



# Islamabad POST

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**Abbas reiterates Gaza strip is integral part of Palestinian state**

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**EU keen to further boost coop with Pak**

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**Fakhar Zaman ready to bat at any positions**

Detailed News On Page-06



**ECP decision was illegal, rules PHC**

## PTI regains 'bat' symbol

PTI counsel Barrister Ali Zafar said: "Now, no one can stop PTI from winning these elections"

SHAMIM SHAHID / DNA

PESHAWAR: In a major turn of events, the Peshawar High Court (PHC) Wednesday restored the "bat" symbol for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) paving the way for the party to head to polls with its iconic symbol on February 8 polls. The decision was announced following the hearing of PTI's petition challenging the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decision declaring the intra-party election as null and void and revoking their electoral symbol "bat". The court heard all parties in the case. In its verdict, the court termed the ECP's decision "incorrect". Following the verdict, the court ordered the electoral watchdog to issue a certificate to the PTI and suspended the decision that stripped the party of its symbol. "PTI is a political party entitled to an election symbol," the court said. A two-member PHC bench comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Arshad Ali announced the verdict today. A day earlier, the court heard the arguments by the counsels of ECP and the PTI. In today's hearing, the court heard other parties in the case. Speaking to the media outside the PHC after the announcement of the verdict, PTI counsel Barrister Ali Zafar said: "Now, no one can stop PTI from winning these elections." Hailing the decision, the PTI senator said PHC kept its tradition of announcing decisions as per law. "Court has ordered to restore PTI's bat symbol and upload intra-party polls results on its website immediately," he added. The court has annulled the decision to take away PTI's electoral symbol. "It was a conspiracy against the PTI to deprive it of bat symbol," said Barrister Zafar. At the outset of the hearing, one of the petitioner's lawyer Advocate Qazi Jawwad said that his client sought information from the PTI's head office regarding intra-party polls, but did not get any response. However, he said he learned about the PTI's polls through media.

**2 soldiers martyred, 2 terrorists killed in fire exchange**



Sepoy Ibrar Shaheed Sepoy Afzal Shaheed

STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: On 10 January 2024, a fire exchange took place between security forces and terrorists in Lakki Marwat district. Own troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location as a result of which two terrorists were sent to hell; Aftab Malang and Terrorist Masood Shah. These terrorists remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as target killings of innocent civilians.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and the cabinet members offering Fateha for the departed souls of security personnel who lost their lives in the line of their duty. - DNA

**3 policemen among four martyred in Kohat attack**

According to initial reports, more than 10 terrorists attacked security checkpoint near Lachi Toll Plaza

SAID ALAM KHAN

KOHAT: At least four people including three police personnel were martyred in a terrorist attack near Lachi Toll Plaza on the Kohat Indus Highway. According to the initial reports, more than 10 terrorists attacked the Lachi Toll Plaza and security checkpoint, leaving four, including three policemen dead. Heavy contingents of the police and Pakistan Army cordoned off

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**Global Health Security Summit PM for establishing global fund to ensure global health security**

PM vows to continue anti-polio mission till its complete eradication

KHAYYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday stressed the need to explore mechanisms for global funding that could support nations in need, ensuring that no one was left behind, in the global pursuit of health security. "The call for a sufficiently funded, widely supported country medium-term road-map, as highlighted in the International Health Regulations Core Capacities evaluation, resonates globally. We must invest in open, transparent, and multi-sectoral processes to strengthen buy-in and commitment at all levels," the prime minister said while addressing the inaugural session of the first-ever two-day Global Health Security Summit 2024. Highlighting the importance of enhancing coordination in the health sector beyond borders, Prime Minister Kakar said "One Health"

Continued on Page 06

**Missing persons Cabinet approves reconstitution of committee**

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Cabinet on Wednesday approved the reconstitution of its committee on missing persons headed by the law minister. The reconstitution is being done on the recommendation of the Ministry of Interior. The position became vacant after the resignation of the previous head of the committee, Sarfraz Bugti. The cabinet meeting, chaired by Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar,

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### Briefs

**Imran out of election race**

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: The election tribunal upheld the rejection of former prime minister Imran Khan's nomination papers for Lahore's NA-122 and PS 89 of Minawali, resulting in his exclusion from the upcoming general elections. Justice Tariq Nadeem, presiding over the election tribunal at the Lahore High Court, dismissed the appeal pertaining to the rejection of PTI founder Imran Khan's papers for NA-122. The tribunal upheld the returning officer's (RO) decision, which stated that the candidate's endorser did not belong to the constituency.

**AML set to sweep elections in Rawalpindi**

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Former interior minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed affirmed on Wednesday his party, Awami Muslim League, will secure a majority in Rawalpindi in the upcoming general elections. Talking to a group of reporters outside an anti-terrorism court in Rawalpindi, Rashid said that the elections would take place on time and the people would cast their votes. Asked to comment on the country's current political situation, Rashid stated that it was for the first time that Pakistani politics was beyond his comprehension. In this respect, he termed the next three days very crucial, adding that the situation would become clear by Jan 13.

**High treason case**

## SC upholds dictator Pervez Musharraf death sentence

Top court throws out Musharraf's appeal against death sentence, declares LHC judgment "null and void"; I wish next time such appeals are heard when accused are alive, says Musharraf's lawyer

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld former president General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf's death sentence awarded to him by a special court in 2019 in a "high treason case". A four-member bench headed by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Justice Aminuddin Khan and Justice Athar Minallah conducted the hearing. On December 17, 2019, a special court awarded the death sentence to the former ruler under Article 6 of the Constitution after a case of high treason was filed against him during Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) tenure for his "unconstitutional" decision to impose an emergency in November 2007. On Jan 13, 2020, the Lahore High Court (LHC) declared the verdict, given by the special court formed to hear the high treason case under Article 6, "unconstitutional".

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## SC Justice Mazhar Akbar Naqvi resigns

"It is no longer possible for me to continue to serve as a Judge of the SC," says Naqvi

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Justice Sayeed Mazhar Ali Akbar Naqvi of the Supreme Court on Wednesday stepped down from his post following misconduct allegations. "It was an honour to be appointed and to serve as a Judge first of the Lahore High Court, Lahore and then as the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Continued on Page 06

**IMF Board takes up Pak issue today**

Remittances increase to \$2.38 billion in Dec 2023

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) takes up Pakistan issue today in its Executive Board meeting. The Fund is likely to approve tranche as was agreed in the staff level agreement. Meanwhile, the inflow of workers' remittances sent by overseas Pakistanis increased by 13% to \$2.38 billion in December 2023 as funds were dispatched through official channels following the return of stability in the rupee-dollar parity and the crackdown against illegal currency networks.

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## Israeli genocidal war continues

Death toll from the ongoing Israeli bombardments, which started on October 7, climbed to 23,357 martyrs and the number of the wounded surged to 59,410 people

NEWS DESK

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 96 on Wednesday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound neighborhoods and homes and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. The health ministry in Gaza said on Wednesday that the Israeli occupation army committed 14 massacres in different areas of the Gaza Strip during the past 24 hours, killing at least 147 civilians and injuring over 243 others, while a large number of victims are still under the rubble of bombed buildings or lying on roads. In a statement, the health ministry added that the death toll from the ongoing Israeli bombardments, which started on October 7, climbed to 23,357 martyrs and the number of the wounded surged to 59,410 people. Every day, the Israeli army escalates its air and ground attacks on the Gaza Strip, which has been under relentless bombardment since a cross-border operation was launched by Hamas's armed wing, al-Qassam Brigades, on October 7. Besides the large number of casualties and the huge displacement of people, basic food, fuel, water and medical supplies have run out for the 2.3 million residents in Gaza due to the tight Israeli blockade and the massive destruction of infrastructure and facilities.

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**PUIC meeting Israel's survival hinges on 'terror'**

FOREIGN DESK

TEHRAN: Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf says the Israeli regime was founded on genocide and aggression and its survival depends on perpetrating such heinous crimes. Qalibaf made the remark in an address to the 5th emergency meeting of members of the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (PUIC) in the Iranian capital of Tehran on Wednesday. During the meeting, convened under the title of "Cooperation of Parliaments for Palestine" and attended by senior parliamentary officials from the OIC member states, the participants discussed Israel's ongoing genocidal war on Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip.

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## PPP Sit-in protests power and gas issues

DERA ISMAIL KHAN :The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), decrying the unavailability of essential services such as gas and electricity in Dera Ismail Khan, led a strong protest and sit-in here at GPO Chowk on Wednesday. The protest and sit-in carried on for over two hours in the noon which was attended by PPP Central Information Secretary and candidate for NA-44 Faisal Karim Kundi, PPP candidates for PK-112 Ahmad Karim Kundi and PK-113 Azizullah Khan Alizai, Chief of Derawal Group and candidate for PK-113 Sohail Rajput and other local political leaders including Shafiq Chaudhry, Fazal Baloch, Hashmat Rehman Sadozai and Farhan Leghari. Besides, hundreds of party workers and residents also participated in the protest. The participants were carrying banners and placards inscribed with slogans against gas and electricity load-shedding. They also chanted slogans against the WAPDA and SNGP departments.

Addressing the protesting participants, Faisal Karim Kundi said the PPP always took a stand for people's rights. He said the people of Dera Ismail Khan were deprived of their necessities like electricity and gas. He wondered that the people of the Dera were being punished for which mistake. The WAPDA officials were themselves involved in electricity theft, he alleged and added the citizens were being proved as electricity thieves.—DNA

## DC reviews progress of anti-polio drive

DNA

BAHAWALPUR : Deputy Commissioner Bahawalpur Zaheer Anwar Jappa here on Wednesday chaired a meeting to review the progress of the ongoing anti-polio campaign in the district. On this occasion, Chief Executive Officer District Health Authority Dr. Syed Tanveer Shah, Melinda Gates Foundation Representative Rashida Bano Bukhari, DG Health Punjab Representative Rukhsana Anwar, WHO Representative Dr. Masood, District Coordinator National Program Dr. Khalid Mehmood, DHO Dr. Khalid Chanar, Deputy Director Local Government Khurshid Ahmed, Deputy District Health Officers and officers of related departments were also present. The DC said that not a single child should be missed during this anti-polio campaign. He said that strict action should be taken against those who do not perform well in the anti-polio campaign. He said that the concerned officers should go to the sites and ensure the monitoring of mobile teams, transit teams and fixed teams. The DC said that polio caused physical defects in children. There is a dire need to protect children from polio and parents should cooperate with polio teams, he said.

The representatives of the Melinda Gates Foundation and the Director General of Health Services expressed satisfaction with the performance of the ongoing anti-polio campaign across the district. The meeting was informed that more than 0.8 million children would be vaccinated during this anti-polio campaign.



ISLAMABAD : Children lighting candles in memory of Hazara people killed in various incidents. Photo Muddassar Raja

# PIPD celebrated cultural day of Romania in Islamabad

Pakistan and Romania enjoys great cordial and friendly relation based upon mutual trust and close cooperation

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : In an effort to further strengthen the cultural and literary bond between the two nations, Policy Institute for Peace and Development in collaboration with the Embassy of Romania and Bahria University organized a conference aiming the cultural diplomacy among the two countries under the topic "Allama Iqbal & Mihai Eminescu-cultural linkages between Pakistan and Romania". The aim of the conference was to pay tribute to the national poets of Pakistan and Romania and to highlight the uniqueness and the similarities among them, the conference was specifically organized to mark the cultural day of Romania which is the Birthday of the Great Mihai Eminescu .

On the occasion Eduard-Robert

Preda (Charge d'Affairs, Embassy of Romania) Thanked PIPD and Bahria University for organizing an event and paid tribute to Mihai Eminescu (The National poet of Romania), who was born on January 15, 1850. He further said that every year on January 15, Romania celebrates cultural day on the Birthday of the Great Mihai Eminescu and highlighted its significance and emphasized that this day serves to promote Romanian culture both within the country and abroad. H.E Eduard Robert Preda further added an overview of the legacy of the poet, and how positively he transformed the Romanian poetry, creating a distinct school of poetry that resonated strongly in the west, he also recited a poem of Eminescu in Romanian language in an effort to convey it in the proper intellect and Rhythm, offering a glimpse into

the rich cultural tapestry of Romania, which was highly appreciated and liked by the audience. On this occasion, President Policy Institute for Peace & Development Ms.Wadana Gul in her speech stressed upon the crucial role of cultural diplomacy and people to people contact in bringing the nations closer. She expressed the dire need for cross-cultural collaboration between Pakistan and Romania both at the government and the public level to further enhance the ties and faster the already strong diplomatic relations. Maj Gen (Rtd) Khalid Amir Jaffery further delved into the rich history of Romania, noting its resilience through various empires, including the Roman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. He shared the lesser known historical anecdote, Recounting how soldiers

from the British Indian Army, Mainly from Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, fought alongside the Romanian Army in World War 1. Highlighting the diplomatic relations established in 1964, Maj. Gen Jaffery applauded the strong support Romania provided to Pakistan, particularly in matters such as the GSP plus issue, resulting in a significant 30% increase in Pakistan's exports to Europe and further emphasized the vast potential for export and import between the two countries. Stressing on the importance of people to people contact, Maj.Gen Jaffery also highlighted the significance of cultural understanding. He complimented Romania's management of its multicultural society and advised for increased interactions and collaborations among the two nations. Adding

to the knowledgeable and the fruitful event, Mr Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed, Chairman Muslim Institute, highly appreciated PIPD for holding the conference and further nurtured the audience with the philosophy of Allama Iqbal. He further paid tribute to Allama Iqbal and explained the legacy of the national poet. Dean Department of social sciences Dr. Adam Saud Presented a scholarly point of view about the historical and the current Perspective of relations between Romania and Pakistan while exploring the new domains of cooperation and strengthening of bilateral ties. He said that there exist a number of areas in which Romania and Pakistan can work jointly and mutually collaborate aiming to further strengthen the bilateral relation.

ABBOTTABAD : The Home and Tribal Affairs Department KPK, in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa IT Board on Wednesday launched e-Domicile services in Abbottabad. This new system allows residents to effortlessly apply for and obtain domiciles from the comfort of their homes. The inaugural ceremony for the first-ever e-Domicile in Abbottabad unfolded today, featuring the official launch by the Deputy Commissioner of Abbottabad. Assistant Commissioner Abbottabad, Ahmed Maghais, was also present at the event. The primary objective of e-Domicile is to streamline the process of obtaining domiciles, making it more accessible to the general public.—APP

## CM's aide visits DHQ Tangi

PESHAWAR : Special Assistant to Caretaker Chief Minister on Transport, Zafarullah Umerzai on Wednesday visited District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ) Tangi district Charsadda and inspected its various sections. He visited medical, surgical and children's wards, minor operation theatres, high dependency units and ECG Room and inquired about the provision of facilities to patients. He also met with patients and listened to their problems. Speaking on the occasion, he said that patients would be provided all the needed facilities and they would be facilitated and provided improved healthcare delivery system. CM's aide was also briefed about the lack of facilities in the hospital and the problems being faced by staff. He was told about sanitation problems and the shortage of beds and potable water in the hospital. Umerzai assured cooperation to hospital administration in resolving their problems and urged them to play a role in bringing improvement to the system.—APP

## First ever e-Domicile facility launched in Abbottabad

## RCCI hosts Belgian business contact day exhibition

DNA

RAWALPINDI: The Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) organized the Belgian Business Contact Day and Catalogue Exhibition at chamber house here on Wednesday. Books, magazines and trade direc-

tories were part of the catalogue exhibition providing an opportunity for visitors to get information about key sectors including tourism, education, services, agro-food processing, chemicals, surgical instruments, paper and paperboard, dairy and renewable energy. Ambassador of Belgium H.E Charles Delogne

who was the chief guest on the occasion, inaugurated the Belgian Business Contact Day and Catalogue Exhibition. President RCCI Saqib Rafiq in his welcome remarks gave a short summary of RCCI current activities and upcoming programs. He briefed the Belgian Ambassador about the potential opportunities for

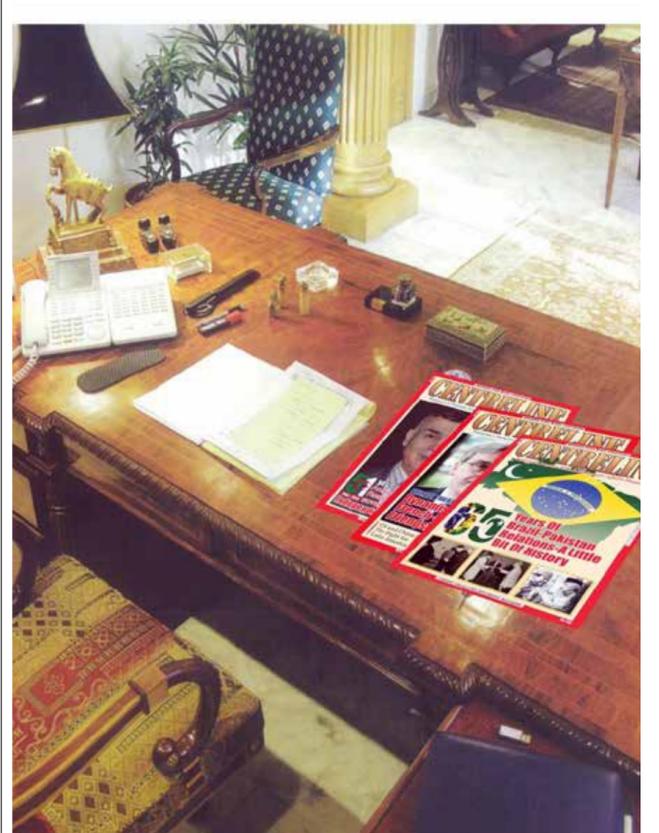
joint ventures and investment opportunities in Pakistan. He said that Belgium was one of Pakistan's important trading partners within the European Union. He assured that RCCI will work closely with the Belgium Embassy to further strengthen connectivity between private sectors of both countries.

## LDA told to simplify building plan approval

LAHORE : Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman on Wednesday visited the Lahore Development Authority (LDA) offices and inspected one-window cell and under-construction identification cell. He asked the visitors about the quality of services being provided there and issued directions to authorities on the spot. Appreciating the LDA for expediting records sifting, the chief secretary said that after digitalization of records was completed in two months, the LDA would become an exemplary institution in terms of service delivery. He lauded the efforts of DG LDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa and his team for resolving the long-standing issues of digitalization of Johar Town's record. Later, the chief secretary presided over a meeting on the LDA related issues. He directed the authorities to introduce IT-based reforms in the town planning and housing wings and provide corporate sector-style services for approval of building design. He said that the process of design approval and ownership transfer should be made easier through IT interventions and citizens should not be made to visit offices unnecessarily.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Workers are busy in painting the protective grills of public park in Federal Capital.— ONLINE



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## Envoy: Croatia-Pakistan trade not strong enough

Croatian Ambassador said, "Mirza Imran Baig's appointment as Honorary Consul General of Croatia in Karachi is going to be the extended hand of Croatian Embassy

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Ambassador of Republic of Croatia Dr Drago Stambuk has said that although Croatia and Pakistan were friendly countries but the trade exchange was 'not strong enough to be proud of' so the Croatian Embassy was trying its best to improve it. "My duty is to put the business people of both sides together so I'll be arranging political as well as economic consultations between the two countries so that bilateral trade could be improved.", he added while speaking at a meeting during his visit to Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Honorary Consul General of Croatia in Karachi Mirza Imran Baig, President KCCI Ifikhar Ahmed Sheikh, Senior Vice President Altaf A. Ghaffar, Vice President Tanveer Ahmed Barry, Former President Majyd Aziz, and KCCI Managing Committee

Members were also present at the meeting. Croatian Ambassador said, "Mirza Imran Baig's appointment as Honorary Consul General of Croatia in Karachi is going to be the extended hand of Croatian Embassy. He will be responsible for exploring ways and means to not only improve trade but also facilitate issuance of visas." While identifying delays in issuance of visas as a major bottleneck hindering trade, the Envoy assured that efforts were being made to solve this problem. In this regard, discussions were held with Croatian Honorary Consul General in Karachi whose initiatives to ease visa issuance process will be fully supported. He informed Croatia, which is a member of Euro zone, holds fantastic geo-political position with big ports and railways network, hence, work was underway to make Croatia the hub for Central and South-Eastern Europe. "Howev-

er, Croatia is demographically falling down and it needs people especially skilled and young people. Pakistan holds very good human resource, well-educated English-speaking population along with devoted and intelligent businessmen. I would like to see more Pakistanis coming to Croatia and working in various sectors of our country particularly the tourism industry, which receives millions of tourists every year and it sometimes becomes very difficult to cope so many visitors", he added. Speaking on the occasion, Honorary Consul General of Croatia in Karachi Mirza Imran Baig said that business potential for Pakistanis was incredible in Croatia which was a gateway to Europe bordering Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro, besides sharing maritime border with Italy which was of huge significance. "Trade between Croatia and Pakistan

has been steadily growing as Pakistan's exports to Croatia have been improving at a pace of 7.71 percent annually while Croatia exports to Pakistan have also been rising by 4 percent. Though it's a positive sign but still not enough as there is space for tremendous growth." "To deal with delays in issuance of visas, we are looking into the possible of opening a Drop Box service in Pakistan which will be made available but it will take time as three countries including Croatia, Iran and Pakistan are involved", he assured, adding that Croatian Embassy located in Iran designates over Pakistan as well. He also hinted towards taking a trade delegation to Croatia in collaboration with Karachi Chamber by mid this year and also initiate a Business Council so that all types of trade related issues between Croatia and Pakistan could be dealt under one umbrella.

## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### JANUARY

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

## Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



## Emergency

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



## Enquiry

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PIA Flight Info.....114  
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Railway Exchange 9270831-5  
WASA Rawalpindi. 5555489  
CAA.....9281092



## Hospitals

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



## Departments

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

## Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

# EU keen to further boost cooperation with Pakistan

Answering a question about educational cooperation, EU ambassador said our institutional partnerships between universities of EU and Pakistan in the field of science and technology and higher education are seeking more potential for better outcomes, adding, that EU application for 2024 scholarships is open for Pakistani students, they can apply for different study fields through EU program and enjoy their higher full funded studies in European countries

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the European Union H.E Dr. Riina Kionka, Wednesday said that the EU is keen on enhancing cooperation with Pakistan and focusing on exploring more avenues of trade, and investments in multiple sectors like information technology, surgical instruments, sports business, women entrepreneurs, education and textile industry. In an exclusive interview with a private news channel said that the EU was continuing support to Pakistan's economic development, adding, that the bonds between the two nations are much older which is cementing with each passing day. Answering a question about educational cooperation, she said our institutional partnerships between universities of EU and Pakistan in the field of science and technology and higher education are seeking more potential for better outcomes, adding, that EU application for 2024 scholarships



is open for Pakistani students, they can apply for different study fields through EU program and enjoy their higher full funded studies in European countries.

She said that highest highest-ever number of Pakistani students have been receiving scholarships to study in European universities under the EU's flagship program this year. To another question, she said that the European Union was the largest destination for Pakistani exports where the business community diversifies their exports to the EU to take maximum advantage of the EU's GSP Plus scheme for Pakistan which has recently been rolled. Kionka also termed GSP Plus as tremendously important for Pakistan's economy as it was beneficial not only for textile producers but also through the trickle-down effect of all those people who work in textile factories. She also identified Gems and Jewelry, Tourism, Handicrafts and Auto Parts etc. as potential sectors under GSP Plus, the EU Envoy noted that 28 per-

cent of Pakistan's exports come to the European single market which was a good number but it could further be enhanced. Talking about current political elections in Pakistan, she commented that the top EU diplomat in Pakistan has scheduled a series of meetings with political bigwigs to urge "timely, inclusive and peaceful elections". The EU was sending a handful of top observance in Pakistan to share their expertise and for providing meaningful suggestions. The ambassador said it was the EU priority of his mission to enhance parliamentary diplomacy, people-to-people exchanges, business opportunities, information, and renewable technologies, besides cooperation in the economic sector with Pakistan. The EU-Pakistan Business Forum for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) is also providing opportunities for both EU and Pakistani businesses to work together to become engines of development and partnership and contribute to enhancing bilateral trade, she mentioned.

# Senate committee on climate change meets

## FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: A meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change presided by Senator Seemee Ezdi was held today at Parliament House. The meeting commenced with Chairperson Senator Seemee Ezdi emphasizing the challenges posed by fog in urban areas. The Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination provided the committee members with a comprehensive briefing on various aspects of fog, including its formation, types, frequency in winter, and the related issue of smog: covering its types, causes, and impact. Senator Farooq Hamid Naek emphasized that fog is a natural phenomenon, whereas human activities contribute to the formation of smog. He stressed the need to implement measures to combat smog, particularly in areas like Lahore. The ministry clarified that both carbon-intensive

industries and general pollution contribute to smog. It was conveyed that 45 percent of smog is attributed to vehicle emissions. In discussions about the way forward, the ministry emphasized key factors, such as enhancing fuel quality, implementing mandatory annual certification for vehicles, promoting clean energy and sustainable transportation, adopting cleaner agricultural practices, improving waste management, raising public awareness and education, and implementing urban forestation. Additionally, the ministry suggested installing smog towers as a potential solution, citing their successful installation in China and ongoing efforts in India. The ministry affirmed that Living Indus has been selected from among 150 applications for the World Restoration Flagship of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and this achievement was commended by the committee members. Furthermore, the ministry also briefed the committee

on the Living Indus initiative, emphasizing its aim to restore the ecological health of the Indus basin within Pakistan. They highlighted extensive consultations with the public sector, private sector, experts, and civil society, resulting in a comprehensive list of 25 preliminary interventions. These interventions focus on water and flood management, resource mobilization finance, social inclusion, knowledge base and legislation, pollution control, agri-forestry, and biodiversity. It was conveyed that the financing strategy for Living Indus will concentrate on international support, public finance, community involvement, and public-private partnerships. Moreover, former Senator Nisar Memon provided a detailed briefing on the new convention on Delta Unite (The Convention on Conservation of Deltas). He highlighted the challenges of the Indus River, emphasizing that the real issue lies in surface and groundwater, posing a regional and

global challenge. He pointed out that livelihoods, including agriculture, fishing, and livestock rearing, have been adversely affected, leading to various social issues such as poverty and healthcare concerns. In general, he commended the Living Indus initiative and expressed appreciation for the Senate team's active participation in Cop 28. The meeting concluded with the chairperson's suggestion to emphasize climate change in policy-making and foster public awareness regarding the avoidance of plastic usage. In attendance were Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Senator Farooq Hamid Naek, Senator Taj Haider, Senator Abida Muhammad Azeem, Senator Keshoo Bai, Senator Khalida Ateeb, Ex-Senator Nisar Memon, the Secretary of the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination and the senior officers from the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination.

# AIOU admissions to commence from Jan 15

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is commencing the admissions for the Spring 2024 semester (first phase) across the country, including AJK and GB, on January 15, 2024 while admissions in second phase will start from March 1. The admissions in first phase include Matric, FA, I.Com, certificate courses, BS (face to face), MPhil, and PhD programs, said a press release on Wednesday. The teacher training programs, Associate Degree (BA), Post Graduate Diploma and BS (ODL) programs will be offered in second phase. Vice Chancellor AIOU, Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, has instructed the regional heads of university to enable facilitation centres to support students. The students will be able to use computer and internet facilities in the regional offices of the university. SWIFT Centers have also been established across the country to provide information and support to students. Prospectuses and admission application forms for all the programs will be available online on the university website (www.aiou.edu.pk) on January 15, 2024. Admission in BS (face to face) MPhil and PhD programs can only be applied online whereas admission application forms for matriculation, intermediate and I Com can be submitted manually as well as via online mode.



# China's higher education success inspires developing countries

## DNA

ISLAMABAD: "The success story of Chinese higher education has inspired many developing countries and they embarked on a voyage of collaboration with China to improve the performance of their universities." This was stated by Prof. Dr. Zahid Anwar, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Director of China Study Center, University of Peshawar (UoP) and a Chair-professorship of Yunnan University, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. At the recent 3rd South and Southeast Asian University Presidents Forum held at Yunnan University, the vice chancellor noted that China's economic development has given hope to many developing countries. "Chinese institutions of higher education are playing a very important role in strengthening regional connectivity. In this connection Yunnan University, Kunming's leading step in the establishment of the South and Southeast Asian Universities Network proved to be a great leap forward," he stated. The South-East Asian Universities Network organized this annual conference, which will greatly contribute to strengthening cooperation among member universities to collectively address the challenges of higher education in South-East Asian universities.

# Poet Hafeez Hoshiarpuri remembered on his death anniversary

ISLAMABAD: The death anniversary of prominent poet, Hafeez Hoshiarpuri observed on Wednesday. He was born on 5th January, 1912 at Hoshiarpur in India. He was a genius and very prominent among Urdu poets of his time. Famous poems of Hafeez Hoshiarpuri are, Teri talash mein ham jab kabhi nikalte hain, "Mohabbat karne vaaile kam na honge", etc. Hafeez was the Ustad of Nasir Kazmi, who later on became one of the renowned poets of Urdu language and began writing ghazals under his teacher's guidance. Hafeez died on 10th January, 1973 in Karachi.—APP

# Dr Mukhtar to continue services as VC NSU

ISLAMABAD: Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar will continue his services as Vice Chancellor of National Skills University (NSU) Islamabad till the appointment of a regular incumbent, said a press release issued here on Wednesday. The Senate of National Skills University (NSU) Islamabad, chaired by

the Chancellor/President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, has expressed full confidence in Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar and believed that his continued leadership would further elevate the University's status, the press release added. On his arrival in October 2019 as founding Vice Chancellor of the NSU,

Dr. Mukhtar and his team faced significant challenges as it was a deserted place occupied by illegal occupants. Under his visionary leadership, the NSU has transformed remarkably, emerging as a bustling 'Skills Learning Center', and gaining recognition from UNESCO/UNEVOC as a prominent

skills providing institution. Prof. Dr. Mukhtar's tenure as the founding Vice Chancellor has been characterized by an unwavering commitment to academic excellence, and innovation. The VC has played a pivotal role in shaping the University's identity and fostering a conducive environment for skills teaching and learning. The appointment of Prof. Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar is a testament to his dedication and exceptional leadership in steering the university through its transformative journey.—APP

# Poultry prices increase by 30 % in twin cities

ISLAMABAD: The prices of poultry items have increased by 30 percent in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi during the last six months, which has created huge volatility in the market. According to the market survey conducted by APP here Wednesday, during the last six months, a 30 per cent increase was witnessed in the price of chicken in the last six months, while as same as 33 per cent increase in the price of poultry eggs in the same period. According to the survey, the price of live chicken in the twin cities was between Rs420 and 440 per kg from the last week of this month of January. Similarly, chicken meat is sold at Rs 680 to 700 per kg in the market of both cities. During this time, it was also found that poultry eggs used to be sold at Rs 390 to Rs 405 per dozen in the market of both cities. Meanwhile, talking to APP, the Chairman Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA), Chaudhry, Muhammad Ashraf said the increase in the current prices of poultry is due to demand and supply issues.—APP

# SMEDA to organize training on Exhibitions

The session would be attended by Members of ICSTSI, emerging and existing entrepreneurs, professionals in marketing, sales and advertising, and all those desirous of improving knowledge on the subject

ISLAMABAD: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) will organize a one-day workshop on "Exhibitions and Event Management Skills for SMEs" for profitable business growth on January 11. The workshop will be held at the Islamabad Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industries (ICSTSI), according to sources in the authority informed on Wednesday. The training program will provide information about the scope and nature of exhibitions, pre-conditions and participants selection criteria, developing the concept, physical and human resources, and project logistics. The workshop will also highlight marketing and event, financial management, risk management, and staging the event. The session would be attended by Members of ICSTSI, emerging and existing entrepreneurs, professionals in marketing, sales and advertising, and all those desirous of improving knowledge on the subject.—APP

## JANUARY 2024

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Ph: 051-2261960, 051-2266165



## Briefs

## Election Tribunal decides 116 appeals of NA

ISLAMABAD: The Election Appellate Tribunals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have so far decided 116 appeals against rejection or acceptance of nomination papers for the National Assembly. According to the spokesman of the provincial election commission, the tribunal disposed of 116 appeals of the National Assembly across the province. The tribunal decided 102 appeals against the rejection of nomination papers for 45 general seats of the National Assembly. Similarly, 213 appeals against the rejection of nomination papers for 115 general seats of the provincial assembly were heard. Fourteen appeals were filed against the approved nomination papers for the provincial assembly. The spokesman said that a total of seven Election Appellate Tribunals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had given verdicts on appeals.—APP

## ECP directs authorities to provide voter info via SMS

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has instructed the relevant authorities to provide detailed information on voter registration status and constituency details for national and provincial assemblies on 8300. According to ECP spokesperson, the eligible voters can verify their registration status on the voter lists by sending their Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) number to 8300. Upon sending an SMS to 8300, an automated response will provide details, including the electoral area's name, block code, serial number, National and Provincial Assembly constituency numbers, district name, electoral region name, telephone number of the relevant district election commissioner, helpline number, and the ECP website. Notably, every registered voter has the choice to authenticate their information by visiting the District Election Commissioner's office in their locality, where the comprehensive electoral roll is available for review.—APP

## IIUI extends last date of admission till Jan 15

ISLAMABAD: The International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI) has extended the last date to apply for spring admissions in programs of its 11 faculties till Monday, 15th of January, 2024. The University's administration made this decision keeping in view the interest and requests of applicants to extend the date, said a press release issued on Wednesday. The details of the offered programs of spring 2024 admissions, eligibility criteria and fee structure can be seen on cms.iiu.edu.pk.—APP

## FTO resolves 8,128 tax complaints, provides relief of Rs 17.74 billion

President visits FTO's office, lauds its performance

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) has resolved 8,128 complaints against the maladministration of tax and customs authorities during the year 2023 as compared to 6,106 complaints in 2022. Furthermore, the registration of complaints increased by almost 24% as 8,076 complaints were filed in 2023 compared to 6,480 in 2022. FTO has also provided a relief of Rs 17.74 billion to taxpayers in 2023 as compared to Rs 7 billion in 2022. This was highlighted during a briefing given to President Dr Arif Alvi, who visited the FTO Office in Islamabad, today. Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO), Dr Asif Mahmood Jah, Advisors to the FTO, regional heads, and senior officials of the FTO attended the meeting. Dr Asif Mahmood Jah briefed the President about the FTO's overall performance, outreach and initiatives taken for the facilitation of taxpayers. He informed that FTO provided free-of-cost justice to complainants against the maladministration and high-handedness of tax officials within 60 days, adding that the average time taken for the disposal of complaints had been reduced to 44 days during 2023. While highlighting the achievements of FTO, he stated that FTO was a public-relief-oriented organization that had provided tax relief to low-paid employees, teachers, salaried class, pensioners, and purchasers of vehicles through its decisions. He further said that FTO was making efforts to increase its outreach and registration of cases by opening new regional offices, establishing a helpline, and raising awareness through seminars, and interactions with the business community in various cities of the country. He apprised that FTO was also actively working to create awareness about its role and services in tax matters using social media and mass messaging through cellular companies. Speaking on the occasion, the President said that FTO should further accelerate its efforts to increase the registration and disposal of complaints, besides increasing its outreach to taxpayers. He also called for enhanced coordination between FTO and FBR for the timely implementation of its decisions, and bringing improvements in the tax regime. He remarked that an improved tax system was essential to increase tax and revenue generation in Pakistan, which would help improve our economy as well as reduce the country's dependence on loans. The President highly appreciated FTO's performance that had provided relief of Rs 17.74 billion to complainants, besides addressing 8,128 complaints last year. He also urged the need to provide timely relief to complainants, especially overseas Pakistanis.



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## Khwarizmi International Award laureates to be announced this month

ISLAMABAD: The Khwarizmi International Award Laureates will be announced in January to recognize the valuable achievements of the researchers, innovators and inventors in the field of Science and Technology. The applicants from across the world submitted applications for the 37th Khwarizmi International Award (KIA) announced for acknowledging their outstanding scientific achievements. The awards

have been announced by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology in partnership with the OIC Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTEC), Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, The World Intellectual Property Organization, Economic Cooperation Organization, National Elite Foundation and

others. According to COMSTEC, the awards have been established in memory of Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, the Iranian Muslim mathematician and astronomer. The Khwarizmi International Award is aimed at recognizing the efforts made by researchers, innovators and inventors from all over the world and to appreciate their invaluable achievements and contributions to various fields of science and technology.

The Khwarizmi International Award is named in memory of the achievements of Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, the Iranian mathematician and astronomer. The Khwarizmi International Award is annually held to award those who are contributing in the fields of Aerospace, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Animal Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Basic Sciences, Biotechnology and Basic Medical Sciences, Chemical Technology, all fields of Engineering, Green Technology, Information Technology, Materials, Metallurgy, Mechatronics, Medical Sciences, Nanotechnology, Industry and Technology Management.—APP

## SMEs asked to raise funds through PSX for business promotion

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) in collaboration with Pakistan Stock Exchange organized an awareness seminar on Financial Literacy, Savings & Investment which was attended by a large number of the business community. Addressing the seminar, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that the 22% policy interest rate of the SBP is a major hurdle for the development of the SME sector as it has become impossible for SMEs to get loans from banks for business development. He demanded that the government should consider reducing the interest rate for SMEs, which will help promote business activities, increase investment, and im-

prove the economy. He said that everyone including the business community needs to play a role to get the country out of the current economic crisis. He encouraged the business community to invest in the stock market to generate funds for business expansion. He further demanded that the PSX should come up with attractive packages for the SME sector to raise capital from the stock market. Sarman Hussain, Region Head (Central & North),

Pakistan Stock Exchange said that the stock market provides a better option for businesses to raise funds for business development. He said that SMEs can not only raise capital by selling their shares in the stock market, but this will also promote good governance for them. He said that family businesses in Pakistan are declining rather than flourishing as only 12% of family businesses go to the third generation. He said that family businesses

should focus on diversification instead of depending on one business line. Zahid Latif Khan, CEO of Zahid Latif Khan Securities Private Limited, said that investing in the stock market is very profitable. He said that from July to December 2023, there has been a good increase in foreign portfolio investment in the Pakistan stock market, which is a manifestation of the confidence of foreign investors in Pakistan's economy.



## APHC concerned over surge in Indian state terrorism in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD: The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has expressed grave concern over the surge in Indian state terrorism in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. According to Kashmir Media Service, the APHC spokesman in a statement in Srinagar said since 1947 India has been using military might to break the will of the people and suppress their freedom sentiments but has utterly failed in achieving its nefarious designs. He deplored that India has turned the occupied territory into a garrison where its troops are committing large-scale human rights violations, in fact war crimes. He said, following the Hindutva agenda of communal Hindu organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the BJP-led Indian government has deprived the Kashmiri people of all their basic rights. The APHC spokesman said the people of Jammu and Kashmir have totally rejected the occupation of their homeland by India and its illegal and unilateral actions of August 5, 2019. He said the peace and freedom-loving Kashmiris have always displayed their indignation and resistance against the Indian illegal occupation. He said the Kashmiri people have been fighting for their birthright to self-determination for the past over seven decades and they will continue their struggle till complete success. The spokesman said, "The Indian authorities have put the entire Hurriyat leadership in jails." "Thousands of Kashmiris have been illegally detained under black laws including Public Safety Act (PSA)," he lamented. He urged the United Nations, Organization of Islamic Cooperation and European Union to take cognizance of Indian state terrorism and machinations to change the demographic composition of occupied Kashmir. He called for implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions to settle the Kashmir dispute for ensuring durable peace in South Asia.—DNA

## ECP mourns loss of employees in Kashmir gas tragedy

ISLAMABAD: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja and members of the Election Commission on Wednesday conveyed profound sadness and grief regarding the tragic demise of four Election Commission employees due to a gas leakage incident in Kashmir. According to the Election Commission spokesperson, four employees, including an election officer, two data entry operators, and a sub-assistant, tragically lost their lives in Kashmir due to a gas leakage incident. In his message, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja expressed deep condolences to the families of the deceased and ordered an investigation into the incident.—APP

## Workers' remittances record \$2.4 bn inflow in December

ISLAMABAD: The overseas workers' remittances recorded an inflow of US\$2.4 billion during December 2023, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Wednesday said. In terms of growth, during the month under review, remittances increased by 5.4 per cent on month on month basis and 13.4 per cent on year on year basis. Workers' remittances inflow of US\$13.4 billion has been recorded during the first six months of the fiscal year 2023-24. Remittances inflows during December 2023 were mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia (\$577.6 million), United Arab Emirates (\$419.2 million), United Kingdom (\$368.0 million) and United States of America (\$263.9 million).—APP

## Six gamblers held, 250 kites confiscated

RAWALPINDI: Police arrested six gamblers and recovered stake money amounting Rs 26,000, 05 mobile phones from their possession during a crackdown here on Wednesday. According to a police spokesman, Suddar Wah police raided and held gamblers who were identified as Mamraiz Akhtar, Arshad Mehmood, Mohammad Qadeer, Naveed Ahmed, Shahid Bashir and Bakhtil Mumtaz. Police have registered separate cases against all of them and further investigation was in progress. SP Potohar commended the police team.—APP

## The significance of media literacy

Connecting seemingly unrelated dots is a common task in cybersecurity. The relationship between cybersecurity and media literacy is growing in importance, much as privacy and security are now inextricably linked. In the context of cybersecurity, media literacy is not just challenging the veracity of news but also comprehending the subtleties involved in adding context to the story

HALEEMA

The capacity to understand and assess data has become equally important to cybersecurity as the technology itself. In the context of cybersecurity, media literacy—a phrase that is frequently linked to the ability to discriminate between news and information—now emphasizes both contribution and consumption. Making the Connections Between Cybersecurity and Media Literacy Connecting seemingly unrelated dots is a common task in cybersecurity. The relationship between cybersecurity and media literacy is growing in importance, much as privacy and security are now inextricably linked. In the context of cybersecurity, media literacy is not just challenging the veracity of news but also comprehending the subtleties involved in adding context to the story. The significance of media literacy is underscored by the current dispute on the veracity of an article concerning altered computer hardware that made its

way through the supply chain. Despite the enormous potential impact, organizations have been reluctant to act due to doubts about the veracity of the story. This mistrust highlights the necessity of evaluating the material that is circulating in the cybersecurity area. Getting Around the Media Landscape: What Are Our Options? The media landscape for cybersecurity has developed despite the obstacles, providing trustworthy sources dedicated to objective reporting. It's important to identify and follow reputable journalists who place a high value on presenting correct information, differentiating truth from opinion, and reporting conflicts of interest or prejudices. As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of cybersecurity, the need for media literacy takes on an increasingly crucial role. Beyond merely questioning the authenticity of news, it involves understanding the nuances that contribute to the overall narrative. The current dispute over the validity of an article detailing tampered

computer hardware within the supply chain serves as a stark reminder of the challenges in ensuring the accuracy of information circulating in the cybersecurity realm. In addressing this mistrust, individuals and organizations alike must actively engage in evaluating the material that shapes their understanding of cybersecurity events. This introspection becomes even more relevant as we explore the options available within the media landscape dedicated to cybersecurity. Despite the obstacles, the cybersecurity media landscape has evolved to provide reliable and objective reporting. Identifying and following reputable journalists is paramount, as they play a pivotal role in presenting accurate information while differentiating between facts and opinions. The emphasis on reporting conflicts of interest or biases adds an additional layer of transparency, enabling consumers to make informed decisions about the information they consume. However, the responsibility does not solely rest on the shoulders of journalists. Individuals must

cultivate a sense of critical thinking and discernment when consuming cybersecurity-related information. Media literacy in cybersecurity is not just a passive act of consuming information; it is an active engagement with the content, asking questions about its origin, potential biases, and the evidence supporting the presented narratives. This critical thinking is essential for navigating the complex web of cybersecurity information and ensuring that decisions and actions are grounded in a well-informed understanding of the facts. The evolving nature of cybersecurity demands a continuous commitment to media literacy. By staying vigilant, questioning the information presented, and actively seeking out credible sources, individuals can contribute to a more informed and resilient cybersecurity community. As we navigate the media landscape, let us embrace the responsibility to be discerning consumers and contributors, fostering a culture of media literacy that is integral to the evolving field of cybersecurity.

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## Iran-US relations

THE longstanding tensions between Iran and the United States have been a defining feature of international relations for decades. Rooted in a complex web of historical, political, and ideological factors, the relationship between these two nations has experienced both periods of diplomatic engagement and heightened hostilities. As of 2024, the ongoing tensions continue to shape the dynamics of the Middle East and have far-reaching implications for global geopolitics. The roots of the Iran-U.S. tension can be traced back to the Iranian Revolution of 1979 when the U.S.-backed Shah was ousted, leading to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The subsequent hostage crisis, where 52 American diplomats were held captive for 444 days, set the stage for a strained relationship that persisted through the years. The United States' support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s further deepened the mistrust between the two nations. One significant episode in recent history was the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, an agreement aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. However, tensions escalated when the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018, citing concerns over Iran's regional activities and missile development. The withdrawal strained diplomatic ties and led to a renewed cycle of economic sanctions. The reimposition of economic sanctions by the U.S. severely impacted Iran's economy, contributing to domestic unrest and affecting the livelihoods of ordinary citizens. Meanwhile, the region witnessed a surge in proxy conflicts, with Iran accused of supporting militias in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. The U.S. responded with increased military presence and sanctions, creating a volatile situation with potential ripple effects across the Middle East. Incidents in the Persian Gulf, including attacks on oil tankers and the downing of drones, escalated tensions further. Both sides engaged in military posturing, heightening the risk of a direct military confrontation. The assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020 by a U.S. drone strike added another layer of complexity to the relationship, leading to increased hostilities and threats of retaliation. Despite the escalations, diplomatic efforts to ease tensions have not been entirely absent. Various international actors, including European nations and the United Nations, have sought to mediate and encourage dialogue. The change in U.S. leadership in 2021 saw a shift in approach, with the Biden administration expressing interest in rejoining the JCPOA, albeit with the need for negotiations on broader issues. The Iran-U.S. tension remains a critical and evolving aspect of global geopolitics. The complex interplay of historical grievances, regional power dynamics, and nuclear concerns continues to shape the relationship between these two nations. As the international community navigates these challenges, the path forward remains uncertain, requiring a delicate balance of diplomacy, dialogue, and strategic decision-making to promote stability in the region and beyond.

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Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

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Phone: 051-2266165 / 051-2261960

Off: Awan Plaza, Block 18-A, G-8 Markaz Islamabad



## France's first youngest Prime Minister

EMMANUEL Macron's decision to appoint the youthful Gabriel Attal as France's new prime minister represents a double first in the country's history. At 34, Mr Attal will be the youngest politician ever to hold the office. In his book, *Revolution*, written prior to his first presidential campaign, Mr Macron wrote: "What keeps France united is the acceptance of the diversity of origins and destinies and the refusal of fatalism." As the final phase of the two-term Macron presidency begins, Mr Attal is a choice designed to re-echo the optimism and hopes for democratic renewal present at its outset. More narrowly, Mr Macron's move to replace Elisabeth Borne after only 20 months in office constitutes a political throw of the dice, ahead of European elections in June. These promise to be a torrid affair for the president's centrist Renaissance (RE) party. Marine Le Pen's radical right Rassemblement enjoys up to a 10-point lead in polls, and following the 2022 elections – at which RE lost its majority – has made hay in the national assembly. In stark contrast to his predecessor, the telegenic Mr Attal has won a deserved reputation as a skilled communicator and enjoys stellar personal poll ratings. Usefully, his age also puts him in the same generational cohort as Rassemblement's 28-year-old president, Jordan Bardella. The gamble in the Elysée is that a change of tone will deliver a change in parliamentary dynamics, and a change in the overall numbers. Amid predictions that nationalist radical right parties are set to become the third-biggest force in the European parliament – overtaking the liberal bloc – it must be hoped that Mr Macron's bet comes off. But the president may be investing too much faith in mere mood music. As Ms Borne discovered to her cost, the absence of a majority in the assembly has made the role of prime minister in Mr Macron's second term a borderline impossible job. On the government's fiercely resisted policy of raising the retirement age – which Mr Macron ill-advisedly pursued at the height of a cost of living crisis – Ms Borne was roundly condemned for legislating by decree after failing to garner the necessary votes. Last month, a new immigration law was only passed when draconian new restrictions on benefits for legal migrants were added, at the insistence of the centre-right. Gallingly, Ms Le Pen hailed this moment as "an ideological victory", as her party voted for the beefed-up bill. The political career of Mr Attal, like those of Mr Macron and Ms Borne, began in the Socialist party. But to the dismay of left-leaning RE deputies, who voted en masse against the new immigration law, the right has effectively dictated terms to the minority administration. In consequence, Mr Attal will almost certainly focus on the atmospheric and steer clear of major new legislative battles. Beyond June's elections, Mr Macron's presidency may thus be fated to end with a dying fall, as the internal race to succeed him begins. If he can avoid mistakes while injecting a new sense of optimism, France's new prime minister will be one of the favourites to win the right to take on Ms Le Pen in 2027. But amid signs that a growing number of voters see this beleaguered government as something of a spent force, taking the helm is a huge gamble for Mr Attal, as well as Mr Macron.

# Israeli shift in military tactics threatens to be a double-edged sword

James Dorsey

Despite remaining dependent on US vetoes in the United Nations Security Council and military cooperation, Israel worked to increase its margin of autonomy, much like Gulf states did three decades later after the United States failed to respond to Iranian-inspired attacks on their critical infrastructure in 2019 and 2020. Nevertheless, acting on seemingly accurate and up-to-the-minute detailed intelligence, Israel appears to have responded to US pressure by carrying out a series of targeted killings in the past week, including six operatives of Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Lebanese Shiite militia, an Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander in Syria, a top Hamas official in Beirut

US pressure on Israel to switch gears and focus on targeted precision strikes and killings, rather than indiscriminate bombing of the Gaza Strip, potentially heightens the risk of the war escalating into a regional bust-up and expanding beyond the Middle East. The heightened risk suggests US efforts to allow Israel to continue attempting to destroy Hamas while minimising civilian Palestinian casualties could backfire. This would further underline that the only way of preventing an escalation, protecting innocent lives, and securing the release of Hamas-held hostages, is a ceasefire. Even so, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on his fifth visit to Tel Aviv since the war began, reaffirmed in talks with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, "Israel's right to prevent another October 7 from occurring" but "stressed the importance of avoiding civilian harm, protecting civilian infrastructure, and ensuring the distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza." Antony Blinken arrives in Tel Aviv during his week-long trip aimed at calming tensions across the Middle East. Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

Mr. Blinken was referring to Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel that sparked the Israeli assault on Gaza. His reference to infrastructure constituted the United States' first public criticism of Israeli attacks on Gaza hospitals, schools, and other civilian infrastructure. Signalling differences with Mr. Blinken, Mr. Netanyahu's office did not issue a readout after the meeting. Even so, US reluctance to go beyond verbal pressure by threatening consequences if Israel fails to heed US advice may stem from a belief that America's leverage on Israel has diminished over time in economic and political terms. US financial support amounted in 1981 to ten per cent of Israel's GDP. The US' annual US\$4 billion allocation was in 2021 only good for one per cent of GDP. Moreover, Israel today produces many of its most essential weapons domestically, making it less dependent on US arms sales. In addition, Israel concluded in 1991 that it could no longer blindly rely on US protection after the United States did not come to its aid when Iraq fired Scud missiles at the Jewish state during the Gulf war. Despite remaining dependent on US vetoes in the United Nations Security Council and military cooperation, Israel worked to increase its margin of autonomy, much like Gulf states did three decades later after the United States failed to respond to Iranian-inspired attacks on their critical infrastructure in 2019 and 2020. Nevertheless, acting on seemingly accurate and up-to-

the-minute detailed intelligence, Israel appears to have responded to US pressure by carrying out a series of targeted killings in the past week, including six operatives of Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Lebanese Shiite militia, an Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander in Syria, and a top Hamas official in Beirut. On Tuesday, Israeli forces targeted a car in southern Lebanon carrying three Hezbollah operatives north of the narrow band along the 120-kilometre Lebanese-Israeli border to which hostilities with the Lebanese group have so far been contained. A minibus passes the attacked car that was used by the senior Hezbollah commander Wissam Tawil, who was killed on Monday, in Kherbet Selem village, south Lebanon, Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2024. Photo: AP/Hussein Malla

The attack, the second in 24 hours, occurred as Mr. Blinken discussed Israeli military strategy with Mr. Netanyahu and members of his war cabinet. Israel targeted a second car, hours after the attack, close to the home of Wassim Al-Tawil, a senior Hezbollah commander killed together with another of the group's fighters in a drone attack on Monday, as they travelled by car north of the band. The car was targeted as Mr. Al-Tawil was laid to rest. "We're targeting Hezbollah operatives, infrastructure, and systems they've set up to deter Israel," said newly appointed Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz. The United States has been pushing Israel to scale back its bombing of Gaza that has killed more than 23,000 people, a majority innocent Palestinian civilians, withdraw troops from the Strip, and focus on militant Palestinian targets. The killings of senior Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iranian commanders threaten to push Iranian-supported forces to retaliate in ways that could escalate hostilities beyond Gaza and the so far narrow Israel-Lebanese border band. In an indication of how hostilities could escalate, Hezbollah attacked an Israeli air traffic control base south of the band on Monday in retaliation for last week's assassination in Beirut of a senior Hamas official, Salah al Arouri, and Israeli strikes in response. The fact that a majority of Israel's targeted killings have been Hezbollah operatives likely has much to do with US, French, and German efforts to prevent an escalation of exchanges between Israel and the Lebanese group and negotiate a definitive demarcation of the two countries' borders. Hezbollah has rejected Israeli demands to withdraw to a line 30 kilometres north of the border beyond the Litani River. Hezbollah has also said it would agree to Lebanese government

border demarcation talks only after Israel halts its assault on Gaza and accepts a permanent ceasefire. Israel has threatened to militarily push Hezbollah back to the Litani if diplomatic efforts fail. On a visit this week to Israeli troops on the Lebanese border, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu warned, "If Hezbollah chooses to start an all-out war then it will...turn Beirut and southern Lebanon, not far from here, into Gaza and Khan Yunis." The Israeli attacks on Hezbollah appear designed to force the group to choose between withdrawing and sparking an all-out war that bankrupt Lebanon cannot afford and many Lebanese do not want. Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah has indicated that he does not seek an escalation of hostilities but that his group was prepared if Israel opted for a full-fledged conflagration. Israel's apparent focus on Hezbollah operatives may also be because of its inability so far to take out Hamas' most senior Gaza leaders, including Yahya Sinwar, more than three months into the war. Last week, David Barnea, the head of Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service vowed to hunt down every Hamas member involved in the group's October 7 attack on Israel, no matter where they are. Director of Mossad, David Barnea. Photo: Handout/GPO/Amos Ben Gershon/Anadolu Agency via Getty Image

Mr. Barnea compared the manhunt to Israel's pursuit of Palestinian Black September after it attacked the Israeli team at the 1972 Munich Olympics and killed 11 athletes. Last month, Ronen Bar, chief of Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security agency, said Israel would hunt down Hamas in Lebanon, Turkey, and Qatar even if it took years. Ronen Bar, head of the Shin Bet security agency. Photo: Avshalom Sassoni/Flash90

"This is our Munich. We will do this everywhere, in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Lebanon, in Turkey, in Qatar. It will take a few years, but we will be there to do it," Mr. Bar said. While Hamas has yet to retaliate for Mr. Al-Arouri's killing, a senior official warned that it may expand the war beyond Israel and Palestine if the United States continued to support Israel. "The West in general, and the US government in particular, need to reconsider their position because this will have consequences... If the U.S. insists on its position, our entire nation will view it, and treat it, as an enemy... This conflict could go beyond Palestine's borders, and expand in scope," said Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri. Mr. Abu Zuhri's warning coincided with a call by the Islamic State for lone-wolf attacks on civilian targets in Europe and the United States, including churches and synagogues.

# The implications of Myanmar junta's surprise setback

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim

This strategic setback is a major concern for Hlaing. The northern region has been a historically challenging battleground due to its complex ethnic composition and long-standing grievances against the central government. The Three Brotherhood Alliance's gains have emboldened not only these ethnic armed groups but also other dissident factions, creating a domino effect that could destabilize the junta's grip on power. The rebels' success showcases the fragility of the military's control over the northern territories

IN a stunning turn of events, the Myanmar military's Regional Operations Command in Laukkai last week surrendered to the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, marking a significant and unexpected shift in the ongoing conflict. The implications of this surrender, coupled with the Three Brotherhood Alliance's rapid gains across northern Shan state, pose a major problem for the military in the northern region and present a formidable challenge for junta chief Gen. Min Aung Hlaing. The fall of the Laukkai command to the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, a prominent ethnic armed group, underscores the volatile nature of the military's hold on power. Laukkai, a key strategic outpost, was considered a stronghold for the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's military. The surrender means not only a loss of territory, but it also lands a blow on the military's morale and is an assertion of the rebels' resilience. The Three Brotherhood Alliance, consisting of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army, has capitalized on this momentum, making rapid gains across northern Shan. Their coordinated efforts have seen them overrun hundreds of military outposts, seize key towns and take control of crucial border crossings with China. The rebels' success not only demonstrates their military capabilities but also showcases the fragility of the military's control over the northern territories. This strategic setback is a major concern for Hlaing. The northern region has been a historically challenging battleground due to its complex ethnic composition and long-standing grievances against the central government. The Three Brotherhood Alliance's gains have emboldened not only

these ethnic armed groups but also other dissident factions, creating a domino effect that could destabilize the junta's grip on power. The rebels' success showcases the fragility of the military's control over the northern territories. One of the key reasons behind the rebels' success is the support they receive from local communities. The military's heavy-handed approach, characterized by human rights abuses and indiscriminate violence, has fueled resentment among the population. The people of northern Shan, long marginalized and oppressed, see the rebels as a force that represents their aspirations for autonomy and self-determination. The junta's inability to win hearts and minds in the region has turned the conflict into a battle for legitimacy, in which the Three Brotherhood Alliance holds a distinct advantage. China's role in the conflict cannot be overlooked. The rebels' control of key border crossings with China is a significant development. Beijing, which is traditionally hesitant to intervene in Myanmar's internal affairs, may find itself compelled to act to protect its economic interests and maintain stability along its southwestern border. The junta's loss of control over these border areas threatens to disrupt trade and create a security vacuum that could have far-reaching consequences for regional stability. The international community's response to the escalating crisis will also play a crucial role. The UN and major world powers must address the root causes of the conflict, emphasizing a diplomatic resolution that respects the rights and aspirations of Myanmar's diverse ethnic groups. Sanctions and condemnations alone may not be sufficient. A concerted effort to engage all stakeholders in meaningful dialogue is essential to laying the groundwork for a lasting peace. The junta's

stubbornness could exacerbate the crisis, leading to more bloodshed and instability. For Hlaing, the situation in the north presents a significant strategic problem. The loss of Laukkai and the broader gains made by the Three Brotherhood Alliance underscore the junta's vulnerability. It is no longer just a matter of quelling dissent but a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a nuanced and inclusive approach. The junta's refusal to engage in dialogue with ethnic minorities and address their legitimate grievances has created a power vacuum that the rebels are keen to fill. The military's response to this setback will be closely watched. Will it intensify its campaign, further alienating local communities, or will it reconsider its approach and seek a negotiated settlement? The junta's stubbornness could exacerbate the crisis, leading to more bloodshed and instability. Alternatively, a shift toward a more inclusive and conciliatory stance could pave the way for a sustainable solution to the long-standing ethnic conflicts that have plagued Myanmar for decades. The surrender of the Myanmar military's Regional Operations Command in Laukkai, coupled with the Three Brotherhood Alliance's rapid gains across Shan, represents a major defeat for the junta in the northern region. The implications of this setback extend beyond the military sphere, affecting the junta's legitimacy, regional stability and international relations. The conflict in northern Myanmar demands a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses the root causes of ethnic tensions and promotes a sustainable path to peace. The ball is now in Hlaing's court and the decisions he makes in the coming days and weeks will shape the trajectory of Myanmar's future.

— Sourced by Arab News

## Briefs

## PTI regains 'bat' symbol

FROM PAGE 01  
"My client wanted to participate in the elections but was not given the opportunity," the counsel said adding that his client requested that the polls be declared "null and void". Justice Anwar remarked: "You did not say that the intra-party elections should be held again. If the Election Commission annulled the intra-party elections, you should have called for re-elections." The judge further told the lawyer that his client should have objected to withdrawal of the party symbol if he belonged to the party, but he didn't do so. The lawyer also objected to the PHC hearing the case citing its provincial jurisdiction as a limitation, as PTI's intra-party elections were conducted for the whole country and not just Peshawar.

## 2 soldiers martyred...

FROM PAGE 01  
Weapons, ammunition and explosives were also recovered from them. However, during intense exchange of fire, two brave soldiers; Sepoy Muhammad Afzal (age 29 years; resident of district Bimber, Azad Kashmir) and Sepoy Ibrar Hussain (age 27 years; resident of district Mansehra), having fought gallantly, embraced Shahadat. Sanitization operation is being carried out to eliminate any terrorists found in the area as the Security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe-out the menace of terrorism from the country and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve.

## Israeli genocidal...

FROM PAGE 01  
Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza last night and on Wednesday morning, killing and injuring a number of citizens. According to local sources in southern Gaza, the Israeli army carried out an artillery attack on farmers in the east of Rafah, killing three of them, while bodies of four martyrs, who were shot dead by Israeli snipers on Tuesday, were evacuated today from an area in central Khan Yunis. One civilian was also martyred and another one was injured when the Israeli army bombed a neighborhood near Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City in the morning.

## PUIC meeting...

FROM PAGE 01  
"What is coming to pass in the Gaza Strip today is a cause of deep concern and shame for humanity. It is a double injustice to a nation that has been deprived of any human rights and has been under aggression and occupation for more than seven decades," Qalibaf said. "No awakened conscience can be dismissive of the heinous and widespread bloody crimes being committed by the Israeli Zionist regime's war machine in Gaza and its horrendous effects on the peace and security of the region and the world." Qalibaf also touched on Washington's and its Western allies' unflinching support to the Israeli regime over the past decades, saying, "Israel, has not only committed the most heinous crimes against the oppressed people of Palestine."

## 3 policemen among...

FROM PAGE 01  
The entire area and launched a search operation to hunt down the terrorists. Terrorists are believed to be holed up in the nearby mountainous area. When contacted, police sources said the terrorists will be arrested in the ongoing search operation. Meanwhile, Former President of Pakistan and President Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians, Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari have strongly condemned the terror attack on police check post and toll plaza in Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Three policemen and an employee of the toll plaza were martyred in the attack.



LAHORE: The father of a sick girl is offering prayers on the occasion of Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi's visit to the Children's Hospital. – DNA

# PCB and Cricket Australia set BBL-PSL schedule

Zaka Ashraf and PSL Commissioner Naila Bhatti, the board also confirmed that PSL's media rights have been sold for the next two seasons

## OUR CORRESPONDENTS

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and Cricket Australia have reached an agreement with regards to scheduling of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) and the Big Bash League (BBL). According to PCB Chief Operating Officer (COO) Salman Naseer, there won't be any clashes between PSL and BBL in the future. The two boards will also look to ensure that they can provide a better pool of players for both leagues going forward. "We are thankful to Cricket Australia since we had good interaction with them over the past few months," said Naseer during a press conference in Lahore on Wednesday. "Due to the increasing number of leagues all over the world, there are a lot of clashes in terms of scheduling. Bearing this in mind, we have reached a principle understanding with



Cricket Australia about ensuring that there won't be any clashes as far as BBL and PSL is concerned in the future. "We also talked about player availability keeping in mind that the players have a lot of options, in terms of leagues, and we need to be careful about their workload

management. In the future, both the boards will assist each other with regards to a good pool of players for both PSL and BBL while also ensuring better handling of No Objection Certificates. Meanwhile, as part of the agreement between the two boards, Pakistan women's, Shaheens,

and U19 will tour Australia more frequently in order to get acclimatised with the conditions. During the press conference, which was also attended by PCB Management Committee Chairman Zaka Ashraf and PSL Commissioner Naila Bhatti, the board also confirmed that PSL's media

rights have been sold for the next two seasons. According to local media, the PSL television rights for Pakistan territory have been sold for Rs.6.30 billion in an auction. Meanwhile, the digital rights were sold for Rs1.90 billion. The live-streaming and broadcast rights saw an increase of 113 and 45 per cent for the 2024 and 2025 editions, respectively. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) management committee chairman Zaka Ashraf also said that the fringe players had gained "good experience" against Australia. He made it clear that the PCB had held talks with Cricket Australia on various matters. "The PCB and Cricket Australia will move forward together," Ashraf said. Expressing his thoughts on the occasion, PCB COO Salman Naseer said: "Due to the surge in franchise cricket, there exists a clash in the cricket calendar." "The PCB and Cricket Australia will extend cooperation in terms of organising the fixture schedule," he said.

## Fakhar ready to bat at any positions against NZ

AUCKLAND: Top-order batter Fakhar Zaman has stated that he is ready to bat in the lower order for Pakistan during the T20I series against New Zealand, commencing on 12 January in Auckland. While talking to the media here on Wednesday, Fakhar Zaman opened up about the reports of him dropping down the batting order from his usual number three spot as Saim Ayub is expected to open the innings with Mohammad Rizwan. "I don't view it [batting lower

down the order] as a sacrifice. If the team management doesn't see me fitting into the opening position, it suggests they believe I can contribute to winning matches batting lower in the order," said Zaman. The 33-year-old batter also expressed his optimism about the competition for spots in the team. "Given the competition for spots in the national team, I consider myself fortunate to secure a place in the playing XI, especially with the impressive

performances from players like Babar, Rizwan, and Saim." He further mentioned that he would be happy to play at any number, be it number six or seven to help his side. "If Babar or Rizwan come at one down, then I can come at two down. I will be happy to play at number six or seven even," he concluded. Pakistan's T20I squad partook in the training session today to boost their preparations ahead of the first T20I against New Zealand. The players carried out a robust three-hour training session, harnessing their batting, bowling and feeling skills by partaking in different drills to prepare for the upcoming five-match T20I series against New Zealand. – Agencies

## Sandeep gets eight year of jail for rape

KATHMANDU: Nepal's cricketer Sandeep Lamichhane received an eight-year jail sentence from a Kathmandu court for rape on Wednesday, as reported by the Kathmandu District Court found the Nepal legspinner guilty of raping an 18-year-old woman, and on January 10, the sentence was officially declared. The court imposed a fine of Rs300,000 (approximately US\$260) and mandated Lamichhane to pay Rs200,000 (approximately US\$1,506) in compensation to the victim. In early September of 2023, Lamichhane, who was then the captain of Nepal, faced suspension from the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) following an arrest warrant issued in Kathmandu related to the case. This development came after a complaint had been lodged against Lamichhane at a Kathmandu police station.

While participating in CPL 2022 with Jamaica Tallawahs in the West Indies, Lamichhane was obliged to leave the tournament immediately upon the announcement of his suspension. Upon his return to Kathmandu in early October, he was taken into custody. Prior to his arrest, Lamichhane had expressed on Facebook his commitment to "fully cooperate in all stages of the investigation and will fight a legal battle to prove my innocence," referring to the allegations as a "conspiracy and wrongful allegation." In February of the current year, Lamichhane reappeared on the Nepal side amidst protests from rights groups for a Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series at home against Namibia and Scotland. However, during the games, opposing players refrained from shaking hands with him. Although he was not initially chosen for Nepal's squad in the Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series in Dubai in early 2023, he later joined the team as an injury replacement. The 23-year-old continued to represent Nepal in subsequent events, including the ODI World Cup qualifier in Zimbabwe in June-July and the ODI Asia Cup in August-September of the previous year. Lamichhane made history as Nepal's inaugural cricketer to compete in the Indian Premier League (IPL) when he debuted for the Delhi Capitals in 2018. The leg-spinner was highly sought after in prominent T20 leagues worldwide, including Australia's Big Bash League (BBL), the Pakistan Super League (PSL), and the CPL. He holds the distinction of being the world's second-fastest bowler to claim 50 ODI wickets and the third-fastest to achieve 50 T20I wickets. – Agencies



KARACHI: President Karachi Chamber Commerce & Industry presenting crest to Ambassador of Republic of Croatia Dr Drago Stambuk during his visit to KCCI. Honorary Consul General of Croatia in Karachi Mirza Imran Baig, Senior V. President Altaf A. Ghaffar, Vice President Tanveer Ahmed Barry. – DNA

## Rs100m grant approved for international sports events

The events include hockey team's participation in the Olympic Qualifying round and hosting India in the Davis Cup

## SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD: A special supplementary grant of Rs100 million for Pakistan's participation in forthcoming international sports events was approved by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet. The events include hockey team's participation in the Olympic Qualifying round and hosting India in the Davis Cup Group I tie here at the Sports Complex. The grant was awarded following a request received from the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) highlighting urgency of the matter. Pakistan hockey team is to embark on a trip to Mus-

cat (Oman) in less than a week's time to participate in the Olympic Qualifying round scheduled to start from January 15. The five-a-side Hockey World Cup has also been planned later this month while India are scheduled to visit Pakistan later this month to play the important Davis Cup Group I tie at the Pakistan Sports Complex. The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) is dependent on governmental grants and the government has always provided technical and financial support. The Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) vide letter dated January 2, 2024 has conveyed that following events are scheduled in this month which requires a grant of

Rs 37.50 million for participation in FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier to be held at Oman from 15th to 21st January 2024. Another Rs25 million for Men's FIH

Hockey 5S World Cup to be held at Oman from 28th to 31st January 2024. A sizable grant for Pakistan team's forthcoming Davis Cup tie against India has



also been approved. Some other federations have also requested to issue grants for their upcoming international tours which was accepted with some cuts. Moreover, it has also been planned to conduct mind games for children of public schools under the Prime Minister's initiative. "In order to ensure participation of Pakistan hockey team and to sponsor other events for the promotion of sports besides conducting mind games under Prime Minister's initiative, the concerned recommended to the prime minister vide Note for the Secretary to the Prime Minister dated January 4, 2024 for provision of ad-

ditional funds amounting to Rs100 million through supplementary grant in favor of Ministry for IPC," the summary approved by the ECC said. "Accordingly, the Prime Minister's office has conveyed that the prime minister is pleased to desire that the matter shall be placed before the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Federal Cabinet. "Since, the matter is of extreme emergency, it is requested that the requirement of prior consultation with the Finance Division may be allowed to be done during the ECC, keeping in view the approval/orders of the prime minister to place the matter before ECC."

## PM for establishing global...

FROM PAGE 01  
approach, recognized the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. "Our commitment should extend to establishing global frameworks that facilitate information sharing, joint research, and collaborative strategies for an effective response during emergencies." He stressed the need for a strong, visible, active surveillance and tiered public health laboratory system that was integral to early detection, response, and mitigation. He also called for collaboratively working towards establishing international standards for food safety, harmonizing regulations to ensure the highest level of protection for populations worldwide.

## Cabinet approves...

FROM PAGE 01  
also approved regularisation of 227 daily-wage teachers as proposed by the Federal Directorate of Education and recommended by the Federal Public Service Commission in line with the Islamabad High Court's decision of 2018. For the construction of the Supreme Court Karachi Registry building, the cabinet on the recommendation of Ministry of Law and Justice as endorsed by the Supreme Court Building Committee, approved the transfer of federal courts and tribunals across the city. It approved the summary regarding the operationalization of the Livestock and Dairy Development Board so as to fulfill the legal requirements for the appointment of chief executive, in line with the decisions of the Islamabad and Balochistan high courts.

## SC upholds dictator...

FROM PAGE 01  
Following this, the LHC verdict was challenged by the Pakistan Bar Council and several senior lawyers including Taufiq Asif. The court today announced the reserved verdict on the appeal filed by the former ruler against the death sentence which was handed to him and declared it ineffective for non-compliance. "Pervez Musharraf's heirs did not follow the case even on multiple notices," the SC remarked while rejecting the former president's appeal. Musharraf's counsel, Salman Safdar, said that he tried contacting Musharraf's family after the court decided to hear the appeal but the family never responded to him.

## SC Justice Mazhar...

FROM PAGE 01  
In the circumstances which are a matter of public knowledge and to some extent public record, it is no longer possible for me to continue to serve as a Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Considerations of due process also compel so," the judge said in a resignation letter sent to President Arif Alvi. "I, therefore, effective today resign as a Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan," the letter added. The development came a day after the Supreme Court declined to halt the proceedings being conducted by the SJC against Justice Naqvi with the ruling that without hearing the case on merits, stay cannot be granted.

## IMF Board takes up...

FROM PAGE 01  
The improvement in the remittances is expected to fuel the ongoing gradual rally in the rupee against the US dollar and strengthen the market as the current account is expected to be in surplus for the second consecutive month of December 2023. SBP reported that remittances rose 13% compared to \$2.10 billion when compared to December 2022. Inflows also showed an improvement of 5.5% compared to \$2.26 billion in November 2023. Remittances, however, have cumulatively slowed down by 7% in the first half (Jul-Dec) of the current fiscal year 2023-24 to \$13.45 billion compared to \$14.42 billion in the same period of the last fiscal year, according to the central bank.

## Briefs

## Over 6,618 migrants perish seeking Spain in 2023

OVIEDO : 2023 was the deadliest year on record for those trying to irregularly migrate to Spain, according to a report published Tuesday by Walking Borders, with 6,618 people losing their lives. The vast majority of the fatalities, 6,007, occurred on attempts to cross the vast ocean separating northwestern Africa from the Canary Islands, making the Canary Islands the most lethal migration route in the world, according to Walking Borders. The Interior Ministry said 39,910 people completed the journey last year, a spike of 154% compared to 2022. Walking Borders said for many of the deaths, search and rescue operations were not mobilized or were delayed for so long that lives were threatened. "The capacity to save lives exists. If we used the same measures that we do to track cruise ships, fishing vessels or other ships with Europeans on board, this massacre would be reduced considerably," the head of Walking Borders, Helena Maleno, said while presenting the report. According to the organization's estimates, 84 boats trying to reach Spain disappeared with everyone on board.—APP

## Cubans fear 500% fuel price surge, worsening inflation

HAVANA : Already under the yoke of inflation and product scarcity, many Cubans don't know how they will cope with a new 500-percent surge in the fuel price. The communist island's cash-strapped government announced the five-fold increase Monday with effect from February 1, as part of a series of measures seeking to cut its budget deficit. The cost of a liter of regular gasoline will rise from 25 pesos (20 US cents) to 132 pesos, while the price of premium gasoline will jump from 30 to 156 pesos, it said. To buy ten liters of fuel for his motorbike - enough for a week - Domingo Wong told AFP he would now have to fork over half his monthly salary of about \$21. "Ten liters is what I use in a week without doing anything special, just the daily: going to work, bringing my daughter to school, visiting my sister," the 57-year-old building guard said as he waited patiently in line to fill up his bike. The nation of 11 million people is experiencing its worst economic crisis since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the 1990s due to consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, the tightening of US sanctions in recent years, and structural weaknesses in the economy. According to official estimates, the Cuban economy shrank by two percent in 2023, while inflation reached 30 percent in 2023. Independent experts say this is likely an under-estimation.—APP

## Austin kept cancer diagnosis from the White House

WASHINGTON : President Joe Biden was only told that US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin was being treated for cancer, the White House has said. Mr Austin, 70, was admitted to hospital on 1 January and then to the intensive care unit for complications following surgery in December. He has faced criticism for not telling senior officials about it for days. He has since apologised for not "ensuring the public was appropriately informed". The lag in notifying the White House raised potential national security concerns and issues of transparency within the Biden administration. The defence secretary sits just below the president in the chain of command for the US military, and is one of the most important members of the president's Cabinet. The Pentagon confirmed Mr Austin remained hospitalised on Tuesday.—APP

## Hearing begins from today

## Which countries back SA in genocide case at ICJ?

Here are countries which welcomed the ICJ case that says Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza

## NEWS DESK

NEW YORK: The International Court of Justice (ICJ) based in The Hague will hold its first hearing in South Africa's genocide case against Israel on Thursday, with several countries welcoming the move amid a global chorus for a ceasefire in Gaza. South Africa filed the lawsuit end of December, accusing Israel of genocide in its war on Gaza and seeking a halt to the brutal military assault that has killed more than 23,000 Palestinians, nearly 10,000 of them children. The 84-page filing by South Africa says Israel violated the 1948 Genocide Convention, drawn up in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust. Both Israel and South Africa are signatories to the United Nations Genocide Convention, which

gives the ICJ - the highest UN legal body - jurisdiction to rule on disputes over the treaty. All states that signed the convention are obliged to not commit genocide and also to prevent and punish it. The treaty defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group". Here's what we know about the countries backing South Africa in its case against Israel, and the countries that oppose the case at the world court. Which countries have welcomed South Africa's ICJ case against Israel? The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC): The 57-member bloc, which includes Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and Morocco, voiced their support for the case on December 30. Malaysia: In a statement released on January 2, the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign

Affairs welcomed the South African application. It reiterated a call for an independent Palestinian state "based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital". Turkey: Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Oncu Keceli posted on X on January 3 welcoming South Africa's move. Jordan: Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said on January 4 that Amman would back South Africa. Bolivia: On Sunday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia dubbed South Africa's move as historic, becoming the first Latin American country to back the ICJ case against Israel. The Maldives, Namibia and Pakistan: The three countries expressed support for the genocide case filed by South Africa during a UN General Assembly session on Tuesday. Besides countries, many advocacy groups and civil

society groups worldwide have also joined South Africa's call. These include Terreiro Pindorama in Brazil, Asociacion Nacional de Amistad Italia-Cuba in Italy, and Collectif Judeo Arabe et Citoyen pour la Palestine in France, reported independent outlet Common Dreams. Which countries filed the ICC request earlier? Bolivia also pointed out it had earlier filed a request to International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Khan alongside South Africa, Bangladesh, Comoros, and Djibouti to investigate the situation in Palestine. Khan said he received the request on November 30. The ICC and the ICJ are sometimes conflated with one another. Both the courts are located in The Hague, Netherlands. While the purpose of the ICJ is to resolve conflicts between

states, the ICC prosecutes individuals for committing crimes, according to the University of Melbourne's Pursuit platform. While states cannot be sued at the ICC, the prosecutor can open an investigation where crimes, including genocide, were likely committed. Who is not backing South Africa's ICJ case? The United States has voiced its opposition to the genocide case. National security spokesperson John Kirby called South Africa's submission "meritless, counterproductive, and completely without any basis" during a White House press briefing on January 3. Israeli President Isaac Herzog told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday that "there is nothing more atrocious and preposterous" than the lawsuit. Herzog also thanked Blinken for Washington's support of Israel.

## Fair media is indispensable for prosperous

ANKARA : Türkiye's Communications Director Fahrettin Altun has commemorated January 10 Working Journalists Day, stressing that fair media culture is an indispensable element of a more prosperous and peaceful world. In a statement released by the Directorate of Communications on Wednesday, Altun stressed that "one of the most important problems of today's world is the 'Crisis of Truth,'" with incessant disinformation campaigns becoming a major challenge around the globe. With communication opportunities improving day by day and access to information becoming easier, a crucial need has emerged to access accurate information in its purest and simplest form, he said. "All journalists who work in the light of the truth and in line with the principles of professional ethics should be recognised as members of a highly respected profession," Altun said. "We consider the maintenance of a fair media culture in our country and the international arena as one of the indispensable elements of a more prosperous and peaceful world." The communications director sent his prayers to the journalists who lost their lives in the line of duty, especially in Gaza.—APP

## 2 dead after migrant boat sinks off Greek island

ATHENS: At least two people died when a boat carrying migrants capsized Wednesday off the Greek island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea, port police said, while up to 16 people were missing. An inflatable dinghy from the nearby Turkish coast ran aground on the rocky shores of Agios Georgios, east of Lesbos, around 3:00 am local time (01:00 GMT), pushed by strong winds. According to those rescued, 36 people were on board the boat. Authorities said they had found 18 migrants who had managed to get off the dinghy, plus two bodies in the sea near the coast, according to an official from the coast guard's office. Authorities say the other 16 people dispersed after the boat ran aground and were still missing. Coast guard patrol boats were not able Wednesday to carry out searches at sea due to a sailing ban because of bad weather. The island of Lesbos is one of the gateways for migrants seeking to enter the European Union, many making perilous journeys by sea.—Agencies

## Iran develops new drone for Russian

LONDON: Iran has developed a new drone that could be used by Russia to strike Western air defense systems in Ukraine, News media reported on Wednesday. A security source told Sky that the Shahed-107 drone, part of Iran's Shahed family of unmanned aerial vehicles, could operate as both an explosive and reconnaissance aircraft. Several units are believed to have been offered to Russia as part of an initial \$2 million deal. Tehran is known to have supplied Moscow with significant quantities of Shahed-136 kamikaze drones, which can fly long distances and explode on impact, threatening Ukrainian infrastructure and air defenses. The source said Iran's development of the Shahed-107 shows "the significant force design work Iran is engaged in to support Russia's interests regarding Ukraine." With a range of up to 1,500 km, the Shahed-107 can be launched from a vehicle and poses a major threat to Ukraine's air defenses, which rely heavily on systems provided by the US and other Western countries. The latest Shahed model is expected to be fitted with a video transmitter, providing Russian forces with the ability to select targets on the front in eastern Ukraine. The source told Sky that the drone was tested in a trial by Russian and Iranian security forces at a base in central Iran. The development of the new Shahed model is the latest evidence of growing armaments transfers between the two countries.—APP

## Kim reiterates to 'annihilate' South, calling it 'principal enemy'

Kim Jong-un stresses Pyongyang would not take unilateral action but has 'no intention of avoiding a war as well'

## WEB DESK

PYONGYANG : North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un has reiterated that Pyongyang will "annihilate" South Korea, dubbing it as its "principal enemy." "If the ROK dares attempt to use armed forces against its sovereignty and security and such opportunity comes, we will have no hesitation in annihilating the ROK by mobilizing all means and forces in our hands," Kim said. ROK stands for the Republic of South Korea, the official name of South Korea, while DPRK, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the official name of North Korea. The Korean Peninsula was divided during a war in the 1950s. Kim's statement came during an inspection of North Korea's major munitions factories in the past two days, Pyongyang-based KCNA reported. This

is the second time in a month Kim warned to "annihilate" South Korea. On New Year's eve, he ordered North Korea's top commanding officers to "thoroughly annihilate" South Korea and the US if they initiated a military confrontation. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have long persisted as the US, South Korea and Japan held, both separately and jointly, military drills while Pyongyang fired missiles and also launched a military satellite. Early this month, Seoul claimed North fired artillery shells in waters off its western coast but North denied and said it was a "deceptive operation" to assess South's response capacity. Kim defined South Korea as a "state most hostile toward" North Korea which has "pursued a history of vicious confrontation with bloodshot eyes to overthrow our regime and social system for nearly 80 years." Calling for bolstering the military ca-

pabilities for "self-defense and the nuclear war deterrent first of all," Kim said: "We would by no means unilaterally bring a great event by the overwhelming strength in the Korean Peninsula but we have no intention of avoiding a war as well." Earlier on, Kim visits arms factories amid criticism over trade with Russia North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visited arms factories this week, state media outlet Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported on Wednesday (Jan 10) as the United States and its partners condemned the country's arms transfers with Russia. Kim also highlighted recent "shortcomings" in the organisation of munitions production and called for readjustment while emphasising the "strategic importance of the production of major weapons", state media said. KCNA photos of Kim's visit to a munitions factory showed him inspecting mobile

short-range missile launch vehicles. His visit comes as nearly 50 countries condemned Russia's procurement and use of North Korean ballistic missiles against Ukraine. "Russia's use of DPRK ballistic missiles in Ukraine also provides valuable technical and military insights to the DPRK," the joint statement said on Tuesday, using the initials of North Korea's official name. White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan in a call with his South Korean counterpart, Chang Ho-jin, on Tuesday "condemned in the strongest possible terms" North Korea's transfer of the missiles to Russia, the White House said. US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on Tuesday that after the initially reported uses of North Korean ballistic missiles on Dec 30 and Jan 2, Russia had fired more such weapons at Ukraine, including one that landed in Kharkiv.

## Gunmen burst into Ecuador TV studio live on air

QUITO : Armed men wearing balaclavas burst into the studio of a public television station on Tuesday in Ecuador's drug violence-torn port city of Guayaquil, taking hostage several journalists and staff members, live footage showed. "Don't shoot, please don't shoot," one woman shouted as gunshots rang out while the attackers, carrying rifles and grenades, forced terrified crew of the TC broadcaster onto the ground. "National Police units in Quito and Guayaquil have been alerted about this criminal act and are already on the scene," police said in a brief statement to journalists. The live broadcast continued uninterrupted, although lights went off on set. About 30 minutes after the gunmen appeared, police could be seen entering. "Police, police," called out one man in uniform. "We have a wounded colleague," a man replied. "Please, they came in to kill us. God don't let this happen. The criminals are on air," one of the journalists told AFP in a WhatsApp message. The incident came as Ecuador's new president, 36-year-old Daniel Noboa, grappled with a security nightmare after the escape from prison of one of the country's most high profile gangsters, Jose Adolfo Macias, known as "Fito." Noboa declared a 60-day country-wide state of emergency Monday, including in Ecuador's notoriously violent prisons, and imposed a nighttime curfew. In response, gangsters took several police officers hostage, and released a chilling video in which one of them was forced to read out a message addressed to Noboa. "You declared war, you will get war," the clearly terrified officer reads. "You declared a state of emergency. We declare police, civilians and soldiers to be the spoils of war." Noboa was elected in October on a pledge to fight rampant drug-related crime and violence in the South American country - once considered a bastion of peace, but now a key stop on the US- and Europe-bound cocaine trade.—APP

## Moon mission fails and NASA program delayed

WASHINGTON : A private US lunar lander mission is doomed to fail, and NASA pushes back plans to return astronauts to the Moon. The twin developments Tuesday represent blows to America's ambitions to stimulate a commercial space economy, develop a lasting presence on Earth's nearest neighbor, and use it as a jump off point for Mars. China meanwhile is looming in the rear view mirror, targeting 2030 for a crewed landing. Astrobotic's Peregrine Lunar Lander blasted off Monday from Florida's Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, then successfully separated from its rocket. Just hours later, though, Astrobotic reported an inability to orient Peregrine's solar panel towards the Sun and keep its battery topped up. A propulsion system glitch was found to be causing a critical loss of fuel and damaging the spacecraft's exterior. The company said Monday the mission had "no chance of soft landing" - dashing hopes for the first ever successful landing by a non-government mission, and America's first soft touchdown on the Moon since Apollo 17 in 1972. NASA has paid Astrobotic more than \$100 million to ship scientific hardware to the Moon to answer questions about surface composition and radiation, as the US space agency prepares to send astronauts back for long term missions. The failure doesn't mean the strategy of ramping up commercial partnerships is innately flawed, Michael Lembeck, a former NASA official turned associate professor in aerospace engineering at the University of Illinois told AFP.



ISLAMABAD: Janine Rohwer, Political Counselor at the German Embassy in a meeting with Leader of the Opposition in Senate, Senator Dr. Shahzad Waseem.—DNA

## Zelensky in Baltic tour, seeks security and EU support

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are our reliable friends and principled partners. Today, I arrived in Vilnius before going to Tallinn and Riga: Zelenskyy

## FOREIGN DESK

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has arrived in the Lithuanian capital for an unannounced visit to the Baltic states, staunch allies of the war-torn country. The three Baltic states - all former Soviet republics which are now EU and NATO members - are among Ukraine's staunchest allies. "Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are our reliable friends and principled partners. Today, I arrived in Vilnius before going to Tallinn and Riga," Zelenskyy said on social media platform X. "Security, EU and NATO integration, cooperation on electronic warfare and drones, and further coordination of European support are all on the agenda," he said. The Baltic tour marks Zelenskyy's first offi-

cial trip abroad this year. The focus of the Baltic trip, Zelenskyy said on his official Telegram channel, will be security concerns, Ukraine's hopes to join the European Union and NATO, and building partnerships in drone production and electronic warfare capacities. The small countries on the Baltic Sea are among Ukraine's staunchest political, financial and military supporters. They have pushed Kyiv's other Western allies to provide increasingly sophisticated weapons since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Russia's belligerence toward its neighbor Ukraine has some in the Baltics worried that they could be Moscow's next target. The three countries were seized and annexed by Josef Stalin during World War II before gaining independ-



ence again with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. They joined NATO in 2004, placing themselves under the military protection of the U.S. and its Western allies. Zelenskyy, in his Telegram message, expressed gratitude for their "uncompromising" support of Ukraine over the past 10 years, referring to 2014 when Russia's aggression

started the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimea peninsula. Russia's recent escalation of missile and drone attacks is stretching Ukraine's air defense resources, a Ukrainian air force official said Tuesday, leaving the country vulnerable unless it can secure further weapons supplies. Zelenskyy's energetic international diplomacy during the war has been essential to maintain pressure on friendly countries to keep supplying Kyiv with billions of dollars in weaponry, from German Leopard tanks to U.S. Patriot missile systems and Storm Shadow cruise missiles from the U.K. However, material support has recently tailed off. A plan by the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden to send to Kyiv billions of dollars in further aid is stuck in Congress, and Europe's pledge in March to

provide 1 million artillery shells within 12 months has come up short, with only about 300,000 delivered so far. Russia gears up for Drel glide bomb production amid Ukraine war Russia plans to start serial production of its new glide Drel bomb this year, the state TASS news agency has cited a representative of the Rosstec state defence conglomerate as saying in remarks published. The bombs, some of Russia's newest weapons, are capable of flying independently using a gliding flight path onto a target at a greater distance and opening above it at "the right moment," TASS reported. "To date, the product has passed all types of tests," TASS cited an unnamed representative at Rosstec as saying. "The production of the first batch of the Drel aerial bomb is planned for 2024."

## Briefs

### Tussle in PPP erupts over ticket distribution

DNA

KARACHI: The tussle within the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) erupted over the ticket distribution for the forthcoming general elections. The PPP's former provincial minister, Mumtaz Jakhri, had decided on Wednesday to lock horns with the PPP candidate in the upcoming elections. Expressing his thoughts, Jakhri said, "I have not parted ways with the PPP, but the party itself has separated me. The PPP had the policy of awarding tickets to the candidates who clinched victory in the 2018 general elections." "What was my mistake that the ticket was not awarded to me? Now I will contest the elections from PS-3 as an independent candidate," a tussle in PPP erupts over ticket distribution. Earlier, it was reported that the PPP Central Executive Committee (CEC) endorsed former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as the party's official candidate for the position of Prime Minister. The decision was met with unanimous approval during the hybrid meeting held at Bilawal House, where key party members gathered to deliberate on key matters. Chaired jointly by Asif Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto, the meeting addressed pivotal issues such as the upcoming general elections, the party's election campaign, and the formulation of the party manifesto.

### Blinken to make surprise visit to Bahrain

TEL AVIV: US top diplomat Antony Blinken will make a surprise visit to Bahrain Wednesday, a State Department official said, the latest leg of a crisis tour of the Middle East. After meeting Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, Blinken will fly to Bahrain for talks with King Hamad on preventing a regional escalation of the Israel-Palestine war in Gaza. The Gulf kingdom is a key partner of Washington and hosts the US Navy's Fifth Fleet. Bahrain last month joined a 10-country naval task force announced by the United States to protect the vital Red Sea shipping route. Blinken is on his fourth Middle East tour since war broke out with the October 7 attacks on Israel. The US top diplomat said Tuesday that the war had exacted "far too high" a toll among civilians in Gaza, particularly children, and called for more food and medical aid to be delivered to the territory. Israel's relentless offensive has killed 23,200 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. - APP

# Abbas reiterates Gaza strip is integral part of Palestine

## President Abbas stressed the need to immediately stop the war of extermination against the Palestinian people in Gaza and West Bank

NEWS DESK

RAMALLAH: The President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas received US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken at the presidential headquarters in the city of Ramallah. The President discussed with the US Secretary of State the latest developments in the Palestinian territories, the efforts made to stop the Israeli aggression against Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the importance of accelerating the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, and enabling shelter centers and hospitals to operate as they provide what is necessary to alleviate the suffering of citizens. President Abbas warned of the danger of the measures taken by the Israeli occupation authorities aimed at displacing Palestinian people from the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, including Jerusalem, which were revealed by statements issued by Israeli ministers and officials, which call for the expulsion of the Palestinian people from their land, stressing the complete rejection of the displacement of any Palestini-



an citizen, whether in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, adding that "we will not allow it to happen." The President reiterated that the Gaza Strip is an integral part of the Palestinian state, noting that it is not possible to accept or deal with the plans of the occupation authorities to separate it, or cut off any part of it, stressing the need to release Palestinian clearance funds immediately, because their withholding violates agreements and international law. The President stressed that the Gaza Strip has priority, and Palestinian people, who fall under the responsibility of the State of Palestine and its administration, will not be abandoned. President Abbas stressed the need to immediately stop the war of extermination against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, so that the political solution based on international legitimacy can be implemented, starting with the State of Palestine gaining full membership in the United Nations by a decision of the Security Council, and convening an international peace conference to end the Israeli occupation of the land of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, which achieves peace and security for all.

### Parvez, Moonis Elahi out of election race

DNA

LAHORE: The appeal challenging the rejection of nomination papers for former Punjab chief minister and PTI leader Chaudhry Parvez Elahi, his wife Qaisara Elahi, and his son Moonis Elahi was turned down. The decision, pronounced by Justice Ahmad Nadeem Arshad, dismissed Elahi's appeal filed for various constituencies, including NA-64 Gujarat, PP-32, PP-34 and NA-59 Tala Gang. Moonis Elahi's appeal against rejected papers in NA-64 Gujarat, PP-32, PP-34 and NA-69 Mandi Bahaudin constituencies were also dismissed. Additionally, Elahi's wife Qaisara Elahi's appeal for acceptance in all constituencies was rejected. Yesterday, the Lahore High Court's Appellate Tribunal reserved its judgment on the matter.

### Punjab suspends classes for one week

DNA

LAHORE: Caretaker Punjab Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Wednesday announced a one-week suspension of classes for students in grade one and below. This decision comes as the province grapples with cold wave. Naqvi made this declaration during an urgent session held at Lahore's Children's Hospital, where he addressed the unfortunate demise of 36 children due to pneumonia. Consequently, exams for grades 1-10 have been postponed. Highlighting the alarming statistic that eight out of 10 children are currently battling pneumonia, Naqvi directed schools to cease morning assemblies. Stressing the importance of keeping children with pneumonia at home, he urged vaccination for both children and the elderly to curb the spread. This move follows the reopening of schools post winter vacations, initiated on December 18, 2023. In efforts to adapt to the inclement weather, the provincial government previously adjusted school hours from January 10 to January 22, starting at 9:30am.

## Pak-Qatar joint aerial exercise 'ZILZAL-II' kicks off in Qatar

DNA

DOHA: Pakistan Air Force and Qatar Emiri Air Force are all geared up to participate in joint aerial Exercise Zilzal-II, commencing in Qatar. First held in the year 2020, Zilzal-II air exercise is the 2nd in the series of these exercises, hosted by State of Qatar. The exercise is one of the most complex joint air force exercises, which aims at promoting interoperability between the two allied nations while providing an opportunity for shared learning. The exercise will mimic a near realistic aerial warfare scenario coupled with real-time opportunity for the participating Air Forces to test their operational readiness. Exercise Zilzal-II, aimed at improving joint

planning mechanism, is considered as a historical benchmark to further solidify the existing defence partnership between the two brotherly countries. During the exercise, PAF's newly inducted state-of-the-art J-10C fighter aircraft will flex its muscles against Eurofighter jets of Qatar Emiri Air Force in their first ever face-off in an aerial exercise. The successful induction and operationalization of the J-10C fighter jets in PAF's fighter fleet and their participation in yet another international exercise in an unprecedented short span of time is a remarkable achievement. The feat has been achieved in lines with modernization plan of Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force, premised on smart inductions and focused indigenization. The

participation of these fighter jets in the aerial exercise marks a significant milestone in PAF's journey towards a technologically advanced and formidable air force. The rapid acquisition and operationalization of these advanced fighter aircraft showcases PAF's dedication to maintaining a cutting-edge force, capable of meeting evolving challenges and defending Pakistan's airspace with utmost proficiency. Exercise Zilzal-II serves as a platform to foster greater understanding, cooperation and friendship between Pakistan Air Force and Qatar Emiri Air Force, contributing to regional stability and security. Pakistan Air Force remains committed to its mission of safeguarding the skies, strengthening international alliances and promoting peace through mutual cooperation.

## China tells US it will 'never compromise' on Taiwan

FOREIGN DESK

BEIJING: China vowed on Wednesday it will "never compromise" on Taiwan and told the United States to stop providing military aid, days ahead of a crucial election on the self-ruled island. China claims Taiwan, which holds elections on Saturday, as part of its territory and has vowed to seize it one day. The election is being closely watched - including by policymakers in Beijing and Washington - as its outcome will impact the future of Taiwan's relations with an increasingly assertive China. In their first defence talks of the year, held at the Pentagon on Monday and Tuesday, Chinese officials demanded that Washington "stop arming Taiwan, and oppose Taiwan's 'independence'", according to a Chinese defence ministry readout. The officials said Beijing would "never compromise or back down" on the territory's status, the readout said on Wednesday. According to the Pentagon's readout on Tuesday, the United States reaffirmed its calls for "peace and stability" across the Taiwan Strait that separates Taiwan from China. Michael Chase, the Pentagon's deputy assistant secretary for China, Taiwan and Mongolia, restated the United States' commitment to its "One China" policy, which emphasises it does not support Taiwanese independence. Washington has provided Taiwan with military aid under an assistance programme aimed at foreign governments, prompting frequent criticism from Beijing. US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping agreed in November to restart military talks between the two countries, after being put on hold for more than a year. Relations between Beijing and Washington had nosedived in recent years on flashpoint issues from technology and trade to human rights, but the two presidents described their November meeting as a success.

## Enforced disappearances Intelligence officials should be prosecuted

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani of Islamabad High Court (IHC) has observed that enforced disappearances take place because state institutions do not believe in the rule of law and called for prosecuting intelligence agencies' officials. "Is it difficult that police will write a supplementary [statement in FIR] and make the intelligence officers accused? Time will come when intelligence officers will be prosecuted," the IHC judge remarked during a hearing of a petition filed by lawyer Imaan Mazari seeking recovery of missing Baloch students on Wednesday. Justice Kayani said the prime minister, secretaries of interior and defense must give an affidavit that enforced disappearance will not happen in the future. "Police are the front face of the state, other institutions are not..." he added. The IHC judge said trials of terrorists are held in anti-terrorism courts. "Is it forbidden to hold the trial of Baloch extremists in the same courts?" asked Justice Kayani. The IHC judge also asked the federal government to restore the anti-terrorism courts in Balochistan to hold trials of the accused and added that the petitioners seeking recovery of missing Baloch students did not want to protect terrorists. "The concept of missing persons is only found in Pakistan, not in other countries," the judge noted. During the hearing, the IHC judge also expressed concerns about the well-being of recovered persons. "No missing Baloch person has ever come before me after recovery...I don't know if the recovered people are fine or not?" The IHC judge also inquired from petitioner Mazari whether the protest sit-in staged by protesters against enforced disappearances is still underway.

## Dr Mahrang using protests in bid to move abroad

BUREAU REPORT

QUETTA: As protests for the recovery of Baloch missing persons continue in Islamabad, caretaker Balochistan Information Minister Jan Achakzai has said that Dr Mahrang Baloch, a human rights activist who is leading Baloch Yakjehti Committee's (BYC) camp in the federal capital, wants to move abroad on asylum. The minister's remark came during a press conference in Quetta on Wednesday, where he shared the Baloch Enforced Disappearance Commission's report on the missing persons. This report may shut the propaganda mills, he added. The interim minister said that the issue of Baloch missing persons has been used as an organised campaign and some people's motivation can also be used in election campaigns and other interests. "Everyone knows Dr Mahrang's motivation. She wants to get asylum in any foreign embassy or settle in any foreign country by getting a visa. She has a dream to become Malala II," Achakzai said.

## British HC celebrates UK-Pakistan strong people-to-people ties

STAFF REPORT

MIRPUR: The British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, visited the UK-Pakistani diaspora in Mirpur. She was accompanied by the head of the Pakistan department at the foreign commonwealth and development office, Richard Lindsay. Mirpur is called by some as a home away from home for Pakistani Brits. This is due to the

large number of dual nationals. The UK-Pakistani diaspora is at the heart of the UK and Pakistan's relationship. With an estimated 70% of British Pakistanis originating from Mirpur, the High Commissioner was delighted to gain insight into how cross-cultural influences have shaped Mirpur into the city it is today. This followed her visit to Birmingham on 12 December. The High Commissioner and Head of Pakistan Department met with various government officials during their

visit, including the Commissioner of the Mirpur region and the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police at Mirpur. The High Commissioner thanked local officials for their continued support and cooperation. She also emphasised the importance she places on consular support for the British community living in the area. British High Commissioner Jane Marriott, CMG OBE, visited the Mirpur Chamber of Commerce. While speaking to the business community, the High Commissioner said: "This visit has reaffirmed my view that across Pakistan there is a lot more we can do together, whether it's liberalising trade, opening up investment opportunities, bringing in new technologies, or helping Pakistan on the path to sustainable growth and clean energy - there is so much we can do. I return to Islamabad with a strong feeling that our two countries together are primed to grow even closer and continue to work hard to deepen our relationship."

The High Commissioner was delighted to visit the Muslim Hands Football Academy where she met with Street Children Team runners-up at the Street Children Football World Cup in Qatar. **The British High Commissioner said:** "The footballing talent here at the academy is incredible, and I am pleased to know about their performance in Qatar. It is great to see so many British Pakistanis supporting this excellent organisation - Pakistanis and Brits share a huge love of sport - and the UK is committed to promoting sports in Pakistan, including football."



World of CLASS

WINTER 2024

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