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Erdogan says Turkiye vows to widen attacks against Kurdish groups

Detailed News On Page-07

Nawaz might flee to London again after polls

Detailed News On Page-08



Andreeva stuns Jabeur in AO second round

Detailed News On Page-06



Pakistan expels Iran's ambassador

Recalls ambassador from Tehran, major political parties condemn Iranian act of aggression and violation; all bilateral visits cancelled

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI
ISLAMABAD: In an expected move Pakistan on Wednesday recalled its Ambassador from Tehran thus bringing diplomatic relations with Iran to a halt, albeit for the time being. Pakistan has also asked the Iranian Ambassador Reza not to return to Pakistan till further orders. The Iranian ambassador to Pakistan was currently in Iran for political consultations. The foreign office statement said, "Last night's unprovoked and blatant breach of Pakistan's sovereignty by Iran is a violation of international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. This illegal act is completely unacceptable and has no justification whatsoever. Pakistan reserves the right to respond to this illegal act. The responsibility for the consequences will lie squarely with Iran. We have conveyed this message to the Iranian Government. We have also informed them that Pakistan has decided to recall its ambassador from Iran and that the Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan who is currently visiting Iran may not return for the time being. We have also decided to suspend all high-level visits which were ongoing or were planned between Pakistan and Iran in coming days, said the MOFA statement. Meanwhile, various political parties have condemned the Iranian act. PML N President Mian Shehbaz Sharif, the PTI and others have strongly condemned the Iranian attack inside the Pakistani territory.

Jilani talks to Hossein

'Iran attack didn't target Pakistani nationals'

DNA

DAVOS: Iran's foreign minister has said that the country's Tuesday missile attack on areas in Pakistan adjacent to Iranian borders was directed at the so-called Jaish al-Adl terrorist group and no Pakistani national was targeted. Pakistan Foreign Minister and called his Iranian counterpart and expressed concern over the attack. Speaking on the sidelines of the

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In his statement the former Prime Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif said that Iran violated Pakistani air space by launching attack, which is against international norms. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Spokesperson has strongly condemned Iran's unprovoked violation of Pakistan's airspace, saying that this irresponsible and reprehensible act would sabotage the possibilities of much-needed unity among the Muslim Ummah in this hour of need.

China calls for restraint

Beijing calls on both sides to avoid actions that would lead to an escalation of tension

NEWS DESK

BEIJING: China has called upon Pakistan and Iran to exercise "restraint" after Tehran carried out an air strike on its territory that killed two children and injured three girls. "We call on both sides to exercise restraint, avoid actions that would lead to an escalation of tension and work together to maintain peace and stability," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a regular briefing on Wednesday.

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PTI Spokesperson expressed his heartfelt condolences with the victims' families and said that Iran attempted to ruin the prospects of an inevitable harmony and unity among the ummah with unprovoked violation of Pakistan's sovereignty. He sought an immediate explanation from the unconstitutional, illegal, unrepresentative and unelected government for its complete failure to safeguard the integrity, security and defense of Pakistan. PTI Spokesperson further pointed out that after India and Afghanistan, the serious deterioration of relations with Iran is very concerning and worrisome which speaks volumes about our failed foreign and defense policies. Caretaker Balochistan Information Minister Jan Achakzai Wednesday said the violation of Pakistani sovereignty by Tehran "damages relations" between Iran and Pakistan.

Fmr Afghan president heaps hatred against Pak

DNA

KABUL: Former Afghan vice president Amrullah Saleh has heaped scorn on Pakistan saying Iran did a right thing by attacking Pakistan. Amrullah Saleh even in the past had spread negative propaganda against Pakistan and its institutions. In his recent Tweet, Amrullah Saleh said "I read that Iran has launched missile attack against Jaish Adle terrorist group in Pakistan's border edge. Great & courageous move.

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son further pointed out that after India and Afghanistan, the serious deterioration of relations with Iran is very concerning and worrisome which speaks volumes about our failed foreign and defense policies. Caretaker Balochistan Information Minister Jan Achakzai Wednesday said the violation of Pakistani sovereignty by Tehran "damages relations" between Iran and Pakistan.



ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, H.E Jiang Zaidong calling on Chairman Senate of Pakistan, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani, at the Parliament House, Islamabad.- DNA

Unregulated licensing CJP Faez Isa says drugs; weapons destroying society

"No one goes around carrying Kalashnikovs in big cars with tinted glasses anywhere around the world," he says, CJP Isa inquires about issuance of licenses for prohibited weapons, SC issues notices interior secretary, home secretaries, others

STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa Wednesday was angered over the unregulated licensing of weapons in Pakistan, questioning the interior ministry, home departments and law enforcers regarding ease in availability of weapons as well as the acquisition of their licenses. The chief justice remarked that weapons and drugs have destroyed the nation, insisting that there is a need to eliminate Kalashnikov culture from Pakistan. "Drugs and Kalashnikovs have destroyed Pakistan. No one goes around carrying Kalashnikovs in big cars with tinted glasses anywhere around the world," the country's top judge remarked. CJP Isa said he has also been offered to acquire a Kalashnikov license. The chief justice's remarks came while hearing the bail plea of a petitioner accused of theft. The petitioner, Kashif, has been booked on charges of theft after a citizen's home was robbed with their weapons also stolen in the robbery.

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ECP finalizes all arrangements to conduct polls

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan has completed all arrangements to conduct free, fair and transparent elections in the country. This was informed at a high level meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja in Islamabad today. The meeting was also appraised that preparations are also afoot to meet any untoward situation. Speaking on the occasion, Sikandar Sultan Raja underscored that Election Commission of Pakistan will fulfill its duty of conducting polls in a

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Briefs

Qureshi's judicial remand extended

ADIL SHAHEEN

RAWALPINDI: A local court of Rawalpindi on Wednesday extended former foreign minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi's judicial remand till January 25 in arson and ransacking cases relating to May 9 events. An-terrorism court Rawalpindi Judge Malik Ijaz Asif conducted hearing of the cases relating to May 9 incidents against Qureshi. After hearing, the court extended judicial remand of senior PTI leader in cases registered against him till January 25. The court had sent Qureshi to jail on judicial remand on December 28, 2023.

Gilani expresses optimism

DNA

MULTAN: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) senior leader Yousuf Raza Gilani on Wednesday expressed optimism about his party's "triumph" in the forthcoming elections. Expressing his thoughts in Multan, Gilani said, "No doubts should be raised about the elections after ECP and Chief Justice." He was of the view that one of the biggest challenges the masses were facing was ballooning inflation. "We are formulating a strategy to control inflation." Speaking about PTI leader Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Gilani said: "Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who is not contesting the elections, will miss me."

Pak receives \$700mn IMF bailout tranche UAE rolls over \$2 billion deposits to Pakistan for another year

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan has received \$700 million from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as part of its bailout programme, State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Jameel Ahmed said Wednesday. The loan was approved after the IMF Executive Board completed its first review last week, bringing the total disbursements under the \$3 billion Standby Arrangement (SBA) to about \$1.9 billion. Following the board's approval last week, Antoinette Sayeh, Deputy Managing Director and Chair, had said: "There are now tentative signs of activity picking-up and external pressures easing." The nine-month SBA approved by the Executive Board on July 12 last month, aims to provide a policy anchor for addressing domestic and external balances and a framework for financial support from multilateral and bilateral partners. To secure the bailout, Pakistan implemented tough IMF-requested measures: a revamped budget, a record interest rate hike, and painful increases in electricity and gas prices.

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All parties involved in politics of hatred

Bilawal says Nawaz should come out to face public

STAFF REPORT

BADIN: Former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Wednesday said that all political parties except the PPP were involved in the "politics of hatred and division". Bilawal passed these remarks during two PPP rallies as electioneering picks up momentum

Continued on Page 06

Kakar for equitable resources for everyone

Digital economy would attain more importance in the days ahead

NEWS DESK

DAVOS: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday called for ensuring equitable opportunities for all nations and regions to grab the fruits of modern technology. Speaking at a forum titled "Trade Tech's Trillion-Dollar Promise" on the sideline of the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF), he said utilizing state-of-the-art technology was vital to achieve targets of fast development. Stressing the need to ensure equitable opportunities for all to secure the technology, he

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Imran Khan, Qureshi, other PTI leaders out of election race

Lahore High Court upholds RO and appellate tribunal's decisions

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Wednesday upheld the election Appellate Tribunal's decision that dismissed the appeals of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and other party leaders regarding the rejection of nomination papers by the returning officers (ROs) for upcoming general elections, ARY News reported. The former prime minister had submitted his nomination papers from NA-122 Lahore and NA-89 Mianwali for the general elections scheduled for Feb 8, both of which were rejected by the respective ROs. Subsequently, he contested these decisions before the election appellate tribunals, where his appeals were also dismissed. In response, PTI founder Imran Khan filed a writ petition with the larger LHC bench against the tribunal's decision. Similarly, 60 other PTI leaders, had submitted petitions in the LHC against the rejection of their nomination papers. Today was the last day to file petitions against the decisions of the election tribunals. A three-member LHC bench - headed by Justice Ali Baqar Najafi - announced the reserved verdict on more than 60 petitions, including Imran Khan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, PervaizElahi and others. Dismissing the appeals, the three-member LHC bench upheld the decision to reject the nomination papers. Shah Mahmood had challenged the rejection of his nomination from NA-150, NA-151 and PP-218. Furthermore, Fawad Chaudhry's application against rejection of nomination papers from NA-60 and NA-61 was also dismissed. The court also rejected



the petition against the rejection of nomination papers of his wife, Hiba Fawad. The Lahore High Court also upheld the decision to reject Sanam Javed's nomination papers from NA-119 and NA-120. SanamJaved had also challenged the move of rejecting her nomination papers from PP-150. Earlier, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) QaziFaez Isa-led three-member bench announced the verdict, dealing a huge blow to Imran Khan-led PTI's hopes of retaining its symbol. As a result, the PTI candidates will now be contesting the elections independently with different electoral symbols while the party no longer has the right to reserved seats for women and minorities.

TURKISH AIRLINES
BEST PART OF THE JOURNEY
Stopover IN ISTANBUL
EASY VISA
FREE ACCOMMODATION
Economy BUSINESS

Business leader urges active role in local elections

President ICCI said that the government departments in Islamabad have failed to ensure better development of the federal capital and resolve the key issues of the business community

DNA

ISLAMABAD : Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) said that the government departments in Islamabad have failed to ensure better development of the federal capital and resolve the key issues of the business community, therefore, the business community should take an active role in the election of local government in Islamabad to get their issues resolved and accelerate the pace of development works in markets and the city. He said this while addressing the traders during his visit to Melody Market, G-6 Markaz, Islamabad.

Ahsan Bakhtawari said that ICCI would try to set up a filtration plant in the Melody Market to provide clean

drinking water to the traders. He said that ICCI is working on modern washrooms in markets including Melody Market for the traders. He stressed that the traders should pool their resources for arranging the installation of CCTV cameras in the Melody Market to improve the security situation and ICCI would cooperate with them. He assured that ICCI would work with the Traders Association for the better development of Melody Market. Speaking on the occasion, Azhar Iqbal President, and Malik Nadeem Chairman, Traders Welfare Association, Melody Market, Islamabad said that their market is one of the oldest markets of Islamabad but due to lack of development works, its traders are facing many problems. They said that ICCI should cooperate in addressing parking issue and the need of devel-

opment work in the market. They also informed the issues of the Food Street of the Melody Market and hoped that ICCI would work with CDA for its up-gradation.

Zafar Bakhtawari, former President and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that Ahsan Bakhtawari is making all possible efforts to address the issues of markets. He stressed that the CDA should upgrade the food street in Melody Market to facilitate better growth of business activities and attract more investment.

Ajmal Baloch President All Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajiran, Abdul Rehman Siddiqui Secretary General, F-7 Market Association, and others also spoke on the occasion and called upon the CDA to focus on better development of Melody Market and markets of the federal capital.



CDA to build two electric bus depots

ISLAMABAD : The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has taken a delayed decision for construction of two electric bus depots in Islamabad. The first batch of 30 out of 160 China-made buses arrived in Islamabad in the first week of the current month but the construction of two bus depots, which would take another six months, has been taken now. The second batch of buses would arrive by the end of next month. One of bus stations costing Rs 632.06 million would be constructed at Tramari Chowk, while the second station costing Rs604.4 million would be constructed between sectors I-9 and H-9, a CDA official told here Wednesday. —APP

Court Notice

In the Court of Naveed Abbas Mangat Civil Judge Gujrat
Title: Mirza Afzaal Baig etc. Versus A n - war Baig etc. Notice to: 3- waheed Baig s/o. Rash-eed Baig R/o. shahjahan PO Jalalpur Jattan, Tehsil & District Gujrat. Suit for Permanent Injection Whereas in the above mentioned case it has been proved to the satisfaction of the court that the above mentioned defendants are not served in ordinary way. It is therefore proclaimed under order 5 rule 20 CPC that if the said defendants will not appear personally or through a duly authorized agent or pleader in court at 8 AM on 24-01-2024, otherwise case will be decided ex parte.

Govt making efforts to facilitate pilgrims: Ashrafi

ABID RAZA

LAHORE : Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony and Middle East Hafiz Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi said on Wednesday the government was making efforts to provide optimal facilities to prospective pilgrims. Addressing the Tazem-e-Harmin Al-Sharifain Conference, organised by Hajj Organisers Association of Pakistan (HOAP) Punjab zone, at a hotel here, he said Saudi Arabia was dedicated to enhancing facilities for the Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. He said that an effective system had been put in place to ensure effective monitoring of facilities to be provided to Hajj

pilgrims. Under the system, Hajj pilgrims' complaints would be resolved speedily. Ashrafi, who is also the chairman of Pakistan Ulama Council, said the relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is strong, and has no precedent in the world, adding that the two countries have long brotherly relations and both the Muslim countries have always stood with each other in difficult times. About the recent four-day Hajj and Umrah Services Conference and exhibition, organised by the Saudi government in Jeddah, he emphasised that the event placed significant importance on enhancing overall environment for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims. Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Paki-

stan Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki, while appreciating the brotherly relationship between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, clarified that both brotherly countries' relationship was authentic and long-standing, consisting of many decades. At the end of the Tazem-e-Haramain Sharifain Conference, organizers presented Punjabi turbans and souvenir to the ambassador and Allama Tahir Ashrafi. Al Baraka Bank (Pakistan) Limited Chief Executive Officer Muhammad Atif Hanif, HOAP Senior Vice Chairman Sanaulah, Punjab Chairman Saeed Malik and Executive Committee Members Punjab Zone, Zeeshan Qamar Chaudhry, Imtiaiz Chaudhry, Aslam Nadeem Bhutta, Shahid Rafiq and others were present.

UAE artificial rain experts calls on CM Punjab

LAHORE : Members of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) team, who orchestrated artificial rainfall in Lahore recently, called on Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi at his office on Wednesday. The CM greeted the team members, expressing gratitude individually during the meeting. Among those present were Ahmed Al Kamal, Head of Cloud Seeding for the UAE NCM Team, Pilot Col. Obaid Halaf, Pilot Michael Anstis, Head of Cloud Seeding Department Abdullah Al Haman, Arnold Ningala and Verglottoledoloto. CM Naqvi recognised their efforts by presenting certificates of appreciation and commemorative shields to each member and conveyed his thanks for successfully bringing artificial rain to Lahore, marking a historic event in Pakistan. He emphasised that the nation would always remember this successful experience, which was a culmination of 12 years of efforts to achieve artificial rain in Punjab, including Lahore. The first artificial rain in Lahore was not only celebrated in Pakistan but gained recognition worldwide, he added. The names of the UAE team members have now become a part of Pakistan's history. The CM expressed that the UAE team was ready to bring artificial rain again, but unfavorable weather conditions hindered their efforts. Despite the challenges, the UAE team's two-month stay in Lahore exemplified the strong bonds of brotherhood, he said. Highlighting the environmental benefits, the CM further stated that artificial rain is a cutting-edge technology capable of reducing environmental pollution and enhancing production. He bid farewell to the UAE team with gratitude and appreciation. Provincial Minister Bilal Afzal, chairman planning and development, secretary EPD, chief meteorologist, army aviation officers, director environment protection, commissioner Lahore and others were also present.—DNA

KP govt's interim ban on e-cigar hailed

KP Government for implementing an interim ban of 60 days under Section 144 on the storage, sale and use of e-cigarettes in the province

PESHAWAR : Blue Veins and the Provincial Alliance for Tobacco and Nicotine Control Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PATNC KP) have expressed profound gratitude to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government for implementing an interim ban of 60 days under Section 144 on the storage, sale and use of e-cigarettes in the province. According to the notification issued by the Home and Tribal Affairs Department, all Deputy Commissioners were directed to impose a complete ban on the sale of e-cigarettes and vapes to individuals below the age of 21 years across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and its sale and storage within a 50-meter radius of all educational institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Violators of these orders should face legal consequences under Section 188 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). This decisive action follows a series of meetings conducted by the Provincial Alliance for Sustainable Tobacco Control, Blue Veins and

KPTCC with key figures such as Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali, Chief Secretary KP and Special Secretary Home and Tribal Affairs KP and others. These meetings focused on the dangers of e-cigarettes and vapes and examining global legislative and policy practices regarding their sale and storage. In response to the World Health Organization's call for action and in the interest of public health, civil society organizations commend the proactive approach of the Governor and Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This ban is a critical step in safeguarding citizens from the harmful effects of vapes and e-cigarettes, which include respiratory issues, nicotine addiction and potential long-term health risks. Recent momentum and media visibility around the hazards of newer nicotine and tobacco products in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have underscored the need for policy and legislative reform at both

provincial and federal levels. Currently, there is a lack of policy and legislative framework to regulate the sale of electronic cigarettes and vapes. Civil Society Activist Qamar Naseem, Key advocate for tobacco and nicotine control in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, stated, "This interim ban is a commendable step by the KP Government, reflecting its proactive approach to public health. However, we must solidify this progress through comprehensive provincial legislation to ensure a permanent solution to this growing health concern." Sana Ahmad, Coordinator of the Child Rights Movement (CRM) KP, expressed her appreciation, saying, "This ban is a significant victory for the health and well-being of our children and youth. It prevents easy access to addictive substances and protects our future generations from the allure of harmful vaping products." Dr. Qazi Shahbaz, President of the

Provincial Doctors Association, also lauded the efforts, commenting, "We, the healthcare providers, appreciate the Governor and Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for this decisive ban. It's a step forward in the right direction, and we now urge the government to enact comprehensive legislation for a complete ban. This is not just a win for public health but a strong message that the health and safety of our citizens, especially our youth, are of paramount importance." The collective efforts of various organizations and the government in addressing the hazards of e-cigarettes and vapes mark a significant milestone in public health advocacy. This interim ban is a testament to the commitment of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government to prioritize the health and safety of its citizens, aligning with global health standards and responding effectively to emerging health risks.—APP



ISLAMABAD : Chairman Senate, Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani exchanging views with CM of Gilgit-Baltistan, Gulbar Khan at Parliament house. DNA

Surge in illegal cigarette trade raises concerns

DNA

ISLAMABAD : The cigarette industry is experiencing a surge in illegal trade in recent months, particularly following a significant excise increase in February 2023. Fuelled by this excise hike, industry sources has revealed a concerning trend of widespread availability of counterfeit cigarettes in the market, affixed with fake stamps. This raises serious doubts about the efficacy of the Track & Trace System, both in terms of implementation and enforcement.

According to industry sources, around 850 million counterfeit cigarette sticks are currently being sold, equivalent to 42.5 million packs featuring fake stamps, resulting in substantial loss of approximately PKR 5.7 billion in duties and taxes to the national exchequer. The issue is more prevalent in big metro cities such as Islamabad and Rawalpindi as well as other regions. It is surprising to note such blatant violation in cities where enforcement is considered easier to conduct by the relevant authorities in contrast to far flung areas. The implementation of a Track and Trace system can only be successful through extensive & sustained enforcement at retail level. Only two cigarette manufacturers have diligently implemented the Track & Trace System, in letter and spirit, yet the prevalence of illicit trade persists and continues to grow.

Free medical camp related to Hepatitis C

QUETTA : Aga Khan Hospital and OGDCL held a free medical camp related to Hepatitis C at District Headquarters Hospital Kalat on Wednesday. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kalat Hafiz Mohammad Qasim Kakar inaugurated the freed medical Camp for Hepatitis C after cutting the ribbon. Medical Superintendent (MS) Civil Hospital Kalat Dr Nasrullah Longo, DHO Dr Naseem Longo, DS, MPPHI Mujeeb Baloch Regional Coordinator OGDCL Ikramullah Kasi, Senior CSR Officer Muhammad Arshad, Assistant CSR Officer Bahauddin, Senior Admin Abid Khan Hepatitis focal Person Najibullah Mengal and others present were present on the occasion.—APP

QWP Chairman slams online defamation of judges

SAID ALAM KHAN

PESHAWAR : Quami Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Wednesday condemned the malicious social media campaign against the judges of the Supreme Court.

Addressing a gathering at Mandani area in Charsadda district, he said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lost its electoral symbol but due to its own follies. He said that PTI founding chairman Imran Khan was responsible for the situation his party was facing. He said the recent decision of the Supreme Court upholding the ruling of the Election Commission of Pakistan about the intra-party election of the PTI was based on merit and in accordance with the law. However, he expressed resentment over the launching of the smear campaign against

the judiciary. He said the country was already facing a host of issues and it could not afford confrontation and unrest. Aftab Sherpao said that some elements were out to create disturbance for their vested interests. The QWP leader said that holding a free, fair and transparent election was the only way to steer the country towards economic and political stability. He maintained that the country was facing the issue of law and order, poverty, unemployment and inflation so concerted efforts were needed to address these challenges. However, he hoped that the 2024 general election would bring stability to the country. He said the political leadership would have to work hard to pay off the loans and provide relief to the have-nots. He said during the election campaign the politicians

should avoid making promises, which were difficult to honour. He said the nation should be told the truth as the prevailing difficult period was also a test for them. He said the people should use to their right to vote with great care and think about the country and their future. Commenting on the problems facing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Aftab Sherpao said KP and its merged districts had been overlooked. He said that KP was not getting its due share in resources. The QWP leader said the merged areas were also facing shortage of funds and the promises made at the time of merger remained unfulfilled. He said the province was facing gas and electricity loadshedding. He asked the federal government to give KP its arrears of the net hydel profit and gas royalty.

BF leader raises alarm over Pak-Afghan border closure

Bilour was of the view that country's economy was negatively impacted owing to the closure of Pak-Afghan border

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR : Leader of the Businessman Forum (BF), former senator Ilyas Ahmad Bilour expressed grave concern over closure of Pak-Afghan border and hurdles in export. In a statement issued here on Wednesday, the BF leader, Ilyas Bilour said exporters are facing huge financial losses and damages of items-loaded by a large number of trucks that were stuck at Torkham border. He said gov-

ernment, relevant institutions in consultation with president of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fuad Ishaq should resolve the issue. Bilour was of the view that country's economy was negatively impacted owing to the closure of Pak-Afghan border. He said trucks laden with food items, especially fruits, standing near border areas in long queues, are damaging while exporters are bearing the brunt of huge financial losses as well. The businessman forum leader said the economy

of the both countries was also adversely affected due to halting movement of goods-loaded trucks on both sides of the border. Bilour said halting of export is a serious issue and demanded the emergent steps to resolve the issues. He suggested both governments along with Pak-Afghan traders' community should initiate talks at high level in which recommendations of the SCCI president Fuad Ishaq should be implemented to ease difficulties of exporters, importers and traders' community .



ANYONE WHO'S SOMEONE...

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

JANUARY

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

Hotels & Restaurants



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



Turkish Airlines.....8494949



Emergency

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



Enquiry

Edhi Ambulance.....115
PIA Flight Info.....114
PIA Cargo.....9280979
Railway Inquiry.....117
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



RAWALPINDI: Dr.Maen Khreasat, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Jordan called on Minister for Defence, Lt Gen (Retd) Anwar Ali Hyder at Ministry of Defence.—DNA

NAB chairman advocates business-friendly reforms

Business leaders held significant discussions with the Chairman NAB in addressing pressing economic challenges and propelling the nation toward growth. They suggested a number of proposals to help steer the country out of the economic turmoil

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lieutenant General Retired Nazir Ahmed held a series of meetings with the business leaders of Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), Karachi Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI) and other top business community Leaders and assured them in an apparent show of support to the business. Business leaders held significant discussions with the Chairman NAB in addressing pressing economic challenges and propelling the nation toward growth. They suggested

a number of proposals to help steer the country out of the economic turmoil. Chairman NAB Lieutenant General Retired Nazir Ahmed responded positively and said that he wants to assure the Business Communities that NAB will not harass them and they should openly play their key role in the development of the country. He said that they should be fully focused on wealth creation activities and should do business without any fear. Chairman NAB stressed that extreme importance would be given to wealth creation activities/ projects which will be encouraged and will be protected from unwarranted pressures and intimidation. It was agreed that the business community, being

the very core of our economy, has to be given the respect and status that it deserves. He said that NAB will deal with all businessmen with utmost respect & dignity and will help in creating business friendly environment. Business leaders emphasized the importance of an enhanced and sustained interactive dialogue between the business community and NAB. While responding positively, Chairman NAB said that a Business Facilitation Cell would be established initially at Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad including representatives of the business community for better coordination and facilitation of the business community. He said that he believes in participative

accountability therefore general complaints against businessmen will be first referred to the Facilitation Cell for immediate resolution/rectification and necessary action as per law. The Chairman NAB updated the business community about his reforms in NAB and future plans. He said that no businessman will be subjected to a media trial during the process of complaint verification and inquiry. He further added that complaints written under fictitious names or anonymous will not be entertained by NAB henceforth. During the course of inquiry, businessmen would be addressed as respondents and their confidentiality would be ensured. It was further agreed that NAB will hold seminars regularly

at different Business Forums in order to inform business community about NAB's objective, operations and framework for better facilitation and also about their rights under the NAB Law. To bolster economic decision-making, Director General NAB Karachi Javed Akbar Riaz assured that all the pending cases against the business community would be completed expeditiously and all efforts would be made to create business friendly environment for the investors. Prominent Businessmen Aqeel Karim Dhedhi, Arif Habib, Bashir Jan Muhammad, Habibullah, Atif Ikram Sheikh, Zubair Motiwala, Ahmed Chinoy and many other business community members attended the meetings.

Scores of masses register for 4th edition of Islamabad Marathon

ISLAMABAD: Pioneer running community of Pakistan, Islamabad Run With Us has announced that the highly anticipated 4th edition of the Islamabad Marathon will take place on Sunday, January 28th, 2024. As the registration process started, within 3 days hundreds of runners signed up to take up in the largest running event in Pakistan. This community event has become a cherished annual tradition, unfolding on the last Sunday of January each year. Following the success of the inaugural run Half Marathon in 2020, the 1st Islamabad Marathon in 2022, followed by 2023 and now the Islamabad Marathon 2024 has firmly established itself as a staple in the city's calendar. With great excitement, the organizers are gearing up to continue this tradition, ensuring it remains a highlight for years to come, a news release said. Demonstrating a passion for health and community development, the President of the

Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi and First Lady Mrs. Samina Alvi joined the 10km run at the 2022 Islamabad Marathon. Qasim Naz, the founder of Islamabad Run With Us, reiterates the core mission: "Our main objective remains to promote healthy lifestyles, marathon tourism, and projecting a positive image of Pakistan all over the world." Sharing his experience at the 2023 event, the Ambassador of Denmark to Pakistan, H.E Jakob Linulf, expressed his enthusiasm to be at the biggest running event in Islamabad. He had said, "Me and my brother enjoyed the enthusiasm shown by Pakistanis of all age groups coming from different cities to participate in the marathon organized by 'Islamabad Run with Us'. The Chief Guest Hamish Young of the event in 2023, representing Pakistan Polio Eradication Programme commended the efforts of Islamabad Run with Us for making the marathon such a big success.

Mr. Young not only emphasized on the importance of choosing a healthy lifestyle but also stressed on creating awareness and take actions to inspire others to eradicate polio. Ex. Resident Representative of UNDP Pakistan, Knut Otsby, who participated in the 10km race in 2023, highlights the event's inclusive nature. His valuable participation in this event was encouraging as it sets a precedent for other community members and strengthen the belief in Pakistan as a safe and healthy country for these activities. In addition to the challenging full marathon (42.2 Km), the Islamabad Marathon offers a range of exciting events suitable for participants of all fitness levels, including both males and females. The event lineup includes a half marathon (21.1 Km), 10 km run, 5 km run, and a kids' fun run, ensuring an inclusive celebration where everyone can actively participate.

Cash prizes will be awarded to the top three position holders in each race category, adding an extra layer of competition and excitement. What sets the Islamabad Marathon apart is its ability to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds. From government officials and diplomatic representatives to local residents and individuals from all walks of life, this community event fosters unity and inclusivity. The Islamabad Marathon caters to participants of all fitness levels and genders. Whether you're a seasoned marathoner or a recreational runner, the Islamabad Marathon promises an extraordinary experience against the backdrop of Islamabad's breathtaking natural beauty. The event will take place at Trail 3 Parking, creating an unforgettable day of running and excitement.—DNA

Walk held against use of plastic shopping bags

ISLAMABAD: A walk was organized here in the Cantonment area against the use of plastic shopping bags and to create awareness about the cleanliness of the city. Cantonment Executive Officer of the Cantonment Board Azra Bakht was leading the walk, which was also attended by President of Anjuman Tajraan Cantt Bazar Chaudhry Jameel Ahmad, General Secretary Muhammad Zeeshan, Incharge Cleanliness Staff of the Bazar Syed Riaz Hussain Shah, and a number of traders. The participants of the walk were carrying placards inscribed with environment-friendly slogans, including 'Cleanliness is half faith', 'Plastic bags are enemies of the environment, and 'Put the trash in dustbins', etc. Speaking on the occasion, President of Anjuman Tajraan Cantt Bazaar Area Chaudhry Jameel Ahmed said the ban on the use of plastic bags by the Cantonment Board and the walk to create awareness about cleanliness in the Cantt Board area were a good initiative, adding that the traders were standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Cantonment Board to make this campaign successful. The traders would extend all possible support for the purpose, he assured. Azra Bakht, while addressing the participants, said the cantonment board was fulfilling its responsibilities for cleanliness, and the cleanliness situation would be further improved in the area. This walk was aimed at creating awareness among the masses and traders about the hazardous effects of plastic bags on the environment so that they should also fulfill their responsibilities for keeping the environment clean. She said the plastic bags also cause blockage of drains, and their use must be stopped.—APP

Election Quiz Contest announced for young voters

ISLAMABAD: Press Network of Pakistan has announced to offer an amazing opportunity to all youngsters, especially students studying in universities, colleges and educational institutions across the country to check and enhance their knowledge about the electoral process in the context of upcoming General Elections for National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies scheduled on February 8th, 2024. The Young Voters Election Quiz Contest, according to head of PNP Election Cell Sabahuddin Qazi, is designed in accordance with the clause (09) of National Media Code of Conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan, which asks national media houses to launch Civic & Voter Education programs throughout the election period to focus marginalized communities, including youth and women, in order to maximize voter turnout and ensure their active participation in electoral process, a news release said. "The active participation of the public in the election process is very significant to the continuity of democracy," Mr. Qazi said, emphasizing that the right to vote helps in advancing the public agenda. However, there is a dire need to motivate the young generation across Pakistan in this regard. All the participants showcasing outstanding performance will be awarded with the Certificate of Achievement whereas exciting Prizes shall also be distributed among winners. The last date for contesting the quiz is January 31, 2024.—APP

Senate delegation for strengthening ties with UK

ISLAMABAD: A high-profile delegation from the Senate comprised of Senator Khalida Ateeq, Senator Abida Azeem, Senator Keshoo Bai and Additional Secretary Hafeez Sheikh held a very constructive and cordial meeting with Lord Qurban Hussain and British MP Yasmeen Qureshi in London. In a spirit of collaboration, both sides delved into matters of mutual interest during the interactive session, said a press release received here on Wednesday. The delegation provided a comprehensive overview of Pakistan's electoral system, shedding light on the composition of both the National Assembly and the Senate, with a particular focus on the representation of women through special seats. In turn, British parliamentarians shared insights into the intricacies of their parliamentary and electoral systems, emphasizing the process of becoming a member of the British House of Lords. The meeting, conducted in a friendly atmosphere, resulted in a mutual understanding of the respective parliamentary structures. Both sides expressed their commitment to fostering closer ties between the two parliaments, emphasizing the importance of enhancing inter-parliamentary cooperation.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Jamal Shah presenting a shield to Director and Representative UNESCO Dr. Youssef Filali-Meknassi after meeting in his office.—DNA

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Briefs

Pak China Institute enrolls 366 students

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan-China Technical and Vocational Institute (PCT&VI) has admitted 366 students from Gwadar and other parts of Balochistan in various programs. Around 500 students both male and female made their appearance in entry test to get admitted in many areas of study including Tourism, English language, Maritime and Port Management, Software Technology, Chinese Language and Culture, Mechatronics and E-Commerce, according to a Gwadar Pro's report on Wednesday. PCT&VI official told Gwadar Pro that classes will commence on January 22 as per schedule already conveyed to admitted students in their relevant subjects. He said that 15 students were admitted in Tourism Management, 127 were enrolled in English Language, 59 were admitted in Maritime and Port Management. Meanwhile, he said that 100 students were enrolled in Software Technology, 35 were admitted in Chinese Language and Culture, 5 were given admission in Mechatronics and 25 were enrolled in E-Commerce. All vocational and training programs and courses are designed in collaboration with Shandong Institute of Commerce and Technology (SICT), China, and relevant accredited institutions. Pakistan-China Technical and Vocational Institute (PCT&VI) aims to enhance skills of active population in the growth of the Port City. The institute was completed at a cost of \$10 million in only 20 months under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Gwadar.—APP

Ambassador Hashmi visits Sichuan

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Ambassador to China, Khalil Hashmi visited Sichuan, the economic and cultural hub of Southwest China, last week to further enhance cultural and economic cooperation. He engaged the provincial leadership, business enterprises, academia, the Pakistani community, and Chinese media during this visit. During his meeting with Chinese officials, both sides expressed satisfaction over the robust nature of Pakistan-China relations. They discussed proposals to enhance Pakistan-China (Sichuan) cooperation and collaboration, especially in the economic and cultural fields including through sister province and sister city relationships that are already in place.—APP

Police digital license management system leads to arrests and fine collections

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Police's newly implemented Digital License Management System (DLMS) is now fully operational and has proven effective in apprehending a court absconder and a wanted criminal. Moreover, the system facilitated the collection of payments for over 1,000 traffic challans from 634 violators. Under the guidance of Dr Akbar Nasir Khan, the Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (CCPO), the police force has activated the DLMS, integrating data on wanted criminals and traffic violators. "This initiative ensures the apprehension of wanted criminals and guarantees the collection of traffic challan payments," the police spokesperson said. In adherence to these measures, 634 violators visited traffic offices, settling more than 1,000 challans. Simultaneously, one court absconder and a wanted criminal were apprehended, initiating legal proceedings. The recently established Digital License Management System by the Islamabad Capital Police has been in full operation since its launch. Violators failing to settle their challans will forfeit all facilities provided by the police.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja chairing a high level meeting.—DNA

Alvi directs IESCO to refund Rs 139,000 to complainant

The President issued these directions while deciding upon a representation filed by IESCO assailing the order of the Wafaqi Mohtasib directing IESCO to refund the amount to the complainant and adopt proper procedure/rules/regulation, which were violated by IESCO, resulting in maladministration

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi has directed Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) to refund Rs 139,860 to Haji Akhtar Raheem (the complainant) who had been wrongly issued an additional demand notice for the installation of an electricity connection along with a transformer due to cost escalation. IESCO had violated its own procedure by not installing the connection within 30 days and

later sent an additional demand notice to the complainant, who had already paid the original requisite amount, on account of the escalation of the cost of the material. The President issued these directions while deciding upon a representation filed by IESCO assailing the order of the Wafaqi Mohtasib directing IESCO to refund the amount to the complainant and adopt proper procedure/rules/regulation, which were violated by IESCO, resulting in maladministration. Haji Akhtar Rahim (the

complainant) had applied with IESCO for an electricity connection along with a 25 KVA transformer. Subsequently, a demand notice of Rs 305,656, including the cost of allied material was issued to him. He deposited the amount, however, IESCO instead of installing his connection timely, issued an additional demand notice of Rs 139,860 on account of the escalation of the cost of the material. He approached IESCO for withdrawal of the demand notice but to no avail. Feeling aggrieved, he ap-

proached the Wafaqi Mohtasib for the redressal of his grievance, who passed the order in his favour. IESCO, then, filed a representation against the order of the Mohtasib with the President. After personally hearing the case and going through the record of the case, the President directed IESCO to refund the amount to the complainant. He referred to IESCO's Consumer Service Manual which provided that once the demand notice had been issued by IESCO and paid by the applicant in full, no

further charges/demand notice could be raised on account of the escalation of the cost of the material. He further noted that as per the Manual, IESCO was bound to install the connection within 30 days but it delayed the installation by 7 months. The President concluded that Wafaqi Mohtasib's decision was based on sound reasoning and was sustainable in the eyes of the law. He, therefore, rejected IESCO's representation and upheld the Mohtasib's decision.

China, Pakistan cooperate on recycled aluminum project

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A project to recycle aluminum recently began a trial run in Pakistan and Chongqing, southwest China, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Wednesday. The project was initiated by the aluminum working committee of Trade and Economic Multifunctional Platform for SCO countries (SCO TEMP). The committee's member units have established an entity in Chongqing Liang-Guoyuan Port Comprehensive Bonded Zone (CBZ) and have also set up an overseas industrial park in Pakistan. With an investment of approximately RMB 5.5 billion, the industrial park in Pakistan will be equipped with an advanced manufacturing system. Raw materials purchased from the global market will be processed in the park. According to Hu Kaiqiang, Director General of SCO TEMP, this will create job opportunities, generate tax revenue, and enhance international trade for Pakistan in the future. In addition, the processed materials will be sold in the international market or exported to Chongqing CBZ. The Chongqing entity will utilize its local manufacturing expertise to process the imported materials into high-value-added products and distribute them in the global market, Hu added. The initiative benefits from China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, as well as Pakistan's industrial base, preferential policies, port and logistics services, and relatively low costs, according to Hu.



ISLAMABAD: First Lady Begum Samina Alvi speaking at an event themed "Unlock the every day: advancing the SDGs through the power of Assistive Technology" on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum 2024, in Davos.—DNA

The gap between rich and poor is increasing rapidly

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Wednesday said the disparity between the wealthy and the impoverished is swiftly widening. The newly elected government should make economic equality a major priority since, in the absence of an equitable economic structure, the nation will not

have a future, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the government that will be formed as a consequence of the election ought to make economic equality a priority. This is because, just like in the rest of the world, the gap between the wealthy and the impoverished is growing bigger in Pakistan as well. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that a fair economic system is the need of the hour as the divide is growing, which is affecting the economy and fragmenting the social system. According to the

business leader, except in a few nations, capitalists have taken control of the world's economies, which is why their assets are growing at an incredible rate while the general population is getting poorer. He added that due to the prevailing economic system, the wealth in almost every country is being concentrated in a few hands, and if this trend is not stopped, world peace will end. He furthered that during the COVID pandemic, almost all countries not only printed excessive currency but also adopted policies that great-

ly increased the wealth of capitalists.

In Pakistan, too, under the guise of the welfare of the people, the wealthy class was rewarded. After the pandemic, many countries stopped printing excessive currency, due to which inflation started to decrease at the global level, but in Pakistan, due to the devaluation of the rupee, fiscal deficit, and current account deficit, inflation broke all previous records. Mian Zahid Hussain further said that the increase in the wealth of many of the world's richest people by more than 100 percent on an annual basis is surprising, which reveals the weaknesses of the current economic system.

Currently, half of the world's population owns only two percent of the resources, while large multinational companies have been earning an average of 52 percent annual profits for the past three years, he informed.

Cultivating success, olive oil production is on the rise

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Although Pakistan is not a major grower of olive oil, over the last two decades, the trend of cultivation of olive in some areas of Punjab, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and KPK has led to a rapid growth in olive oil production. Hazara Division is one of the best suitable regions for olive plantations, where hundreds of farmers have been attracted and started grafting olives on a local breed named "Kaho", and within two to three years they have also started to yield, which has grown many folds after passing each year. In Hazara division, from district Haripur

to Battagram, more than 1000 hectares of area are dedicated to olive plants, and this area continues to grow annually. Sabir Sultan, a skilled farmer and olive cultivation specialist hailing from Abbottabad, shared a remarkable journey of transforming the agricultural landscape in Hazara Division over the past 13 years. His expertise in olive grafting has not only led to the flourishing of olive trees but has also resulted in a substantial increase in edible oil production. Talking to the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), Sabir Sultan revealed that his deep-rooted passion for olives took shape during extensive

travels to approximately 25 countries. Drawing inspiration from international experiences, he dedicated himself to revolutionizing olive cultivation practices in his home region. Sultan disclosed that the collaborative efforts of 52,000 successfully facilitated olive grafting on local-breed Kaho trees across various regions, with an additional 50,000 individual grafts. He said that the yield from 200 kilograms of olives amounts to an impressive 15 kilograms of high-quality edible oil, underscoring the economic viability of olive cultivation. Acknowledging the support from Turkey, Sabir Sultan highlighted the installation

of four cutting-edge olive oil extraction machines in KP, where one has been allocated for the Hazara Division, which is now operational at the Abbottabad Potato Research Center, showcasing the integration of modern technology into traditional farming practices. Additionally, a state-of-the-art machine from Italy has been installed at the Tea Research Center in Shinkiar, further streamlining the olive oil extraction process. During the past few years, Hazara Division has witnessed an olive boom, with hundreds of thousands of Kaho trees contributing to the region's economic and agricultural prosperity. Sabir Sultan emphasized the

Over population poses great challenge to economy

ISLAMABAD: Coordinator to Minister of State and Federal Tax Ombudsman Meher Kashif Younis Wednesday said that over population had posed a great challenge to Pakistan's economy, exerting pressure on resources, infrastructure, and socio-economic stability. Addressing a conference on "Impact of over population on Pakistan Economy" held here under the aegis of Gold Ring Economic Forum (GREF) a strategic think-tank, he said with a population surpassing 220 million, Pakistan grappled with adverse consequences of overpopulation that permeate various sectors. Meher said natural resources were strained, exacerbating environmental degradation, excessive use of water, deforestation, and increased pollution were direct consequences, posing threats to sustainable development and exacerbating climate change-related concerns. The coordinator said that rapid urbanisation, driven by population growth, leads to the emergence of slums and inadequate living conditions, further exacerbating socio-economic disparities. "To mitigate its impact, we must prioritize comprehensive family planning programmes, invest in education and healthcare infrastructure, and implement policies that promote sustainable resource management," he added. Addressing these challenges is pre-requisite for fostering economic growth, social well-being and environmental sustainability in Pakistan. Meher Kashif Younis said the burgeoning population intensified competition for employment, leading to a higher unemployment rate, this not only strained the social fabric but also contributed to heightened poverty levels as a substantial portion of the populace struggled to secure sustainable livelihoods. It affects the nation's ability to keep pace with global advancements.—DNA

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The view on Donald Trump's Iowa victory

Before voters in Iowa kicked off the US presidential election cycle on Monday, Donald Trump shared a bizarre campaign video on his Truth Social platform that declared him to be God's chosen emissary on Earth, sent to deliver prosperity to America. It seemed unlikely that evangelicals in a rural state would buy into such narcissism. Sadly, Mr Trump has blinded believers to the means and fixed their gaze on the ends. Despite being charged with 91 felonies in four criminal cases, he won an unprecedented majority of Republican caucus-goers. The rest of the Republican electorate doesn't always follow Iowa's lead. This, however, is a small comfort. In 2016, Mr Trump lost out to Ted Cruz in the state before winning his party's nomination with a mendacious, racist, misogynistic campaign that encouraged violence and dealt in the politics of personal insult. His spell in office did not mellow him. His 2024 campaign picked up where his last one ended – by brazenly attempting to use his efforts to overturn the 2020 election result as a rallying cry. It is an ominous portent that he had persuaded voters, especially religious ones, that it was better to win with vice than to lose with virtue. After Iowa, Mr Trump hopes the media will amplify the message that his coalition of support within the Republican party will crush those seeking to rescue it from his grip. To reset the conversation would need Mr Trump to lose the New Hampshire primary – an unlikely outcome, as he maintains an average double-digit lead over his nearest rival, Nikki Haley. For the former US president, there's no such thing as bad publicity. Fresh from his Iowa victory, Mr Trump arrived at a Manhattan court hearing over a \$10m damages claim sought by the writer E Jean Carroll for defaming her after she accused him of raping her nearly three decades ago. Mr Trump aims to use his upcoming criminal trials as opportunities to claim headlines and public attention. In lashing out at prosecutors, judges and Democrats, Mr Trump wants to look strong – and make his opponents look weak. It is a battle of image, not of substance, to sustain a cult of personality. If Mr Trump turns out the Republican party vote, he also turns out his Democratic opposition. This electoral reaction saw Mr Trump lose the 2020 election. It led the Republicans to do unexpectedly badly in the 2022 midterms and delivered strong results for Democrats in special elections last year. Post-Covid, the US economy has recovered in the sense that the majority of Americans are better off financially now than they were before the pandemic. But the pessimism in consumer sentiment lingers. That might explain why polls find voters glum about Joe Biden. There is some good news: Mr Biden is running neck and neck with his predecessor in recent surveys of voting intention. American democracy is uncertain to survive another four years of Mr Trump in office. Mr Trump didn't create the hostilities found in the US. He just ruthlessly exploits them for his selfish needs. Increasing polarisation is a recipe for political paralysis as parties become more interested in stopping the other side winning than in solving problems. Democrats are right to warn that 2024's likely rematch for the White House will be a battle for the nation's soul. The current president wants to restore the old norms of stable, civil politics. Mr Trump wants to destroy them. As things stand, the stakes could not be higher this November.



Friendship enables effective coordination

Continuing a Chinese diplomatic tradition that has now entered its 34th year, Foreign Minister Wang Yi is visiting African countries on his first overseas trip of the year. This month is destined to be a busy one for the country's senior diplomat. As well as his visits to Egypt, Tunisia, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire, the second half of the trip will also take him to Brazil and Jamaica. If the year-opening visit to the United States by Liu Jianchao, head of the Communist Party of China Central Committee's International Department, signified a strong desire for stabilizing ties with the US-led West, Wang's Africa trip reveals the weight Beijing places on the Global South. As the visiting Chinese diplomat told his Egyptian hosts, Egypt is a major Arab, African, Islamic and developing nation bestowing upon it special geopolitical significance in Chinese foreign policy. Egypt was the first African and Arab country to establish diplomatic ties with China. And as Wang and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry both agreed, that Egypt has again been the destination for the Chinese foreign minister's first overseas visit of the year showcased the two countries' long friendship. Over the decades, Chinese and Egyptian foreign policies have aligned well under the guiding principles of peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and noninterference in each other's internal affairs. Egypt, as a key member of the African Union and the Arab League, wields critical influence on the peace, stability and prosperity of the corresponding regions, hence the world at large. China finds Egypt to be an ideal partner for the materialization of its global security, development and civilization initiatives, and a key participant in the Belt and Road Initiative. In addition to the tangible benefits Belt and Road cooperation brings to both sides, as Wang said, China and Egypt are key factors for global strategic stability. Praising the two countries' relationship as all-round strategic partners, which is now in its 10th year, Wang said China is willing to work with Egypt to support equitable, orderly multipolarization and inclusive economic globalization, and to safeguard the common interests and legitimate rights and interests of developing nations by prompting international governance to proceed in a just and reasonable direction. The two countries' joint declaration on the Palestinian issue was a timely answer to a historical impediment to lasting peace in the Middle East. Upholding the general international consensus on a two-state solution, the two countries' foreign ministers proposed a Palestine state with full sovereignty and independence, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as the capital. Wang also called for a larger-scale, more authoritative international peace conference of more practical effect, the goals being a concrete timeline and road map for the realization of that solution. The friendship between China and Egypt has brought tangible benefits to the two peoples and set a model for South-South cooperation, Wang's visit shows that it will continue to do so as the two sides raise their relations to new heights.

Iran's missile attack in Pakistan: Complexities and concerns

Qamar Bashir



These unprovoked attacks within Pakistan's territory were ostensibly aimed at bases affiliated with Jaish al-Adl, a militant group seeking an independent Baluchistan that has expanded its presence across Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. What makes these assaults particularly egregious is that they occurred despite existing communication channels between Iran and Pakistan, established for the purpose of enforcing border control, exchanging information

In a surprising and highly unusual move, Iran conducted a series of aggressive actions by launching six bomb-carrying drones and rockets into Pakistan's Balochistan province on Tuesday night (16.01.2024). The targets of these attacks, according to Iran, were homes purportedly housing the families of Jaish al-Adl fighters. Shockingly, the assault resulted in the tragic death of two children, with two women and a teenage girl sustaining injuries. The nature of these strikes raises questions about their proportionality and justification, as they were seemingly directed at non-combatants.

These unprovoked attacks within Pakistan's territory were ostensibly aimed at bases affiliated with Jaish al-Adl, a militant group seeking an independent Baluchistan that has expanded its presence across Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. What makes these assaults particularly egregious is that they occurred despite existing communication channels between Iran and Pakistan, established for the purpose of enforcing border control, exchanging information and intelligence, and fostering cross-country cooperation in addressing terrorist movements and plans. The blatant disregard for diplomatic norms and cooperative mechanisms underscores the severity and unpredictability of Iran's actions, adding a layer of complexity to the already sensitive regional dynamics. Iran's recent attacks on Pakistan flagrantly violated the longstanding friendly, brotherly, and fraternal ties between the two nations, which share common borders, religion, customs, and a shared history. The reckless response is believed to be fueled by Iran's anger over the twin bombings in the city of Kerman on January 5, 2024, where 89 people lost their lives and 280 were wounded during a memorial for the top Iranian General Qassem Soleimani. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi had vowed retaliation, stating that Iranian forces would choose the place and time for action. Pakistan wasn't the sole target of Iran's ire; a day before the attacks in Balochistan, Iran launched ballistic missiles in Iraq's Kurdish region, targeting sites allegedly linked to ISIS. Simultaneously, Iran hit locations in northern Syria, claiming it was defending its security and countering terrorism. These actions reflect Iran's broader strategy of responding aggressively to perceived threats, marking a significant escalation in the region and complicating diplomatic relations. The cross-border attack by Iran on Jaish-e-Adl hideouts inside Pakistan, given the considerable distance from Kerman, seems illogical and disconnected from the alleged retaliation motive for the bombings in Iran. This raises questions about the justification and strategic sense of such a move, especially when it risks straining historic religious and fraternal relations with Pakistan. Iran's simultaneous targeting of both ISIS and Jaish-al-Adl reflects a broader belief that these groups are tools manipulated by the United States, Saudi Ara-

bia, and Israel. The intention is perceived as instigating hatred between the Sunni and Shia sects within Islam, aiming to undermine Iran's religious revolution, threaten its social and religious fabric, and weaken the state of Iran. This aligns with Iran's perspective that it stands as a bulwark against the hegemonic designs of the USA, the West, and Israel in the region. Iran holds the belief that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as Daesh, emerged in the early 2000s and gained prominence around 2014 as a Sunni extremist organization. According to Iran, it is considered an offshoot of Al-Qaeda and was created by the USA, the West, and Israel. The core ideological motivation of ISIS, as perceived by Iran, revolves around establishing a caliphate governed by its interpretation of Islamic law, predominantly based on Sunni thoughts and practices. Iran emphasizes that being a predominantly Shia Muslim country, it is viewed as a direct adversary by ISIS due to the profound ideological differences between Sunni and Shia Islam. This animosity is deeply rooted in sectarian tensions, with ISIS considering Shia-majority regions, including Iran, as opponents to its extremist Sunni ideology. Iran also points to complex geopolitical factors and power struggles in the Middle East as contributing dynamics that lead to ISIS's attacks on Iran. Iran asserts that Jaish al-Adl, a Sunni militant organization formed in 2012 in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province after the dissolution of Jundallah, is supported and aided by the USA, the West, and Israel, according to Iran's perspective. Comprising ethnic Baloch Sunni militants, Jaish al-Adl's activities are driven by grievances related to ethnic, religious, and economic disparities. The group claims to champion the rights of Sunni Muslims in Iran, particularly in Baloch-majority areas, aiming for autonomy and addressing perceived discrimination by the Iranian government.

Iran argues that its military actions inside Pakistan's Balochistan province were a necessary response to safeguard its sovereignty and citizens from perceived threats posed by Jaish al-Adl. They contend that the presence of Jaish al-Adl militants in the Iran-Pakistan border region posed a direct and imminent danger, justifying preemptive self-defense measures. Additionally, Iran frames these actions as part of a broader counter-terrorism strategy, emphasizing the need to address the militant threat originating from Pakistani territory for the sake of regional security.

Pakistan contends that Iran's incursion into its territory were unacceptable, violates the principle of sovereignty and constitutes a breach of international law. Pakistan argues that diplomatic channels and engagement should have been pursued by Iran to address concerns related to Jaish al-Adl. The unilateral military actions are viewed by Pakistan as not only risking escalation but

also undermining potential diplomatic resolutions. Pakistan emphasizes that such actions have the potential to harm regional stability, as they could strain diplomatic relations, involve other regional actors, and exacerbate tensions in an already volatile area.

As a victim of external unprovoked missile and drone attacks, Pakistan retains the right to consider military, economic, and diplomatic responses. Each option comes with its own set of merits and demerits.

Pakistan, viewing the breach as a grave violation of sovereignty, is likely to respond by fortifying border defenses and deploying additional troops. While the immediate focus would be on averting a full-fledged military conflict through engagement with Iranian forces, the regional military dynamics may shift based on responses from neighboring countries. Afghanistan and India expressing concerns about the potential escalation adds another layer of complexity to the situation.

Heightened tensions between Iran and Pakistan hold significant economic ramifications, impacting trade and investment. The cautious approach of investors may lead to a decline in foreign direct investment for both countries. The economic disruption could extend beyond their borders, affecting global energy markets given the significance of both nations in the energy sector. As the possibility of economic sanctions looms, the need for stability and resolution becomes increasingly urgent. On the diplomatic front, international condemnation of Iran's actions and calls for an immediate ceasefire would be anticipated. To de-escalate tensions, diplomatic initiatives, possibly through the United Nations and regional organizations, become paramount. Seeking mediation from neutral third parties could facilitate dialogue and pave the way for a peaceful resolution. Pakistan's active engagement with the global community and involvement in international forums would be crucial to garner diplomatic support. The potential economic and diplomatic fallout underscores the urgency for constructive dialogue and international cooperation to address the crisis.

An ideal response from Pakistan would center on diplomatic engagement, international mediation, economic stabilization measures, and military restraint. Prioritizing dialogue through diplomatic channels and seeking mediation from neutral parties, Pakistan can underscore its commitment to a peaceful resolution. Stabilizing the economy and reassuring investors through collaborative efforts with international financial institutions will be crucial. Simultaneously, maintaining a robust defense posture while exercising restraint is imperative for regional stability. Actively engaging with the global community to garner diplomatic support and presenting evidence of Iran's violation of sovereignty will contribute to building a case for international understanding and intervention.

A casualty of war

Israeli footballer Sagiv Yehezkel was deported from Turkey this week after being detained by police and fired by Super Lig club Antalyaspor for expressing support during a soccer match for more than 100 hostages kidnapped by Hamas during its October 7 attack on Israel. Sagiv Yehezkel points to a message that says "100 days, 7.10" – a reference to Israeli hostages held in Gaza – after scoring for Antalyaspor.

A second Israeli player, 23-year-old Eden Kartsev, awaits a similar fate after his club, Istanbul Bashakshehir, said it was investigating him for "violating the sensibilities of the country" by reposting on X, formerly known as Twitter, an image with the hashtag "BringThemHomeNow." Assuming Mr. Kartsev will also be deported, Ramzi Safuri, a Palestinian Israeli, who plays for Antalyaspor alongside 28-year-old Mr. Yehezkel, will be the last Israeli footballer standing in Turkey. Bashakshehir maintains close ties with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), staunch Hamas supporters. Mr. Erdogan has described Hamas as a "liberation group." The hashtag is the slogan of a movement, driven by the hostages' families, demanding that Israel prioritise the release of the hostages above pursuit of the Gaza war. Israel's more than three-month-long devastating campaign against Gaza has so far failed to militarily free the hostages. In November, Israel achieved the release of more than 100 hostages in exchange for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons during a ceasefire mediated by Qatar. A senior US official, Brett McGurk, visited Qatar in recent days for "very serious and intensive discussions" on a possible new prisoner exchange deal. White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday. Senior US official, Brett McGurk. Photo: Mandel Ngan Via Getty Images Meanwhile, Qatar and France brokered a deal for the exchange of medicine for the hostages in return for the increased entry into Gaza of medical supplies and humanitarian aid. Turkey's backing of Hamas is likely one reason why it, unlike Qatar and Egypt, the two other Middle Eastern states with links to the group, has not played a role in efforts to achieve a ceasefire in the Gaza war and the freeing of hostages. Hamas released a video on Monday that appeared to show the dead bodies of two hostages after warning Israel they might be killed if it did not stop its bombardment of Gaza. An Israeli military spokesman denied the hostages were killed in air strikes targeting Hamas. Turkey's disciplinary action against the Israeli players raises troubling questions. It suggests Tur-

key cares about Gaza's human carnage caused by Israel's indiscriminate bombing of the Strip but not about the lives of innocent Israelis. To be fair, a "substantial" number of the remaining hostages are Israeli military personnel. Even so, Hamas videos released since the November exchange have featured mostly women and elderly captives. By disciplining the Israeli players on political grounds rather than by invoking world soccer body FIFA's banning of political expressions on the pitch, Turkey punctured one more hole in international sports associations' fiction that sports and politics are separate rather than Siamese twins inseparably joined at the hip. Ironically, the Turkish Football Federation last month cancelled a Super Lig final between clubs Galatasaray and Fenerbahce scheduled to be played in Riyadh after Saudi authorities banned players from wearing jerseys portraying Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the visionary who carved modern Turkey out of the ruins of the Ottoman empire. Galatasaray's Kerem Akturkoglu, right, challenges for the ball with Fenerbahce's Alexander Djiku, during a Turkish Super Lig match between Fenerbahce and Galatasaray at Sukru Saracoglu stadium in Istanbul, Turkey, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023. Photo: AP The disciplinary actions touch on one more major casualty of the Gaza war beyond the shocking 24,000 Gazan death toll, including 55 footballers; the hostages; and the mass Israeli arrests of West Bank Palestinians: freedom of expression. Irrespective of one's attitude towards the Gaza war, disciplining the Israeli players amounts to curtailing their freedom of expression. That is no surprise. Turkey is the fourth most prolific jailer of journalists globally behind Iran, China and Myanmar. Even so, the disciplinary measures are part of a global crackdown stretching from Israel and the United States into Europe on freedom of speech accelerated by the Gaza war but shaped long before Hamas' October 7 attack by Israel and its supporters seeking to label criticism of the Jewish state as anti-Semitism. Israel and pro-Israeli groups have skillfully exploited a blurring of the lines between anti-Zionist, anti-Israel, and anti-Semitic expression to try to squash criticism of Israel while ignoring, if not encouraging blatant racist and dehumanizing anti-Palestinian language. Increasingly, the upshot is a clampdown on free speech in democracies in which calls for a Gaza ceasefire and an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel are denounced as anti-Semitism. Public outrage in Europe has defeated attempts in countries like France, Germany, and Austria to ban pro-Palestinian protests, the waving of Palestinian flags, and/or the wearing of a keffiyeh, the chequered black-and-white scarf that symbolises Palestinian nationalism.

Similarly, Israeli far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir failed to ban anti-war protests organised by a minority of Israelis opposed to the assault on Gaza. Itamar Ben-Gvir speaking to the press ahead of a weekly cabinet meeting, Jerusalem, March 19, 2023. Photo: Abir Sultan-POOL/AFP/Getty Images The war has sparked debates in multiple democracies on the right to peaceful protest, with the media and human rights organisations weighing-in on the repercussions of silencing war critics. In the United States, the clampdown has involved censorship, putting college campuses at the centre of a debate on free speech and what constitutes anti-Semitism. In December, a US House of Representatives resolution, adopted by a wide margin, equated anti-Zionism to anti-Semitism. Thirty-seven of the 50 US states have passed legislation banning state offices from investing in or doing business with companies that support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in what amounts to curtailing freedom of choice. Various states have incorporated the ban in their contracts. BDS protest in Montreal, Canada. Photo: Tadamon.ca Germany's parliament passed a resolution in 2019 denouncing BDS as anti-Semitic. Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, BDS campaigns for boycotting Israeli products imported from occupied Palestinian lands and embargoing and divesting from companies doing business in occupied territory. To be sure anti-Semitism is on the rise as is anti-Muslim sentiment since October 7. The New York-based Anti-Defamation League reported anti-Semitic incidents had risen by 388 per cent in the first two weeks of the war, compared with the same period last year. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) said requests for help and reports of anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim bias increased by 172 per cent in the first two months of the war. In Israel, Meir Baruchin, a history and civics teacher, was fired from his job, investigated for intent to commit treason, and put in solitary confinement in Jerusalem's notorious Russian Compound prison for Facebook posts mourning Gaza civilians killed, criticising the Israeli military, and warning against wars of revenge. Israeli rights groups and lawyers say a crackdown on speech has resulted in scores being fired from their jobs, disciplined or expelled from their universities, and even arrested, often for posts on social media in support of Palestinians or critical of Israel's operations in Gaza. "Make no mistake: Baruchin was used as a political tool to send a political message. The motive for his arrest was deterrence – silencing any criticism or any hint of protest against Israeli policy," Israel's Haaretz newspaper said in an editorial.

Assuming Mr. Kartsev will also be deported, Ramzi Safuri, a Palestinian Israeli, who plays for Antalyaspor alongside 28-year-old Mr. Yehezkel, will be the last Israeli footballer standing in Turkey. Bashakshehir maintains close ties with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), staunch Hamas supporters. Mr. Erdogan has described Hamas as a "liberation group." The hashtag is the slogan of a movement, driven by the hostages' families, demanding that Israel prioritise the release of the hostages above pursuit of the Gaza

James Dorsey

Briefs

'Iran attack didn't target Pakistani...

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World Economic Forum in Davos on Wednesday, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said members of the terrorist group are Iranians who have taken shelters in Pakistan and that Tehran had repeatedly warned Islamabad to prevent their anti-Iran cross-border operations. "None of the nationals of the friendly and brotherly country of Pakistan were targeted by Iranian missiles and drones," he said. "The so-called Jaish al-Adl group, which is an Iranian terrorist group, was targeted," he said, adding that this was a response to the recent attacks on Iran by the group, which he said is linked to Israel. The minister also touched on Iran's attack into Iraq's Kurdistan region, saying they were retaliation for recent anti-Iran attacks staged by Israel's Mossad.

Fmr Afghan president...

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I wish we had such capability to target Quetta Shura when they were based there for 20 plus years" In his Tweet he further said that General. Musharraf in his famous encounter with him had said "Pakistan is not a banana republic where you can send your agents & then tell us that Usma Bin Laden is here". I replied, Mr. President, that is the title you just give to your country not me. Maybe it is, I didn't know then and I don't know now the meaning of the banana republic but I think it means that if a country has nuclear arsenal but gets kicked from all sides i.e. US drones fly from Qatar let alone night attack of May 2011, TTP from Waziristan, Iranian missiles from West, Indian surgical strikes from east and so on.", reads his statement.

China calls for restraint

FROM PAGE 01
"We consider both Iran and Pakistan as close neighbours and major Islamic countries," she said. Pakistan has strongly condemned the unprovoked violation of its airspace by Iran, warning that violation of Pakistan's sovereignty is completely unacceptable and can have serious consequences "It is even more concerning that this illegal act has taken place despite the existence of several channels of communication between Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan's strong protest has already been lodged with the concerned senior official in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran," Pakistan's Foreign Office added. Both Iran and Pakistan are close partners of Beijing and members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Iran offered no immediate official comment but its state-run Nour News agency said the attack destroyed the headquarters of the militant group Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice). Earlier today, caretaker Balochistan Information Minister Jan Achakzai said the violation of Pakistani sovereignty by Iran "damages relations" between Tehran and Islamabad. "The enemy forces are trying to intervene externally in Pakistan, especially in Balochistan. The enemies will never succeed in their plans," the minister added. Formed in 2012, Jaish al-Adl is black-listed by Iran as a terrorist group and has carried out several attacks on Iranian soil in recent years. The strike came after Iran launched missile attacks on "spy headquarters" and "terrorist" targets in Syria, and in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region. The Iranian strikes add to multiple crises across the Middle East, with Israel waging a war against Hamas in Gaza and pro-Palestinian Houthi rebels in Yemen attacking commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

Kakar for equitable...

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said it was key to ensure sustainable global development. Keeping in view the development of technology, PM Kakar said that the digital economy would attain more importance in the days ahead. He said every region of the world should benefit from the development being carried out in the technology sector.

Allen powers NZ to T20I series win over Pakistan

Finn Allen smashes 137 runs in 62 balls as NZ set Pak a daunting 225-run target

OUR CORRESPONDENTS

DUNEDIN: Finn Allen starred as New Zealand beat Pakistan by 45 runs and clinched the T20I series in Dunedin on Wednesday. Allen smashed 137 runs in 62 balls as New Zealand set Pakistan a daunting 225-run target in the third T20I of the five-match series. In reply, Babar Azam, 58 off 37, scored his third consecutive fifty of the series but it was not enough to take Pakistan over the line. Pakistan reached 95 for two in the 11th over, but saw a clutch of wickets derail their chase, losing four for just 39 runs. Mohammad Nawaz scored 28 runs in 15 balls, with the help of two fours and as many maximums. Mitchell Santner bowled an economical spell, taking one wicket for 26 runs in four overs. Allen took Pakistan to the cleaners as he notched up the highest indi-



vidual score for New Zealand in men's T20Is, surpassing the previous best of 123 set by Brendon McCullum. He also hit the joint-most sixes, 16, in an innings in men's T20Is. The opener was particularly harsh on Pakistan pacer Haris Rauf, smashing 27

off one over including three sixes, two fours and a single. Allen's whirlwind knock put New Zealand in a strong position to clinch the five-match series with two matches left and maintain their unbeaten record at Dunedin's University Oval. After the early departure of

Devon Conway for seven, Allen and Tim Seifert added 125 for the second wicket, with Seifert only contributing 31 as he decided to take singles to keep in-form batter on strike. The umpires had to call for replacement balls thrice, after Allen smacked them out of the

park. The opener was eventually dismissed in the 18th over when he was bowled by an off-cutter from Zaman Khan, who then applauded the New Zealand batter as he left the field. Rauf conceded 60 off his four overs while Mohammad Nawaz gave up 44 and Shaheen Afridi 43 on a dismal day with the ball for Pakistan. Both teams made three changes heading into the clash. Lockie Ferguson, Tim Seifert, and Matthew Henry came in for Kane Williamson, Adam Milne and Ben Sears. Leg-spinner Usama Mir and all-rounder Aamer Jamal were excluded from the Pakistan lineup, while pacer Abbas Afridi was ruled out due to a low grade abdominal wall muscle strain. Mohammad Wasim Jr, Mohammad Nawaz and Zaman Khan replaced the aforementioned trio for Pakistan. The remaining two matches are in Christchurch on Friday and Sunday.

Pakistan expels...

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"The enemy forces are trying to intervene externally in Pakistan, especially in Balochistan. The enemies will never succeed in their plans," the minister said. The minister's comments came during a presser in Quetta where he spoke in the wake of a drone and missile attack by Iran on 'militant bases' near its shared border with Pakistan late on Tuesday. The attack, however, resulted in the death of two innocent children and injured three girls. Islamabad, on the other hand, has strongly denounced the strike, terming it "unprovoked and completely unacceptable", warning Iran of serious consequences after Tehran violated its airspace.

CJP Faez Isa says...

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"How many licenses of prohibited weapons were issued across the country?" the chief justice asked, seeking details from concerned authorities. The Supreme Court also issued notices to the interior secretary and provincial home secretaries, inspector generals, attorney general for Pakistan and provincial advocate generals. It has also directed sending a copy of the order. CJP Isa lamented that the police did not demand a license from the person whose weapon was stolen.

ECP finalizes...

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transparent way. He assured that shortage of police personnel will be addressed during polls with the cooperation of security agencies. He said the entire election process will be strictly monitored and indiscriminate action will be taken according to law against the candidates involved in misconduct of breaching the election code of conduct. Sikandar Sultan Raja directed relevant authorities to assure the security of all voters and leaders of political parties. He further asked to provide security to rallies and public gatherings and implement elections' code of conduct in letter and spirit. Meanwhile, The Punjab Police on Wednesday pointed out that 19 politicians face security threats. Punjab Inspector General (IG) of Police Dr. Usman Anwar informed a meeting held to review security situation in the province with the Chief Election Commissioner in the chair about the threat.

All parties involved...

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ahead of the February 8 general elections. The PPP chairman has been campaigning across the country all month. Addressing party workers and supporters in Badin, Bilawal said the PPP believed in the power of the people. "While other political parties are fighting among themselves, we are fighting for you," he claimed. He stated that the PPP was the only party that had prepared and presented its manifesto before the nation. Bilawal also mentioned his 10-point agenda if his party emerges victorious in the polls, which includes addressing problems such as poverty, inflation, unemployment and hunger. Turning his guns on the PML-N, Bilawal said "a person wants to run for the prime minister for a fourth time [...] he does not have an election campaign or a manifesto".

Pak receives \$700mn...

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Under the bailout deal, the IMF also got Pakistan to raise \$1.34 billion in new taxation to meet fiscal adjustments. The measures fuelled all-time high inflation of 38% year-on-year in May, which is still hovering above 30%. "The authorities took challenging steps to bring both electricity and natural gas prices closer to costs in 2023. Continuing with regularly-scheduled adjustments and pushing cost-side power sector reforms are vital to improving the sector's viability and protecting fiscal sustainability," Sayeh said. As Pakistan has secured the IMF loan, analysts expect the struggling South Asian nation to secure more multilateral and bilateral loans.



ISLAMABAD: Youngsters are playing foosball Table game in a Katchi Abadi in the Federal Capital. – Online

Debutant Joseph gives West Indies some hope

ADELAIDE: Debutant Shamar Joseph gave the West Indies some hope after taking two top-order wickets during Australia's reply to the visitors' first innings total of 188 in the opening Test in Adelaide Wednesday. Australia were 59-2 at stumps, with Usman Khawaja not out 30 and Cameron Green on six. Australia were only 129 runs behind, but with key batsmen Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne back in the pavilion. Earlier, Australian captain Pat Cummins won the toss and sent the West Indies in to bat on a cool and overcast morning, a decision that proved fruitful when the visitors were reduced to 133-9. But Joseph, playing only his sixth first class match, gave the score some respectability with a breezy 36 off only 41 balls. The best was still to come for the 24-year-old, who came on as first change and had Smith caught at third slip with his first ball in Test cricket. He then enticed a hook shot from Labuschagne, which went straight to Gudakesh Motie at deep fine leg to leave Australia 45-2. That could have been even better had wicketkeeper Josh Da Silva not dropped Khawaja on one, a catch he should have taken. Earlier, Josh Hazlewood took 4-44, including his 250th Test wicket, and Cummins 4-41 as Australia ran through the West Indies batting line-up. Australia had gone into the Test making only one change from the team that beat Pakistan 3-0 earlier in the summer. Smith moved to the top of the Aussie order in place of the retired David Warner and Green was back at number four. It was a different story for the West Indies, who gave debuts to Joseph and all-rounders Kavem Hodge and Justin Greaves. **Windies skittled out:** West Indies openers Kraigg Brathwaite and Tagenarine Chanderpaul began sedately, content to leave as many balls as possible. Cummins brought himself on in the 10th over with immediate results, a fuller ball enticing Chanderpaul into an expansive drive, only to slice the ball to gully where Green used all his height to take a comfortable catch. Cummins then removed Brathwaite with a beautiful ball that was angled in, then straightened and took the top of off stump to leave the West Indies 27-2 after the first hour. West Indies look to spring surprise on Australia: Alick Athanaze and Kirk McKenzie then steadied the ship and looked to take the West Indies to lunch at two down, but with the score on 52, Athanaze opted to leave a Hazlewood delivery only to see the ball cannon into his off stump. – DNA

Andreeva stuns Jabeur in AO second round

"I was really nervous before the match, but I saw that she was nervous too. It kind of helped me, because I know I'm not the only one who is nervous before the match"

MELBOURNE: Russian 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva put her school work to one side Wednesday and instead underlined her huge potential by crushing sixth seed Ons Jabeur in under an hour at the Australian Open. Playing her first main draw at Melbourne Park, Andreeva was electric in downing the three-time Grand Slam runner-up 6-0, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena in just 54 minutes. Ranked 47, it was her first win over a top-10 player, having burst onto the scene when she reached the fourth round at Wimbledon last year as a qualifier. "I was really nervous before the match, but I saw that she was nervous too. It kind of helped me, because I know I'm not the only one who is nervous before the match," said Andreeva. "I decided to just enjoy, because it's Rod Laver Arena, I'm playing against the person that I like. I decided just to play, and I think I played OK." It was her second appearance on Melbourne's centre court after last year losing the girls final to fellow Russian Alina Korneeva. She admitted it left her "super upset" and drove her forward against Jabeur. "Today when I saw that I play on Rod Laver, I said that this time I

have to take my chance and I have to win on the big court for the first time, and so I did," she said. Andreeva made her Grand Slam bow at the French Open last year with a run to the third round after coming through qualifying, ahead of her exploits at Wimbledon. In her only other Grand Slam, she lost in the second round of the US Open to eventual champion Coco Gauff. She is pursuing her dream of a tennis career while still juggling school. "I still have to do a lot of school. It actually started two days ago, so I have to do it," she said, adding "I don't like chemistry". At such a young age, Andreeva is restricted by the WTA Tour in number of tournaments she can play and she said it was too early to be thinking about what how far she can climb up the rankings. "I mean, I'm 16. Why do I have to think about the rankings? I'm going a bit higher, and so my goal is to go higher and higher, maybe for a little bit but still higher," she said. "So I don't know. I just try not to think about that and just to think about tennis and that's it." The first set against the Tunisian was a 20-minute demolition job, with 29-year-old Jabeur completely out of touch. She won only eight points across the six games, and just three from the baseline, while making 10 unforced errors. Her serve was not firing, with only 38 percent of first serve points won and just 13 percent on second serve. Jabeur, who has made the final twice at Wimbledon and once at the US Open, finally held serve to get off the mark in the opening game of set two, raising her finger in celebration. But the teenage Russian kept coming and broke again for a 2-1 lead, then made it 4-1 as Jabeur's shoulders slumped, knowing it was all over. – Agencies

Djokovic and Sabalenka back in Australian Open action
Belarusian second seed will be on centre court ahead of Serbian superstar to face Czech qualifier Brenda Fruhvirtova

SPORTS DESK

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic resumes his quest for a 25th Grand Slam title Wednesday against home hope Alexei Popyrin, while fellow defending champion Aryna Sabalenka faces her second consecutive qualifier. Serbian superstar Djokovic dropped a set against unheralded Croat Dino Prizmic in his opening clash and will not want to do repeat the feat against 43rd-ranked Popyrin. But the 10-time Australian Open winner heads into the night match on Rod Laver Arena with lingering concerns over his health after admitting he was "a bit under the weather" against Prizmic. "Look, it is what it is. You just have to try to deal with it and get over it and accept the circumstances and try to make the most of it," he said. Should he come through against the Australian, the world number one will face a third-round clash against veteran Frenchman Gael Monfils or Argentine Tomas Martin Etcheverry, who ended Andy Murray's tournament. Sabalenka will be on centre court ahead of Djokovic to face Czech qualifier



Brenda Fruhvirtova. The powerful Belarusian second seed dropped just one game in obliterating her first-round opponent, with Fruhvirtova set to face more of her wrath. Men's fourth seed Jannik Sinner is also in action, against Dutchman Jesper de Jong on Margaret Court Arena as he looks to maintain his recent impressive form, which has included a win over Djokovic. US Open champion Coco Gauff, who romped through her first match, will follow on from Sinner against fellow American Caroline Dolehide in her quest for a maiden title at Melbourne Park. Men's seventh seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, last year's losing finalist, meets Australian Jordan Thompson, but is not worried about a hostile crowd, with a big Greek contingent in Melbourne. "I know I have a great fan base, I have a great crowd by my side. This gives me belief, this gives me an additional type of confidence that is not typically there on other tournaments," he said. Other players in action include women's sixth seed Ons Jabeur against exciting Russian 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva, former champion Caroline Wozniacki, and men's fifth seed Andrey Rublev.

Briefs

Explosion at Thai fireworks factory kills 17

DNA

BANGKOK: At least 17 people have been killed in an explosion at a fireworks factory in central Thailand. The incident took place in a remote area in the province of Suphan Buri, about 120km (74 miles) north of the capital Bangkok, police said, according to a video shared with media of Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin being briefed by telephone. The provincial governor told the news agency that no survivors had yet been found. Srettha expressed his condolences and issued an order to help the victims and families of the deceased. One worker was killed in an accident at the factory in November 2022.—APP

Russia blasts Davos meeting on Ukraine as 'failure'

MOSCOW: Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova criticized as a "failure" the results of the fourth international meeting on Ukraine in the Copenhagen format held earlier in the day in the Swiss city of Davos. The first meeting in the Copenhagen format was held in June 2023 in the capital of Denmark. Then the European Union, US and Ukraine invited countries of the so-called "Global South" for informal consultations to win over the non-Western world, which insists on solving the Ukrainian crisis at the negotiating table. Zakharova said in a statement that although the number of countries that took part in the latest meeting increased from last time's 66 to 82, their participation cannot be called "meaningful" because they were presented at a low level and as observers. The participants did not adopt a joint final document and the communiqué of the presidents contains a note that it does not reflect the views of all participants, she noted. "Today, more and more countries of the Global South and East... openly say that without Russia, any discussion of the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis makes no sense," she emphasized. She criticized Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's initiative, which he called "a peace formula," saying many of its demands, including an ultimatum to Russia to pull out its forces to the 1991 borders and pay reparations, are "unrealistic.—APP

UK inflation rate rises to 4% in Dec

LONDON: Britain's annual rate of consumer price inflation rose for the first time in 10 months in December, increasing to 4% from 3.9% in November which was its lowest in more than two years, official figures unexpectedly showed on Wednesday. The data, which follows bigger-than-expected falls in inflation in recent months, is likely to concern the Bank of England which raised interest rates to a 15-year high of 5.25% in August. The central bank forecast in November that it would take until late 2025 to return inflation to its 2% target, but many economists now think this could happen as soon as April or May this year due partly to a slide in wholesale gas prices. Surging gas prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine pushed British inflation to a 41-year high of 11.1% in October 2022, adding significantly to existing inflation pressures from supply chain difficulties following the COVID-19 pandemic. Wednesday's figures showed that core inflation - which excludes volatile food, energy, alcohol and tobacco prices - was 5.1% in December, the same rate as November. Services inflation increased to 6.4% in December from 6.3% in November. The BoE looks at both core CPI and services inflation as a better guide to underlying price pressures in the economy, especially those caused by rapid wage growth.—Agencies

Ethiopian DPM and FM meet Pak PM Kakar at Davos

They discussed mutual engagements at various levels including the highest levels of respective governments to further strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation



DNA

DAVOS: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, H.E. Demeke Mekonnen, earlier this morning met with the Caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan, H.E. Anwar ul Haq Kakar on the margins of the World Economic Forum

(WEF) in Davos-Klosters in Switzerland. They discussed mutual engagements at various levels including the highest levels of respective governments to further strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation. By citing the fact that Ethiopia opened its Embassy in Islamabad recently, DPM and FM Demeke reiterated Ethiopia's commitment to consolidate



Ethio-Pakistani ties. He also mentioned that Ethiopia will work towards diversifying its engagements with Pakistan including trade and investment. Caretaker Prime Minister Kakar, on his part stated, by capitalizing on the positive momentum from the commitment of the governments of Pakistan and Ethiopia to boost relations, his country will work

to strengthen ties in the areas of trade, investment, skills transfer as well as people-to-people relations. The Embassy of Ethiopia to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was officially inaugurated on 11 May 2023 while Ambassador Jemal Beker is the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

EU 27 states to offer Ukraine additional funding

European Union's chief confidence that all 27 member states will agree to jointly extend more financial aid to Ukraine

WEB DESK

BRUSSELS: The European Union's chief executive voiced confidence on Wednesday that all 27 member states will agree to jointly extend more financial aid to Ukraine. Hungary has resisted agreement on an aid package, raising the possibility of the other 26 countries giving funds to Ukraine under separate bilateral deals with Kyiv. Ursula von der Leyen, who heads the executive European Commission, told EU lawmakers: "I am confident that we will find a solution by 27." EU leaders last month agreed to start accession talks with Ukraine but Hungary vetoed granting 50 billion euros (54 billion



US dollars) in aid for Kyiv through 2027. The bloc's 27 national leaders will meet again in Brussels on February 1 to try to agree on providing more financial assistance to Kyiv, which relies heavily on Western support to defend itself against Russian forces who invaded almost two years ago. The European Commission proposed extending the support through a review of the EU's shared budget, which would also provide more financing for migration and other priori-

ties. But Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has refused to channel the aid through the joint budget run by the Commission, leaving the other 26 countries considering proceeding without Budapest. The prospect of 26 countries giving aid to Ukraine under separate bilateral deals with Kyiv is one alternative that is under discussion. That is seen as more complicated and expensive than going via the EU budget, as well as damaging the bloc's unity. Meanwhile, France sends 40 missiles to Ukraine: Macron France will deliver to Ukraine a new batch of around 40 SCALP long-range cruise missiles as well as hundreds of bombs as Kyiv fights the Russian

invasion, President Emmanuel Macron told reporters at a news conference that Europe's priority must be to "not let Russia win," announcing he would make a new visit to the Ukrainian capital in February. "Letting Russia win would mean accepting that international law is not respected," he said. Macron said that France was working on a new bilateral security agreement with Ukraine - along the lines of a pact agreed between Kyiv and London - that would be announced during his February visit. The SCALP is capable of striking targets far into the country's Russian-occupied east, well behind front lines that have remained relatively fixed for months.

Ukraine says 2024 priority is to gain control of skies

DAVOS: Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Wednesday said his country's priority for 2024 was to gain control over its skies, as Russia's full-scale assault enters its third year. His comments at the World Economic Forum in Davos came just hours after Russian drone and missile attacks overnight wounded 20 people across Ukraine. The barrage left massive craters in the southern city of Odesa where AFP journalists saw residential buildings charred in the wake of the assault. Rescue workers hauled out vulnerable residents on stretchers from housing blocs that had had their windows blown out, footage from emergency services showed. "In 2024, of course the priority is to throw Russia from the skies," Kuleba said in an address to the World Economic Forum in Davos. "Because the one who controls the skies will define when and how the war will end," he added. Kyiv has long called on the West to deliver advanced fighter jets to support its troops entrenched in the south and east of the country. Responding to those calls, President Emmanuel Macron announced this week that France would deliver a new batch of around 40 SCALP long-range cruise missiles as well as hundreds of bombs as Kyiv fights the Russian invasion. But even that pledge is limited compared to the range of munitions that Russian forces have recently been raining down across Ukraine. Officials in Kyiv have seen a steep rise in civilian casualties since December, as Moscow intensifies air attacks, reversing a downward trend seen earlier in 2023, the United Nations has warned.—APP

Get ready for Disease X, warns WHO chief

LONDON: The World Health Organization (WHO) secretary-general on Wednesday highlighted the importance of getting prepared for Disease X, expressing hope that countries will reach a pandemic agreement by this May to address this "common enemy." "The pandemic agreement can bring all the experience all the challenges that we have faced and all the solutions into one," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Saying that Disease X, an unknown disease, was used as a term for the first time in 2018, he noted that there are unknown things that may happen and anything happening is "a matter of when not if." "We should not face things unprepared, we can prepare for some unknown things as well," Ghebreyesus told a panel discussion titled "Preparing for Disease X." Touching on the importance of research and development as well as health infrastructure and workforce to be prepared for Disease X, he stressed that primary health is crucial as the world saw during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Even communities can prepare for Disease X," said Ghebreyesus, adding public health, education, and communication should be at the center. Reiterating the importance of the pandemic agreement, he stressed that this can help the world prepare for the future in a better way.—APP

EU parliament backs South Africa's ICJ case

ANKARA: In a compelling plenary session of the European Parliament (EP), members passionately called for the European Union to rally behind South Africa's International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against Israel, accusing the nation of committing "genocide" in Gaza. Irish EP member Clare Daly delivered a powerful speech, asserting that because of its actions, including the killing of tens of thousands of civilians and relentless bombardment in Gaza, Israel has lost the support of the international public. Daly criticized Israel for what she called "provocative" actions aimed at inciting regional conflict, and she accused the nation of seeking assistance from the

US to evade accountability. Daly's scathing remarks also targeted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the US, drawing parallels to the situation in Yemen. "As we saw in Yemen, butcher Biden is preparing for office with Madame Genocide (von der Leyen) by his side. They are the ones who ensure the continuation of Israeli terrorism. If it weren't for them, it would have ended long ago," she said. Ciaran Cuffe, an EP member with the Greens group, emphasized the need for Israel and its Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, to face consequences for violating international law. Cuffe highlighted the humanitarian crisis in Gaza,

where continuous Israeli bombardment hinders the delivery of essential aid and medical supplies, leading to surgeries on children being conducted without anesthesia. Finnish EP member Heidi Hautala also urged for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, citing the impossibility of meeting basic medical needs due to Israel's bombings. Hautala stressed the significance of the ICJ thoroughly investigating the allegations of Israeli violations of the Genocide Convention. She called on the EU to throw its weight behind South Africa's case and demand Israel's compliance with any interim measures imposed by the court. Portuguese Socialist EP member Pedro

Marques brought attention to the staggering death toll in Gaza, with 70% of the victims being women and children. Marques emphasized the urgency of holding those responsible for violations of international law and war crimes accountable. French EP member Manon Aubry underscored the need to support South Africa's case at the ICJ, labeling Israel's actions as "genocidal." She called for the suspension of partnership agreements with Israel and a halt to arms exports, urging an end to complicity. Greek EP member Kostas Papadakis expressed support for South Africa's ICJ case, describing the ongoing attacks in Gaza as "genocide."—APP

Erdogan says to escalate anti Kurdish operations

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed on Tuesday to widen military operations against groups linked to Kurdish militants in neighboring Iraq and Syria, days after an attack on a Turkish military base in Iraq killed nine Turkish soldiers. Turkish warplanes and drones have been carrying out airstrikes on targets in Syria and Iraq believed to be affiliated with the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, since attackers attempted to infiltrate a military base in northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region on Friday. Five soldiers died in the attack while four others died later of critical injuries. In a televised address following a Cabinet meeting, Erdogan said Turkish jets had struck a total of 114 targets in Syria and Iraq in operations launched in the last five days. A further 60 infrastructure and facilities were destroyed in separate operations by Turkey's intelligence agency, the president added. Erdogan said Turkey was determined to eliminate the threat from Kurdish militants "at its source" in Iraq and Syria. It was not clear if Ankara, which has carried out land offensives in the past, is contemplating a new ground operation. "Our operations

will continue until every inch of the mountains in northern Iraq that have become the source of terrorist actions... are secured," he said. "In the same way, we will not stop until the terror nests in Syria... are completely destroyed." The Turkish leader continued: "God willing, in the coming months, we will definitely take new steps in this direction, regardless of who says what, what threats they make or what their plans are." On Monday, Kurdish-led authorities said Turkish shelling and airstrikes have targeted dozens of infrastructure facilities in northeast Syria over the past days wounding at least 10 people and cutting out electricity and water supplies in wide areas held by the main U.S.-backed group in the war-torn country. The PKK, which maintains bases in northern Iraq, is considered a terror organization by Turkey's Western allies, including the United States. Tens of thousands of people have died since the start of the conflict in 1984. Turkey also considers Syrian Kurdish groups as terrorist organizations but the U.S. disagrees with that status and regards them as allies in the fight against the Islamic State group in Syria.—APP

Fidan hails Turkish-Japanese friendship

ANKARA: Türkiye and Japan will cooperate more closely as the two nations share deep-rooted historical friendship bonds. Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told a joint news conference with his Japanese counterpart Yoko Kamikawa in Ankara. "We developed our relations on this solid foundation and elevated them to the level of a strategic partnership in 2013," Fidan said. He recalled that Japan provided significant assistance to Türkiye after twin earthquakes jolted the southern part of the country on Feb. 6, 2023. Fidan said that Japan continues to contribute to reconstruction activities in the region. "I would like to express my gratitude once again to our Japanese friends for this solidarity. We are working together to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the relationship in a worthy manner," Fidan said as the two nations mark the centennial of their diplomatic relations. "Throughout the year, we aim to add new dimensions to our relationship through academic, cultural and economic events." He added that they are pleased that the Turkish-Japanese Science and Technology University will become operational in 2024. Like many other fields, Türkiye attaches importance to implementing the existing collaboration between the two countries in the energy field, he said. "We are also closely monitoring Japan's recent steps in defense and security," said Fidan, adding they believe there are new opportunities for cooperation between the two countries in the defense industry. During the meeting, there was an emphasis on the need to end the Israeli massacre in Gaza and the Russia-Ukraine war, he said. "We believe that a lasting peace in the Middle East can only be achieved through a two-state solution. We are pleased to share the same viewpoint with them." "We both agree that the solution can only be based on the 1967 borders, with establishing an independent and sovereign State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, maintaining its territorial integrity," Fidan added. Both countries have also decided to collaborate on humanitarian aid for Gaza, he said. For her part, Kamikawa said that Türkiye and Japan, being countries frequently affected by earthquakes, often assist each other in times of difficulty. She said Japan has been involved in numerous aid activities in Türkiye following the twin earthquakes in February 2023. She also noted that Türkiye offered assistance to Japan after the earthquakes centered in Ishikawa Prefecture and expressed her thanks.—Agencies

Canada minister : Study permits from India drop amid dispute

OTTAWA: The number of study permits Canada issued to Indian students fell sharply late last year after India ejected Canadian diplomats who would process the permits and fewer Indian students applied due to a diplomatic dispute over the murder of a Sikh separatist leader in Canada, a top Canadian official told media reporters. Immigration Minister Marc Miller added in an interview that he believes the number of study permits to Indians is unlikely to rebound soon. Diplomatic tensions erupted after Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in June said there was evidence connecting Indian government agents to the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia. The tensions are likely to weigh on the numbers going forward, Miller said. "Our relationship with India has really halved our ability to process a lot of applications from India," Miller said. Canada is a popular destination for international students since it is relatively easy to obtain work permits after finishing courses. The government intends to address "a very generous" program for postgraduate work permits and to crack down on "fly-by-night" universities, called designated learning institutes, he said. The government already plans curbs to the number of off-campus work hours for international students, which the food service and retail industries fear could cause labor shortages. In 2023, the government projected that some 900,000 international students would study in Canada that year, about three times that of a decade ago. Miller said 40 percent of those students - or some 360,000 - were Indian. The number of permits given to Indian students declined by 4 percent last year, but they remained the largest group.

Russian forces shot down 69 Ukrainian drones

MOSCOW: Russia's Defense Ministry said Tuesday that 69 Ukrainian drones and 13 HIMARS rockets were shot down over the past day. Ukrainian troops continued attempts to storm Russian positions and Russian forces repelled six Ukrainian attacks in the Kupiansk area. All assault attempts were repelled, with Russian forces destroying several pieces of heavy military equipment including two German-made Leopard 2 tanks, it said. Ukraine also shelled several Russian border regions including Bryansk and Belgorod, resulting in the destruction of a number of private houses and service facilities, according to the ministry. Russia launched its "special military operation" in Ukraine in February 2022.—APP

High hopes for Japan's 'Moon Sniper' mission

TOKYO: Japan's "Moon Sniper" spacecraft will attempt a historic touchdown on the lunar surface this weekend using pinpoint technology the country hopes will lead to success where many have failed. With its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) mission, Japan wants to become the fifth nation to pull off a fiendishly tricky soft landing on the rocky surface. Only the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India have accomplished the feat, and Japan's lander - equipped with a rolling robot developed by a major toy company - is designed to do so with unprecedented precision. The descent of the lightweight SLIM craft, nicknamed the "Moon Sniper" by space agency JAXA, is scheduled to start at midnight Japan time on Saturday (1500 GMT Friday). If all goes to plan, the touchdown will be around 20 minutes later. The craft is targeting an area within 100 metres (330 feet) of a spot on the lunar surface - far less than the usual landing zone of several kilometres.—APP

Briefs

Violation of Pakistani sovereignty by Iran 'damages ties'

DNA

QUETTA: Caretaker Balochistan Information Minister Jan Achakzai Wednesday said the violation of Pakistani sovereignty by Tehran "damages relations" between Iran and Pakistan. "The enemy forces are trying to intervene externally in Pakistan, especially in Balochistan. The enemies will never succeed in their plans," the minister said. The minister's comments came during a presser in Quetta where he spoke in the wake of a drone and missile attack by Iran on 'militant bases' near its shared border with Pakistan late on Tuesday. The attack, however, resulted in the death of two innocent children and injured three girls.

Islamabad, on the other hand, has strongly denounced the strike, terming it "unprovoked and completely unacceptable", warning Iran of serious consequences after Tehran violated its airspace. "Pakistan strongly condemns the unprovoked violation of its airspace by Iran which resulted in death of two innocent children while injuring three girls," Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in a statement.

Achakzai maintained that the Pakistani government and security agencies are fully prepared to establish peace and order in Balochistan. "We are capable of fully countering hostile forces everywhere." Meanwhile, former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif said he was "shocked at the Iranian breach of Pakistani sovereignty". Taking to X, formerly Twitter, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz president wrote: "This missile attack is against spirit of our friendship and principles of good neighbourliness, especially as it undermines the historic relationship between our two countries."

LHC allows Sheikh Rashid to contest elections

DNA

LAHORE: Lahore High Court on Wednesday allowed Awami Muslim League (AML) chief to contest upcoming general elections to be held on Feb 8. A three-member bench of the Lahore High Court (LHC) conducted hearing of an appeal against a ruling under which former interior minister Sheikh Rashid's nomination papers were accepted. The LHC upheld the decision of appellate tribunal. The petitioner had taken the stance that AML chief's nomination papers were accepted ignoring the facts. The petitioner further appealed to the LHC to set aside the appellate tribunal's decision.

Japan to grant \$3.62m to support Polio Programme

The new funding is part of the continuous support from Government of Japan to the Polio Eradication programme since 1996



STAFF REPORT

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Japan has announced a new US\$ 3.62 million grant to procure essential oral polio vaccines as part of its continued support to polio eradication efforts in Pakistan. Pakistan Polio Programme will use these funds to procure more than 21 million doses of vaccines to support polio campaigns in 2024. Pakistan is one of only two countries globally that has yet to stop polio. In 2023, Pakistan reported a total of 6 cases of polio. With polio cases cornered to only a few locations

in the country, the Government of Pakistan and partners are preparing to launch an aggressive plan of activities in 2024 to stop this life altering disease for children. Each national immunization drive targets over 44 million children under the age of five, with more than 370,000 frontline workers, predominantly women, playing a crucial role to ensure the Polio Programme's outreach. "Despite the challenges, Pakistan will remain relentless in our drive to put an end to polio in the next year," said Dr. Nadeem Jan, Federal Health Minister, Government of Pakistan. "As we prepare to launch polio campaigns in 2024, together with our part-

ners we will maintain an emergency focus towards resolving the remaining challenges that stand in our way to reach all children. "The unwavering support of the Government of Japan has been instrumental in helping us get closer to reaching zero cases. We are thankful to the Government and people of Japan for their continued support towards polio eradication in Pakistan," Dr. Nadeem Jan added. Mr. ITO Takeshi, Charge d' Affaires ad interim of Japan to Pakistan, appreciated the significant gains made last year in controlling the spread of poliovirus. "I would like to express my sincere respect to polio workers and law en-

forcement agencies for their dedicated mission for humanity", said Mr. ITO. Noting the importance of a clear and strong commitment by the Pakistani leadership to end polio, he said, "Japan would like to renew its commitment to continuing its efforts toward the ultimate goal of polio eradication by promoting routine immunization." The new funding is part of the continuous support from the Government of Japan to the Polio Eradication programme since 1996. To date, the grant and loan contribution from the Government of Japan has amounted to approx. US\$ 242.16 million dollars to support the Polio programme in Pakistan through UNICEF. "We appreciate the government's commitment to making all-out efforts to ensure all children receive the essential vaccine. We believe that vaccines, the most effective way to strengthen children's immunity, will be used effectively with the understanding of parents and communities and the efforts of frontline workers. We sincerely hope that all the polio campaigns of this year will be conducted successfully toward zero polio cases", said Mr. Tsuyoshi Hara, Senior Representative, JICA Pakistan Office. "With fewer cases reported in 2023 compared to 2022, we find ourselves at the crossroads between progress and regression. Six cases are far too many, meaning six children affected permanently by polio," said Melissa Corkum, UNICEF Chief of Polio in Pakistan. "Today with this generous pledge from the Government and people of Japan, we renew our commitment to ensuring a polio-free world. One step forward, no steps back towards reaching all children with life-saving vaccines."

9 injured in Quetta blast

DNA

QUETTA: Nine people, including a traffic policeman and three children, were injured in a blast on Quetta's Zarghoon Road on Wednesday, according to police. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operation Jawad Tariq confirmed the number of injured to Dawn.com. He said that explosive material was planted in a heap of trash that had been lying for some time. The explosion occurred when children, who were picking trash, were sifting through the garbage, he said. It was unclear what kind of explosive device was used, Tariq said. "The explosion was not a security lapse," he asserted. "Foolproof security arrangements have been made with regards to the elections," he added.

The head of the Quetta Trauma Centre, DrArbab Kamran, said that the injured were shifted to Civil Hospital. He added that two people were reported to be in critical condition. On Tuesday, PPP candidate Mir Asghar Rind had survived a grenade attack in Turbat.

The incident occurred when an unknown motorcyclist threw a grenade at his residence in Overseas Colony, Rind, a PPP leader and candidate for the Balochistan Assembly, remained unharmed but his brother sustained injuries.

Nawaz might flee to London again after poll defeat: Imran

PTI founder suggests placing PML-N supremo's name on ECL until elections

KHAYAM ABBASI

We are not responsible for PTI losing 'bat': Shehbaz

DNA

LAHORE: Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif reiterated on Wednesday that his party saved the country from bankruptcy and brought economic stability. "If asked in the court of Allah, I would say that Pakistan was saved from bankruptcy," Shehbaz maintained that the survival of the state was the priority and not politics or remaining in power, expressing no regret in that outcome. Furthermore, the PML-N president underlined the strenuous efforts made by the PML-N, stating, "Working day and night for 16 months, we saved Pakistan from bankruptcy." Shehbaz mentioned the impact of the "storm of inflation" and the broken IMF agreement, attributing these challenges to the hindrance created by former CJP SaqibNisar. Discussing the broader consequences, he acknowledged the damage to diplomatic relations and the creation of divisions. He acknowledged that the healing of these divisions would take time. "These divisions will not be overcome in a year or two; we will unite the nation by ending hatred." He also announced start of a journey on February 8, reminiscent of 2017. Shehbaz maintained that the PML-N was not responsible for PTI losing its electoral symbol of 'bat'.

RAWALPINDI: Former prime minister and founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan, has suggested that the name of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif should be placed on the Exit Control List (ECL) until the election, expressing concern that if Sharif loses, he might attempt to flee to London once again. Addressing the media at Adiala Jail on Wednesday, he said that the scenes on February 8, the election day, will be shocking for his opponents. Regarding his covert 'Plan C', he mentioned its confidentiality before the elections to prevent interference by external forces.

Khan referred to the Holy Quran once again, highlighting the consequences for societies that deviate from the principles of good and evil. He noted that the Quran mentions hypocrites aligning with evil and opposing good, emphasising that a just society is essential for development. Khan commented on the ongoing "software updates" by authorities, stating that individuals are being picked up, and it is later revealed that their "software has been updated". He cited the case of PTI's leadership facing challenges, including the theft of their electoral symbol 'bat' and the allocation of undesirable symbols to PTI candidates.

The PTI founder questioned the focus on PTI members' arrests related to the May 9 riots, urging authorities to inquire about alleged misconduct by figures like Maryam Nawaz and Asif Ali Zardari. Khan stressed the need for the Supreme Court to investigate human rights violations, particularly the registration of FIRs against PTI candidates during election campaigns.

PTI rejects JIT to probe campaign against judiciary

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) rejected JIT set up to achieve very vague goals of dealing with the criticism on judiciary, suggesting that if the JIT was really serious to curb the smear campaign against judges, then practical actions should be taken

against the bad-mouthed people like Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Aimal Wali Khan instead of harassing citizens of the country. Reacting to the formation of the JIT to harass citizens and deprive them of their fundamental constitutional right to freely expression their point of view, PTI Spokesperson stated that constitution and democracy guaranteed the coun-

trymen the basic rights of expression and criticism and analysis. He pointed out that every citizen had full right to criticize the state and government's actions including court decisions with good intention. However, he added that the unconstitutional and illegal caretaker government, which was devoid of constitution, law, democratic values, turned Pakistan into a slaughter house of fundamental and constitutional rights. PTI Spokesperson recalled that the media and social media were under the worst censorship and extra-constitutional and legal curbs during the past 22 months.

Israeli genocidal war continues despite ceasefire calls

GAZA: As the US-backed Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip entered day 103 on Wednesday, massive aerial and artillery strikes continued to pound neighborhoods and homes and massacre more civilians, mostly children and women. The Ministry of Health in Gaza announced on Wednesday that the Israeli occupation army committed 16 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, claiming the lives of 163 Palestinians and injuring 350 others over the past 24 hours. The Ministry said in a press statement, a large number of victims are still under the rubble or lying on roads, as ambulance and civil defense crews have not been allowed to reach them. It confirmed that the toll of the Israeli aggression on Gaza had surged to 24,448 martyrs and the number of the wounded mounted to 61,504 injuries since October 7. The Ministry affirmed the spread of hepatitis A in the besieged enclave as a result of overcrowding and low levels of hygiene in displacement shelters in the Gaza Strip. Palestinian Information Center (PIC) said that the Israeli occupation army continued to attack different areas of Gaza last night and on Wednesday morning, killing and injuring dozens of citizens.

Local media affirmed that 25 Palestinians were killed in an Israeli bombing in the Daraj neighborhood of Gaza, while dozens more were wounded. A Palestinian woman was pronounced dead at the Gaza European Hospital, succumbing to her wounds, which she sustained two weeks ago in the Ma'an area, south of Khan Yunis. The Israeli forces also targeted several residential homes southeast of Khan Yunis and bombed several areas, including the Nasser Medical Complex, the port west of Gaza City, the Al-Marana neighborhood (east), Batn Al-Sameen, and the center and south of Khan Yunis. Meanwhile, fierce clashes broke out between the resistance fighters and the Israeli forces

near Nasser Complex in Khan Yunis amid heavy artillery shelling. Four civilians, including two girls, were killed and several others were injured in an Israeli airstrike on the Al-Hout family house on Ashdod Street in central Rafah. The Israeli forces also stormed and levelled the Austrian neighborhood cemetery in the city of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, Hamas has denounced Germany's move to agree to send about 10,000 tank shells to the Israeli military. In a statement, Hamas said the decision "makes Germany a direct partner in the war against our people in Gaza". Germany "bears full political and moral responsibility for the war crimes committed by the Nazi Zionist government and the genocidal war against our Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip", the statement continued.

On Tuesday, the German magazine Der Spiegel revealed that government agencies in Germany had approved an Israeli request to obtain 10,000 precision-guided 120mm artillery shells. Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday reiterated his call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the besieged Gaza Strip. "The world is standing by as civilians, mostly women and children, are killed, maimed, bombed, forced from their homes and denied access to humanitarian aid," Guterres said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The UN chief said "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza" was the sole means of preventing "a spillover that could send the entire region up in flames." The UN chief emphasized the importance of addressing the humanitarian situation in Gaza, establishment of ceasefire, and releasing hostages. Israel has killed more than 24,000 people in Gaza since early October 2023. The regime launched the hostilities in the wake of the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm by the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas. - Agencies

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