in the next few days. "I am coming to Lahore on Monday and will start full-fledged rehab and training there inshaAllah. I also plan to feature in an international event before the Olympics," Arshad said. He will be handled by his coach Salman Butt. Arshad's personal best throw is 90.18 metre which he managed at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022. The javelin throw event in the Paris Olympics will be held at the France's biggest venue Stade de France. The qualifying round will be held on August 6 with the final to be conducted on August 8. Arshad finished fifth in the Tokyo Olympics with a throw of 84.62m in the final. He had topped his group in the qualifying round with a throw of 85.16m. — DNA

## Jamal in elite company after 6-wicket haul

PAKISTAN'S Aamer Jamal finds himself in elite company after taking a six-wicket haul in the first innings of the ongoing third Test against Australia in Sydney. Aamer Jamal is the first bowler in Pakistan's Test history to take 18 wickets in debut series (3 matches or less). Jamal is the only Pakistan cricketer to make a score of 80+ and take a six-wicket haul in the same match after Imran Khan against India in 1983. Jamal is also among the three touring players with 125+ runs and 15+ wickets in a three-Test series in Australia after England's Ian Botham and Pakistan's Wasim Akram. Australia were dismissed for 299 to trail Pakistan by 14 runs on the first innings on the third day of the third Test in Sydney on Friday. The hosts collapsed after tea, losing four wickets for 10 runs with paceman Aamer Jamal taking 6-69. The Sydney Cricket Ground pitch is dry and breaking up, with the outcome of the Test match in the balance with more than two days to play. Australia clinched the series with a tense 79-run win in the second Test in Melbourne over Christmas. Pakistan have performed poorly in Australia, losing 16 Tests on the trot with their last win in 1995.

## Azarenka, Elena Rybakina into Brisbane semis

### Ostapenko, the 2017 French Open champion, was comfortable on serve in the third set while Azarenka struggled to hold hers

SPORTS DESK

BRISBANE: Former Grand Slam champions Victoria Azarenka and Elena Rybakina reached the semi-finals of the season-opening Brisbane International on Friday, but in contrasting fashion. Azarenka took 2hr 30min before finally outlasting third-seeded Latvian Jelena Ostapenko 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 in the first match on Pat Rafter Arena. The Brisbane tournament is a warm-up for the Australian Open, which the 34-year-old Azarenka won in 2012 and 2013. Kazakhstan's Rybakina was then handed a spot in the last four when her Russian opponent Anastasia Potapova withdrew with a stomach problem after losing the first set 6-1. Azarenka was in control early as she took the first set with one break of serve, but as the match progressed Ostapenko began to find her range and deservedly levelled. Ostapenko, the

2017 French Open champion, was comfortable on serve in the third set while Azarenka struggled to hold hers. But at 5-6 and serving

to send the set into a tiebreak, the Latvian cracked and a poor service game handed the Belarusian victory. Azarenka will play top

seed Aryna Sabalenka or Daria Kasatkina in the last four. "I thought the quality of tennis was incredible," Azarenka said.

"She was blasting returns, blasting winners, so I had to stick in there. "I was looking forward to seeing how my game was going to match up this year, and I think it's pretty good." In another quarter-final, Rybakina raced to a 4-1 lead when Potapova asked for the trainer to treat what appeared to be a stomach injury. She played the next two games but withdrew when 2022 Wimbledon champion Rybakina took the first set. Rybakina will face Linda Noskova next after the Czech player saw off 16-year-old Russian Mirra Andreeva 7-5, 6-3. In the men's draw, top seeded Dane Holger Rune looked in great touch as he downed Australian qualifier James Duckworth 6-2, 7-6 (8/6). The world number eight will play Roman Safiullin in the semi-finals after the unseeded Russian beat Italy's Matteo Arnaldi 7-6 (7/4), 6-2. Spanish great Rafael Nadal plays his quarter-final against Jordan Thompson later Friday.



## Briefs

## Sudan recalls Envoy over RSF leader's visit

NAIROBI : Sudan recalled its ambassador to Kenya in protest against the warm reception given to Sudanese paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo by Kenyan President William Ruto. Sudan's Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Al-Sadiq confirmed the summoning of Kamal Gubara in protest against the Kenyan government's official reception Wednesday for Dagalo, popularly known as Hemedti, who heads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Quoting Al-Sadiq, the Sudan News Agency (SUNA) highlighted the significance of the move, saying "the consultation with their ambassador will cover all possibilities for the outcome of Sudan's relations with Kenya." Kenya said the meeting between Ruto and Dagalo was aimed at fostering lasting peace in Sudan, which has been facing clashes between the Sudanese army and the RSF since mid-April 2023. According to the UN, the conflict has resulted in the loss of at least 12,000 lives, with more than 33,000 people sustaining injuries. The humanitarian impact is severe, with an estimated 24.8 million people, nearly one-half of Sudan's population, requiring urgent assistance in 2024. Dagalo's visit to Nairobi is part of a broader regional tour that has seen him engage with leaders in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Uganda in recent weeks. He is currently in South Africa. The RSF leader's diplomatic engagements have drawn mixed reactions, particularly due to the ongoing conflict in Sudan.—Agencies

## Heavy rain causes flooding in Britain

LONDON: Major rivers across Britain were flooded on Friday after heavy rain, with the government issuing more than 300 flood warnings, travel operators announcing serious disruption and around 1,000 homes suffering damage so far. A succession of storms in recent weeks meant prolonged rainfall that started on Thursday fell on saturated ground and quickly caused already-swollen rivers and waterways to burst their banks across England and Wales. The storms have also caused flooding in other parts of Europe in recent days. The River Trent in central England flooded, prompting the local authority to declare a major incident. London's fire service said it had to escort around 50 people to safety late on Thursday after a canal in the east of the capital overflowed. "We have woken up to, as many people will see, to a very wet situation across the country," Caroline Douglass, the director in charge of flood management at the Environment Agency, told the media.—APP

## UK police say no new Andrew investigation

LONDON : British police said on Friday no new investigation had been launched into allegations relating to Prince Andrew following the release this week of court documents relating to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Andrew, 63, a younger brother of King Charles, has always denied accusations of sexual wrongdoing and in February 2022 settled a U.S. lawsuit brought by Virginia Giuffre accusing him of sexually abusing her when she was a teenager. Details of Giuffre's allegations and those made by another Epstein accuser against the British royal have been previously reported, but featured in previously redacted court documents detailing the extent of Epstein's alleged sex trafficking activities which were unsealed on Wednesday. In October 2021, London's Metropolitan Police (MPS) said it would not be taking any action against the prince following a review of the evidence in the wake of Giuffre filing her lawsuit.—APP

## EU's Borrell visits Lebanon amid conflict with Israel

Israel's war on besieged Gaza — now in its 91st day — has killed at least 22,438 Palestinians

## NEWS DESK

BEIRUT : EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell will be in Lebanon from Jan. 5 to Jan. 7 to discuss the situation at the Israeli-Lebanese border and the importance of avoiding regional escalation, the EU has said in a statement. "Borrell will re-emphasise the need to advance diplomatic efforts with regional leaders", the statement said. Israeli forces killed one Palestinian child and injured seven others during a raid in the town of Beit Rima northwest of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. A high school student, 17-year-old Aseel Tariq Anis Al-Rimawi, was shot in the chest with a live bullet during the raid, the official Palestinian news agency Wafa has said, citing health sources. He died after sustaining the wound. Seven Palestinians injured in the raid were transferred to Salbit Governmen-

tal Hospital in the West Bank. At least two Palestinians were injured with live bullets during an Israeli raid on the Balata Refugee Camp in the West Bank city of Nablus. UAE condemns ethnic cleansing calls in Gaza by Israeli ministers The United Arab Emirates [UAE] has condemned Israeli ministers' calls for the mass expulsion and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from Gaza and demanded an end to Israeli war in the besieged enclave. "The United Arab Emirates strongly condemns the extremist statements of the Israeli Ministers of Finance and National Security calling for the displacement of Palestinians outside Gaza, reoccupation of the [Gaza] Strip, and the construction of settlements in it," said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, referring to extremist Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. It emphasised "the UAE's categorical rejection



of these offensive statements and all practices and procedures carried out in contravention of resolutions on international legitimacy, which threaten further escalation and instability in the region." The UAE called for an "urgent humanitarian ceasefire" to end the bloodshed and to facilitate the immediate, safe, sustainable and unhindered delivery of relief and humanitarian aid. The UAE statement urged

the international community to intensify efforts to reach an immediate ceasefire "and to advance all efforts to achieve a comprehensive and just peace while preventing a regional spill-over that risks further violence, tension and instability."

Pro-Palestine protesters stage rally in Berlin under heavy rain A group of pro-Palestine protesters have staged a rally in the German capital Berlin to protest Israel's ongoing aggression in Gaza, which has killed more than 22,400 Palestinians and left the coastal enclave in ruins. Despite heavy rain, the protesters gathered outside German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's office to express solidarity with the Palestinian people. Carrying Palestinian flags, the crowd chanted slogans such as "Free Palestine" and "Stop the genocide." Speeches at the demonstration demanded an end to the

Israeli attacks and called on the international community to make an effort in this regard. Gaza hospital received 155 dead, 357 wounded after December attacks Gaza's Al Aqsa Hospital received 155 dead and 357 wounded following Israeli attacks on two refugee camps in December, the medical charity Doctors Without Borders [MSF] has said, reiterating its call for a ceasefire. "From the hospital, we can hear the bombing in the neighbourhoods northeast of Al Aqsa Hospital in Gaza's Middle Area, near the Al Bureij and Al Maghazi refugee camps," it quoted Carolina Lopez, MSF emergency coordinator in the besieged enclave, as saying on its X account. "No one and nowhere is safe in Gaza," the MSF said. "We need a sustained ceasefire now to prevent more deaths and injuries, to ensure the delivery of unhindered aid, and a massive scale-up of health care to meet Gazans' medical needs," it added.

## German FM to tour middle east from Sunday

"There must be no occupation of the Gaza Strip, no expulsions and no reduction in the size of the territory. And at the same time there must be no more danger to Israel from the Gaza Strip," Baerbock said

## WEB DESK

BERLIN: Berlin : German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock will travel to Israel Sunday for her fourth visit since the outbreak of the Gaza war, a ministry spokesman said. Baerbock will hold talks with Israel's new Foreign Minister Israel Katz, as well as President Isaac Herzog, foreign ministry spokesman Sebastian Fischer told a regular press conference on Friday. She will also meet with Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas and foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki. Baerbock will subsequently travel to Egypt to meet with her counterpart Sameh Shoukry and also planned to visit Lebanon. The talks would focus on the "dramatic humanitarian situation in Gaza, the situation in the West Bank and the extremely volatile situation on the Israel-Lebanon border", as well as efforts to secure

the release of more Hamas hostages, Fischer said.



Baerbock said at a Berlin press conference on Friday that the Israelis and Palestinians would "only be able to live side by side in peace if the security of the one means the security of the other." "Our position on the so-called day after is very clear," she said, speaking alongside her counterpart from Luxembourg. "There must be no occupation of the Gaza Strip, no expulsions and no reduction in the size of the territory. And at the same time there must be no more danger to Israel from the

Gaza Strip," Baerbock said. Talks to focus on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, the situation in the West Bank and the extremely volatile situation on the Israel-Lebanon border, Baerbock said. Fears have grown that the conflict between Israel and Hamas could spread, after one of the militant group's leaders was assassinated in the Beirut suburbs. In addition to the killing, widely assumed to have been carried out by Israel, the Israeli army has for months traded tit-for-tat fire across the border with Hezbollah militants. The risk of escalation was "very real", Fischer said. Germany on Wednesday urged its citizens to leave Lebanon as quickly as possible. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also left Thursday on a diplomatic tour of the Middle East, including Israel, his fourth since the war began. Israel launched its campaign against Hamas

after the militant group's October 7 attack, which left about 1,140 people dead, most of them civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

There must be no occupation of the Gaza Strip, no expulsions and no reduction in the size of the territory. And at the same time there must be no more danger to Israel from the Gaza Strip," Baerbock said. The conflict between Israel and Hamas could spread, after one of the militant group's leaders was assassinated in the suburbs of the Lebanese capital Beirut. The militants also took around 250 hostages, 132 of whom remain in captivity, according to Israel, including at least 24 believed to have been killed. Relentless Israeli bombardment and its ground invasion have killed at least 22,438 people, most of them women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

## S. Korea's live drill responds to North

## WEB DESK

SEOUL : North and South Koreans on Friday fired around 600 artillery shells into their de facto maritime zone in a renewed escalation on Korean Peninsula after Pyongyang fired 200 shells early Friday. The North Korean shells splashed into waters north of the Northern Limit Line — the de facto maritime border between the divided Koreas. South Korean residents of Yeonpyeong Island, facing North Korea in waters off its eastern coast, were evacuated to shelters but the country's military said there was "no damage" to its citizens or the military. Seoul-based Yonhap News reported. Pyongyang is yet to make a statement about its latest military activities. Seoul had said the artillery shells were fired from Jangsan Cape, north of South Korea's northernmost island of Baengnyeong, and Deungsan Cape, north of the South's western border. Following Pyongyang's firing, South Korean Marine Corps deployed on the islands of Baengnyeong and Yeonpyeong held live fire exercises, which involved K9 self-propelled howitzers and K1E1 tanks, against simulated targets in waters south of the de facto maritime border. The maritime buffer zone between two Koreas was set up under now-defunct inter-Korean military accord which was signed on Sept. 19, 2018. Seoul had partially suspended the pact, aimed at reducing border tensions, before North completely scrapped it last November. South Korea's move came after North Korea successfully launched, in its third attempt last year, a military satellite. North Korea is also rebuilding guard posts in concrete inside the demilitarized zone, which separates the two Koreas. The two sides had demolished at least 10 guard posts each inside the zone following the 2018 military pact. Pyongyang's launch of artillery shells also comes after South Korea assumed a two-year seat at the UN Security Council since this Monday while Seoul and the US held military drills close to border with North Korea since Dec. 29 until Thursday. Seoul and Washington are "closely tracking and monitoring" North Korea's latest actions. It is the first time Seoul fired shells into the maritime buffer zone since the 2018 military pact was signed, while Pyongyang last time fired in the maritime buffer zone in the East Sea on Dec. 6, 2022.—DNA

## Trade chiefs discuss closer Turkiye-UK ties

ISTANBUL : British Trade Minister Kemi Badenoch arrived in Istanbul on Friday to meet her Turkish counterpart Ömer Bolat to strengthen business links ahead of the expected launch of talks on a new free trade deal later this year. Both Britain and Türkiye have agreed there is room to broaden the scope of their current free trade agreement, which was rolled over when Britain left the European Union. "I'm delighted to be in Türkiye ahead of talks to upgrade our existing trade deal to make it fit for the 21st century," Badenoch said in a statement, noting Britain's services sector in particular could benefit from any new agreement. "With its major economy and strategic position — where Europe, the Middle East and Asia meet — Türkiye presents huge opportunities for U.K. businesses," she noted. "I'm excited to start discussions on ensuring our new trading relationship with Türkiye unlocks those opportunities." Bilateral trade between Türkiye and the U.K. was up more than 17% to 26.2 billion pounds (about \$33.16 billion) in the 12 months to June 2023, according to the British Consulate-General in Istanbul. It makes Türkiye the 17th largest trading partner for the U.K.—APP

## Pistorius released on parole 11 years after murdering girlfriend

PRETORIA: South African former Paralympic star Oscar Pistorius was released on parole on Friday, nearly 11 years after murdering his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp in a crime that shocked a nation inured to violence against women. Pistorius — dubbed "Blade Runner" for his carbon-fiber prosthetic legs — shot 29-year-old model Steenkamp dead through a locked bathroom door on Valentine's Day in 2013. He has repeatedly said he mistook Steenkamp for an intruder when he fired four shots into the bathroom at his Pretoria home, and he launched multiple appeals against his conviction on that basis. In a statement shared by the Steenkamp family lawyer on Friday, Reeva's mother June said: "There can never be justice if your loved one is never coming back, and no amount of time served will bring Reeva back." "We, who remain behind, are the ones serving a life sentence," June Steenkamp said, adding her only desire was to be allowed to live in peace after Pistorius' release on parole. Pistorius, now 37, spent about eight and a half years in jail as well as seven months under home arrest before he was sentenced for murder. A parole board in November decided he could be freed after completing more than half his sentence. South Africa's correctional services department said in a short statement that Pistorius had become a "parolee, effectively from 5 January 2024.—Agencies

## Tokyo stocks open higher

TOKYO : Tokyo stocks opened higher on Friday as a weaker yen against the dollar buoyed export shares, while traders awaited US jobs data due later in the day. The Nikkei 225 added 0.33 percent, or 109.23 points, to 33,397.52 at the open, while the broader Topix index climbed 0.40 percent, or 9.57 points, to 2,388.36. "The Tokyo market is expected to move in a narrow range after US stocks ended mixed," brokerage house Monex said. "Investors will stay in a wait-and-see mode ahead of the US jobs data to be released this evening." On Wall Street, the Dow Jones Industrial Average finished the day flat while the broad-based S&P 500 fell 0.3 percent. The tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index extended its recent slump to end the day down 0.6 percent. The dollar fetched 144.75 yen in early Asian trade, against 144.61 in New York and 143.65 yen in Tokyo on Thursday.—APP

## 4 dead, 22 injured in Indonesia train collision

BANDUNG : Four people were killed and at least 22 injured when two trains carrying hundreds of passengers collided in Indonesia on Friday, officials said. The front carriages of both trains were a mangled wreck while others further back had derailed and overturned on a stretch of tracks cutting through rice fields in West Java province. No fatalities have been reported among the nearly 500 passengers on board, with all four deaths reported so far involving train crew. The crash between an intra-city train carrying 287 passengers and a local line with 191 on board took place at 6:03 am local time (11:03 GMT) near Cicalengka, railway operator PT KAI said. "KAI is deeply saddened and expresses its condolences for the death of four train officers, who were train driver, assistant, steward and security guard," said a spokesman for the company. The number of injuries reported have varied. Police have put the number at 37 while the railway operator said 22 people were injured. Police spokesperson Ibrahim Tompo said all passengers have been evacuated with those injured taken to local hospitals. But he said that a joint rescue team was still working to recover the body of one train crew member killed in the crash. "One victim who is believed to have died still cannot be evacuated because the victim was buried in the material of the carriage," Tompo said.—DNA



ISLAMABAD:- Power Division and K-Electric ink landmark agreements, in the presence of Minister for Energy Muhammad Ali, providing energy security for Karachi at Power Division.—DNA

## Ukraine's top priority strengthening air defense

Diplomats, all those responsible for communication with partners, representatives abroad doing everything possible to ensure deliveries, says Ukrainian president

## FOREIGN DESK

KYIV : Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said securing delivery of additional air defense systems and missiles for his country is currently his "number one" priority. "The entire team of our diplomats, all those responsible for communication with partners, and Ukrainian representatives abroad are doing everything they can to ensure the delivery of additional air defense systems and missiles. This is the number one priority," Zelenskyy said in his speech broadcast by local media late Thursday. Many regions and cities of Ukraine have been subjected to Russian air attacks, Zelenskyy said, claiming that the Russian government is trying to use the New Year's period to "break our spirit and

bring back the old threat we faced last year." "The threat of destruction of our energy sector, the foundations of our life. Our defenders of the sky are doing everything possible to protect the state," he added. He said new support packages containing artillery, ammunition, drones, electronic warfare equipment, and other items are another priority for Ukraine. "I am grateful to all our partners who are already forming new support packages. There will be a lot of relevant communication this month," the Ukrainian president remarked. More than 90 people have been killed in 12 regions of Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv, due to Russian air strikes since Dec. 29 that have also injured at least 420 people, according to the latest UN figures. The UK government announced last week



that it would send around 200 air defence missiles to Ukraine following the latest uptick in Russian strikes. The missiles would restock British-gifted air defence systems capable of striking down Russian drones and missiles "with incredible accuracy", according to the defence ministry. Meanwhile, Norway approves direct weapons, defense

equipment sales to Ukraine Norway has approved direct sales of weapons and defense equipment from its defense industry to Ukraine and said the policy change took effect. Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide stressed the importance of supporting Ukraine for Norwegian and European security. "In the extraordinary security situation resulting from Russia's war of aggression, it is crucial that we continue to support Ukraine. Support for Ukraine is important for Norwegian and European security," he said in a statement that was released Monday. "We must plan for the possibility that the illegal war of aggression may be prolonged," he said. Defense Minister Bjorn Arild Gram said Norway will devote various types of equipment to facilitate the important role of "the defense industry in the current security policy situation." The

export licenses for direct sales will only be permitted on an individual basis and will be rigorously assessed under strict and responsible frameworks under Norwegian export control regulations, according to the Foreign Ministry. The Nordic state also pledged to provide Ukraine with additional support to strengthen its air defense and financially help the war-torn country increase its ammunition production as well as give financial support for health care and education sectors. The UK government also announced last week that it would send around 200 air defence missiles to Ukraine following the latest uptick in Russian strikes. The missiles would restock British-gifted air defence systems capable of striking down Russian drones and missiles "with incredible accuracy", according to the defence ministry.

## Briefs

### Prominent religious figure shot dead in Islamabad

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: A leader of Sunni Ulema Council Pakistan and prominent religious figure Allama Masoodur Rehman Usmani was killed during an attack on Friday in Islamabad, Express News reported. A spokesperson has confirmed that armed individuals opened fire on Usmani's vehicle in Ghauri Town which resulted in the tragic demise of the religious figure. Upon receiving reports of the incident, a significant police presence swiftly arrived at the scene. The body of the deceased has been transported to PIMS Hospital for further examination. Confirming the identity of the victim, Islamabad Police spokesperson, in a statement said that the suspects involved in the attack will be apprehended soon and brought to justice. He said that the perpetrators are being traced with the help of CCTV cameras, adding that one person was also injured during the firing. Soon after the incident, the members of Sunni Ulema Council gathered outside PIMS Hospital and started protesting, after which additional police personnel arrived. The incident marks another instance of religious figures being targeted in recent past.

### PPP nominated Bilawal as its candidate for PM

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) senior leader Sherry Rehman said on Friday that her party had nominated former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari as its candidate for the prime minister slot. Addressing the press conference in Karachi, the former climate minister reacted to the Senate's resolution seeking a delay in the general elections. She made it clear that her party was taking a clear stance in line with holding the general elections in the country. "We [PPP] are ready for the elections," she said. "The PPP had not supported the resolution that has been passed in the Senate," Rehman said. Separately, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari said today that the elections will be held at any cost. The former foreign minister reacted to the Senate resolution in connection with the delay in the general elections. Expressing his thoughts in connection with the birth anniversary of former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Lahore, Bhutto-Zardari said: "Today, we are facing immense happiness as we are celebrating the birth anniversary of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto." He highlighted the economic woes faced by the country, saying, "The country is facing ballooning inflation, and the salaried people are bearing the brunt of it".

# Bangladesh to vote in election without opposition

"Participating in an election under Hasina, against the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people, would undermine the sacrifices of those who fought, shed blood and gave their lives for democracy," he said

DHAKA: Bangladesh votes Sunday in an election guaranteed to give Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina her fifth term in office, after a boycott by opposition parties whose ranks have been decimated by mass arrests. Hasina's ruling Awami League has presided over exceptional growth in a country once beset by grinding poverty, thanks to a lucrative garment export industry supplying the world's top fast fashion brands. But her tenure has also been marred by widespread human rights abuses, with her security forces accused of extrajudicial killings, laws curtailing press and civic freedoms, and a ruthless crackdown on the opposition. The Awami League faces few or no effective rivals in the seats it is contesting but has not fielded candidates for a small minority of seats, an apparent effort to avoid the legislature being branded a one-party institution. Many young voters say they have no intention of participating in a contest they see as lacking a genuine choice. "I'm not wasting my time for a one-sided election," computer science graduate Sohanur Rahman, 28, told AFP in Dhaka. The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and other parties staged a series of rallies last year demanding Hasina step down in favour of a neutral caretaker government to oversee Sunday's vote. Around 25,000 opposition cadres including the BNP's entire local leadership were arrested in the ensuing crackdown, the party

says — the government puts the figure at 11,000 — and tens of thousands more are in hiding. Politics in the world's eighth-most populous country was long dominated by the rivalry between Hasina, the daughter of the country's founding leader, and two-time premier Khaleda Zia, wife of a former military ruler. Hasina, 76, has been the decisive victor since returning to power in a 2009 landslide, and consolidating her power with two subsequent polls accompanied by widespread irregularities and accusations of rigging. Zia, 78, was convicted of graft in 2018 and is now in ailing health at a hospital in the capital Dhaka. Her son Tarique Rahman has helmed the BNP in her stead from London, where he has lived in exile since 2008, facing several criminal convictions at home. Rahman told AFP that his party, along with dozens of others, had refused to participate in a vote with a "predetermined" outcome.



"Participating in an election under Hasina, against the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people, would undermine the sacrifices of those who fought, shed blood and gave their lives for democracy," he said. Hasina has accused the BNP of arson and sabotage during last year's protest campaign, which was mostly peaceful but saw several people killed in police confrontations. Bangladesh's security forces have long been dogged by allegations of excessive use of force — charges denied by her government. The United States, the biggest export market for the South Asian nation of 170 million, sanctioned an elite police unit and its top commanders accused of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. Analysts and opposition leaders say Hasina will seek to bolster the vote's credibility by using a carrot-and-stick approach to drive up turnout, including threats to withhold

government benefits for those who do not vote. "It won't be appropriate to call it an 'election' by any standard," Illinois State University professor Ali Riaz told AFP. "It is better described as a stage-managed show of the ruling party," he added. "It won't provide any moral legitimacy." Hasina's economic stewardship had long been a central pillar of her popularity, but economic headwinds have seen rapid rises in the cost of everyday food staples. A balance of payments issue left Bangladesh unable to source enough fossil fuels for its power plants in 2022, prompting months of regular blackouts. Wage stagnation in the garment sector, which accounts for around 85 percent of the country's \$55 billion in annual exports, sparked industrial unrest late last year that saw some factories torched and hundreds more shuttered. Pierre Prakash of the International Crisis Group said that frustrations with the vote could portend political violence in the aftermath. That could prompt increased government repression, a hit to investor confidence and possibly further sanctions from Washington that would "likely deepen the country's economic woes", he added. Hasina's government was clearly "less popular than it was a few years ago, yet Bangladeshis have little real outlet at the ballot box", Prakash said. "That is a potentially dangerous combination." — Agencies

### Fawad's physical remand in NAB custody extended

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: An accountability court in Islamabad Friday granted the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) another four-day extension in the physical remand of former federal minister Fawad Chaudhry in a corruption case related to development projects in Jhelum. Islamabad Accountability Court-1 Judge Muhammad Bashir extended Fawad's physical remand on NAB's request as the anti-graft watchdog's prosecutor apprised the court that they had to recover banking records related to the suspect. After examining seven bank accounts, the NAB found some of the transactions "suspicious", the prosecutor said, adding that they have doubts about the former federal minister "receiving bribes". After hearing arguments from both sides, the accountability court served the verdict which was later announced on the same day. In its verdict, the court granted NAB a four-day extension in Fawad's physical remand and directed the officials to produce the suspect before the court on January 9.

### Genocide in Gaza Israeli Forces continue attacks on refugee camps

NEWS DESK

GAZA: The Israeli occupation forces continue to carry out the Gaza Holocaust for the 91st consecutive day Friday, through dozens of airstrikes, artillery shelling, and fire belts, committing bloody massacres against civilians and carrying out horrific crimes in the infiltration areas, amid a catastrophic humanitarian situation resulting from the siege and the displacement of over 90% of the population. Our correspondents reported that the Israeli aircraft and artillery continued their intense airstrikes and shelling on various parts of the Gaza Strip, targeting houses, gatherings, facilities, and streets, resulting in hundreds of martyrs and casualties. Three dead bodies and five injured arrived at Nasser Hospital following an Israeli airstrike in the Mawasi al-Qarara area yesterday evening.



ISLAMABAD: JUI Chief, Maulana Fazlur Rahman visits Iranian Embassy, meets with Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan, Dr. Raza Amiri Moghadam and expressed condolences to the Iranian nation and government over the Kerman terrorist attack. — DNA

# Sheikh Rashid, Mengal, Firdous Naqvi cleared to contest elections

Election tribunals issue notices on pleas challenging acceptance of Nawaz nomination papers

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: Several senior political leaders including Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, Akhtar Mengal, and Firdous Shamim Naqvi among others have secured relief from election tribunals as their nomination papers were accepted for the February 8 general elections. Hearing of objections filed against rejection or acceptance of nomination papers by the election tribunals and courts of law continued on Thursday. Different election tribunals approved the nomination papers of Awami Muslim League (AML) chief Rashid, Balochistan National Party (BNP) head Mengal and PML-Zia chief Ijazul Haq, and allowed them to contest the February 8 elections. Rashid's nomination papers were accepted from NA-56 and NA-57 constituencies. Another election tribunal in Balochistan granted permission to Mengal on Thursday to contest elections from NA-264 Quetta. A two-member tribunal comprising Justice Hashim Khan Kakar and Justice Amir Nawaz Rana set aside the RO's decision to reject Mengal's nomination papers on account of having Dubai's Aqama (work permit). The BNP chief had challenged the rejection of his nomination papers through his counsel Sajid Tareen Advocate. Separately, a tribunal reject-

ed the RO's objections to the papers of Ijazul Haq. His nomination papers were accepted for NA-55. On the other hand, former federal minister Fawad Chaudhry's appeal against rejection of papers from two Jhelum seats was heard in which the tribunal issued notices to the Election Commission for Friday (today). His lawyer took the stand that bogus objections were being raised to keep his client out of the election. Similarly, an appellate election tribunal set aside a returning officer's order with regard to the rejection of the nomination papers of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and former provincial assembly opposition leader Firdous Shamim Naqvi for NA-236 East Karachi constituency, and directed the RO to accept his nomination papers. Meanwhile, the Abbottabad circuit bench of the Peshawar High Court (PHC) Thursday summoned Captain (ret'd) Muhammad Safdar and the returning officer in a petition challenging the clearance of PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif's nomination papers for NA-15. Justice Kamran Hayat Miankhel, head of the PHC's Regional Election Tribunal, after hearing arguments of Senator Azam Khan Swati's counsel Sardar Basharat Advocate and Waqar Ahmad Khan, the counsel for PTI's leader Sharif Rafique, summoned Muhammad Safdar, the covering candidate of Nawaz Sharif, and RO for

NA-15. Azam Swati and Sharif Rafique had challenged the clearance of Nawaz Sharif's papers for NA-15 Manshehra-II before the tribunal. Swati, through another petition, which is pending before the same tribunal, challenged his disqualification by the returning officer for NA-15. "We have been expecting the ruling by the election tribunal on Friday (today), as it has summoned both parties to appear before it," Sardar Basharat told reporters. He said the SC had disqualified Nawaz from holding any public office and taking part in elections for life. "How come a returning officer can clear Nawaz Sharif to contest elections from NA-15 against the verdict of the apex court," Basharat said. Also, the Lahore High Court appellate tribunal issued a written order of appeal against approval of Nawaz's nomination papers for NA-130 in Lahore on Thursday. The court summoned the returning officer along with the report on January 8, 2024. Justice Raheel Kamran Shaikh issued notices to the RO on an appeal against the rejection of the nomination papers of former Punjab chief minister Parvez Elahi, his son Moonis Elahi and other family members. In the appeal, the position was adopted that Parvez Elahi and Moonis Elahi were candidates in NA-69, 64-PP 32 and PP-34 Gujarat, but the returning officer rejected the nomination papers for not showing a 10-marla plot.

### PTI chairman condemns Senate resolution

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Khan has vehemently denounced the passage of the undemocratic resolution in the upper house of the parliament seeking delay in the general elections, demanding the apex court to enforce its orders regarding February 8, 2024 polls. Strongly reacting to the resolution passed in the upper house of the parliament seeking delay in the elections, PTI Chairman said: "A resolution of 14 Senators based on their personal opinions, has no legal or binding force in the constitutional process of holding general elections." He said that the attempt by some political parties to defer the much-needed polls beyond the scheduled date of February 8 by using the floor of senate was tantamount to attack on constitution and democracy. PTI Chairman vowed that PTI was fully prepared for the general elections and would not accept and tolerate any nefarious attempts to delay the elections come what may. — DNA

### Job Opportunity

Applications are invited from suitable Pakistani professionals having Master's degree or equivalent in Commerce, Accounting and Finance with upper age limit of 30 years and having proficiency in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel and Microsoft PowerPoint, Accountancy, Record Keeping, Preparing Journals, Ledgers and Financial Statements & Maintaining accounts and preparing Financial Reports. Interested candidates can send their one-page CV through courier on address: CEO, Pakistan Broadcasting Foundation, HPT Complex, H-9 Islamabad. Last date of submission of application is 20.01.2024

## Religious freedom US again fails to designate India as country of 'particular concern'

There's no justification as to why State Dept didn't designate India, regrets US commission on religious freedom

FOREIGN DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has called for a congressional hearing after expressing disappointment over the US Department of State's continuous failure to designate India as a "Country of Particular Concern (CPC)". The commission stated this in response to the State Department's list of the countries designated as CPCs. Secretary of State Antony J Blinken, following the core objective of US foreign policy as per the International Religious Freedom Act 1998, has designated Burma, China, Cuba, North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan as Countries of Particular Concern "for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom".

Blinken said he had designated al-Shabab, Boko Haram, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Houthis, ISIS-Sahel, ISIS-West Africa, al-Qa'ida affiliate Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin, and the Taliban as "Entities of Particular Concern" as well. USCIRF Chair Abraham Cooper and Vice Chair Frederick A Davie in a joint statement said there was no justification as to why the State Department did not designate India as a Country of Particular Concern, despite its own reporting and statements. The USCIRF called on Congress to convene a public hearing on the failure of the State Department to follow their recommendations, they said. "In India, in addition to perpetrating egregious religious freedom violations within its borders, the government has increased its transnational repression activities targeting religious minorities abroad and those advocating on their behalf," stated Cooper and Davie. The USCIRF said since the issuance of its 2023 Annual Report, it had consistently shared its recommendations with the US Department of State and Congress. In early December 2023, the USCIRF met with Antony Blinken to reiterate those recommendations. USCIRF released publications on India's State-Level Anti-Conversion Laws and Religious Freedom.

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