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Russia's FM rejects US proposal to resume nuclear arms talks

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Punjab CM Naqvi optimistic about Pak-Canada ties

Detailed News On Page-08



Blinkova ousts Rybakina in AO tie-break

Detailed News On Page-06



Drones, rockets used in attack Tit for tat: Pakistan Army neutralizes terrorists' hideouts

Iran says, at least 9 killed near Iran's southeast border in Pakistani air strikes

ANSAR M BHATTI

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan Armed Forces, in the early hours on Thursday, carried out effective strikes against hideouts during an intelligence-based operation inside Iran, used by terrorists, responsible for recent attacks in Pakistan. The precision strikes were carried out using killer drones, rockets, loitering munitions and stand-off weapons whereas maximum care was taken to avoid collateral damage, an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said. The hideouts used by terrorist organisations, namely Balochistan Liberation Army and Balochistan Liberation Front, were successfully struck in an intelligence based operation, code name 'Marg Bar Sarmachar'. The targeted hideouts were being used by notorious terrorists including Dosta alias Chairman, Bajjar alias Soghat, Sahil alias Shafaq, Asghar alias Basham and Wazir alias Wazi, amongst others. Pakistan Armed Forces remain in a perpetual state of readiness to ensure safety of Pakistan citizens against acts of terrorism. "Our resolve to ensure that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan is respected and safeguarded against any misadventure, remains unwavering. We reaffirm our determination to defeat all enemies of Pakistan with the support of the people of Pakistan," the ISPR said. It added that going forward, dialogue and cooperation were deemed prudent in resolving bilateral issues between the two neighbouring brotherly countries.

China offers mediator's role

Says Beijing hopes two sides shall exercise calm

DNA



BEIJING: China has expressed willingness to facilitate mediation between Pakistan and Iran in the aftermath of a series of attacks on militant targets by both governments across the respective borders, leading to loss of lives on both sides. The missile strike, initiated by Iran without any provocation late Tuesday night, caused the death of two children and injured three girls. Pakistan's Foreign Office strongly condemned the "unprovoked" attack, stating that Tehran violated the country's sovereignty. Meanwhile, in response to the strikes that

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Arif Alvi: No compromise on national security

Lauds quick action of the armed forces

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday said that Pakistan would not compromise on its national security and territorial integrity and would take all necessary measures to defend its soil. In a statement issued by the President House Press Wing, he lauded the professionalism of the Armed Forces of Pakistan that targeted the terrorist hideouts in the Sistan-o-Baluchistan province of Iran, while avoiding civilian casualties. He stated that terrorism was a common challenge that required global efforts for its elimination. He said that Pakistan fully respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states and expected the same from other nations not to violate international law.

PTI stands firmly with forces: Gohar
PTI Chairman says Pak integrity of utmost importance

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Spokesperson termed the airstrikes of Pakistan targeting the terrorist hideouts in Iran as the right of the defense of the armed forces of the country, which, he said, was essential for sovereignty, national security and territorial integrity of Pakistan. PTI Spokesperson made it clear that PTI stood firmly with their armed forces in the face of any foreign aggression to defend and guard the motherland. He said that Pakistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and security were of utmost importance; hence no compromise would be made in this regard.

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Pakistan to be made an economic power: Nawaz

Former prime minister vows to make Pakistan stand on its feet



HAFIZABAD: PML N supremo Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz wave to people during Nawaz' maiden rally in Hafizabad. - DNA

GULZAR NOSHI

SARGODHA: Addressing the rally, Nawaz asserted that if he had not been removed as prime minister, the country would have been flourishing, with no unemployment, and every household illuminated with the glow of light. PML-N supreme leader credited his government for successfully combating terrorism and load-shedding in the country. The former prime minister lamented that a decision made by five judges removed a representative of 250 million people. "If our government had continued, there would be no unemployment in the country today."

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Bilawal optimistic about forming govt in centre
Ex-foreign minister vows to address masses' problems

NAZIR SIYAL

NAUSHAHRO FEROZE: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari expressed optimism on Thursday about forming a government in the centre. Addressing the public gathering in Naushahro Feroze, the former foreign minister said: "We have given the 10-point agenda for the betterment of the masses." He reiterated that his party had nominated him as the candidate for the PM slot for the upcoming elections, slated to happen on February 8. Expressing his resolve to foster the country's growth, Bhutto-Zardari vowed to increase the masses income if voted into power. "The masses will have to vote for the PPP. We will address the masses' problems." "The upcoming elections will witness the battle between the PML-N and PPP."

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Experts react to operation Marg Bar Sarmachar

Sharif asserted that Pakistan's reaction was to ensure its territorial integrity

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Senator Sherry Rehman Thursday termed Pakistan's response to Tehran's "unprovoked" attack a "thoughtful response", as the country's army launches strikes on terrorist hideouts operating in the Iranian territories. The senior politicians said Iran's attack on Pakistani sovereignty was unexpected. After Iran launched a surprise attack in Balochistan claiming to target a militant outfit late Tuesday night, Pakistan's military targeted terrorist hideouts inside the Iranian border today. Iran's attack, which the Foreign Office termed "unprovoked and unacceptable", left two children dead and injured three girls, stating that it violated the country's sovereignty. Pakistan's retaliation, however, killed a number of terrorists during the intelligence-based operation - codenamed "Marg Bar Sarmachar", the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement today.

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PM, FM cut short foreign visits

Pakistan's action against terrorists, not Iran: Spox

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch on Thursday said that Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar and Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani had cut short their foreign visits in light of the developments, hours after Pakistan carried out a strike targeting the terrorists' hideouts in Iran. The spokesperson, in her weekly briefing, told the media that Pakistan's action was against the terrorist outfits, not Iran as it desired peaceful relations with the neighboring country and always sought to address the challenges through dialogue. "Pakistan fully respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The sole objective of today's act was in pursuit of Pakistan's own security and national interest"

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DAVOS: Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan calls on Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar. - DNA

Pak-UAE sign over \$3b investment pact

The signing of Investment Framework Agreements highlights the importance of Pakistan as gateway to Asia

NEWS DESK

DAVOS: Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have signed multiple agreements worth more than \$3 billion for cooperation in railways, economic zones and infrastructure, a Pakistani official said on Thursday. The development comes amid Pakistan Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar's visit to Davos, Switzerland to attend 54th summit of the World Economic Forum (WEF). The agreements cover the development of a dedicated freight corridor, multi-modal logistics park, and freight terminals, according to a statement shared on X by Syed Mazhar Ali Shah, the Pakistan Railways secretary. DP World, a Dubai-based Emirati multinational logistics company, will carry out infrastructure improvement at Qasim International Container Terminal, Pakistan's leading trade gateway, as part of the project. The Emirati firm also plans to develop an economic zone near the terminal. The agreements were signed by Pakistani Communication, Railways and Maritime Affairs Minister Shahid Ashraf Tarar and H.E Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, chairman of ports, customs and free zone corporation (PCFC) of the Dubai government. "DP World has long standing proud presence in Pakistan witnessed by mutually rewarding engagement. Building on the unwavering trust and partnership, the two brotherly

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Saudi FM calls on PM Kakar

PM lauds role of the Saudi leadership Centreline Report

DNA

DAVOS: Pakistan Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan in Davos, PM Kakar's office said on Thursday, adding the two figures reviewed "regional developments" at the meeting. The meeting between the Saudi foreign minister and PM Kakar took place on the sidelines of the 54th World Economic Forum (WEF) summit in Davos, according to PM Kakar's office. It occurred hours after Pakistan said it had targeted "terrorist hideouts" in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province after Tehran this week conducted an airstrike against alleged militants in Pakistan's southwest. "The Prime Minister underlined the strategic importance of close brotherly relations between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, rooted in common cultural

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CEC stresses security for all political leaders ahead of polls

CEC Sikandar Sultan Raja directs relevant authorities and officials to strictly follow the election code of conduct

PM forms high-level committee

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar has formed a high-level committee to oversee security for the February 8 elections as political actors voice concerns about the law and order situation. Federal Minister for Communications, Railways, and Maritime Affairs Shahid Ashraf Tarar will head the seven-member committee, as per a notification from the Prime Minister's Office. The committee includes the Ministry of Interior's secretary and the chief secretaries of all four - Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab - provinces, the notification mentioned. The committee's formation comes just days ahead of the elections as several politicians have either demanded their security be beefed up or a delay in elections due to the uncertain law and

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DG labour department visits RCCI

President RCCI for promoting healthy labor management

President RCCI Mr. Saqib Rafiq gave a short overview of the Chamber current and upcoming events. The focus of the discussion was on fostering a collaborative environment to enhance the growth of the business community for the overall development of Pakistan

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Director General Labor Department, Punjab Ms. Syeda Kulsum Hai visited chamber house. President RCCI and Chairman RWMC, Mr. Saqib Rafiq along with Senior Vice President Muhammad Hamza Sarosh welcomed the Honorable Guest and discussed the issues related to the business community of Rawalpindi. Former President Mr. Najam Rehan, Mr. Nasir Mirza, Executive Committee members, representatives from the trade associations, Sheikh Hafeez,

Zafar Qadri, Chaudhry Akram, Director Labor Rawalpindi Samiullah Khan and distinguished RCCI members were also present in the meeting. President RCCI Mr. Saqib Rafiq gave a short overview of the Chamber current and upcoming events. The focus of the discussion was on fostering a collaborative environment to enhance the growth of the business community for the overall development of Pakistan. Further, President RCCI highlighted the importance of promoting healthy labor management and industrial relations for socio-economic progress, emphasizing the fundamental role of the

labor force in industrial development. Ms. Kulsum emphasized the pivotal role of the business community in the progress and prosperity of the nation. She affirmed that the Punjab Labour Department is dedicated to serving as a facilitator, ensuring maximum facilities for trade and industry. In the end President RCCI Mr. Saqib Rafiq emphasized on commitment from both sides to foster a stronger partnership between the government and the business community, with a shared vision of achieving sustained economic growth and development in Pakistan.



Dense Fog to Persist in Punjab, KP, Sindh

ISLAMABAD: Dense fog is likely to continue over the plain areas of Punjab, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and upper Sindh during the next few days, according to the forecast of Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD). The PMD has advised the citizens to be cautious during the dense foggy conditions. Day temperatures are likely to remain below normal in most parts of Punjab due to dense fog.—APP

Public Notice

By advertisement, it is hereby notified to all, private and public, that my client, Lt. Col. Retd., Sakhawat Hussain Malik, son of Fazl Elahi, resident of House No. 180/9, Street No. 2, Mohalla Sirsyed Road, Sadar, Rawalpindi Cantt, have a Plot DHA Valley, DYI-023042, Open Certificate Plot No./Sector 164/IRIS, Street No. Road 3-B, Size 8 Marla General the original documents of said plot have been stolen, therefore any person or firm should refrain from buying and selling the said plot, otherwise they will face legal action, at your risk & cost. MOHSIN RAZA CHAUDHARY, Advocate High Court, Phone: 0312-5770799.

Govt boosts exploration sector to attract investment

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister of Energy, Muhammad Ali, expressed hope on Thursday that the government's initiative in the exploration sector would attract investment in the oil and gas sectors. During his presentation at the National Seminar on "Pakistan's Economy Crisis: Challenges and the Way Forward," organized by NUST, the minister outlined that the government is set to permit leading oil and gas E&P companies, including OGDCL, PPL, GHPL, Mari Gas, and for-

ign entities, to directly sell 50 percent of gas to the private sector and the remaining 50 percent to state-owned gas companies. This initiative aims to encourage companies to invest more in oil and gas exploration. Muhammad Ali emphasized the importance of geographical and seismic studies to enhance onshore and offshore exploration. He called for investment in refineries, explorations, and terminal infrastructure, stressing the need for research and development in hydrocarbons, renewables, and minerals sectors to meet domestic energy requirements. The minister highlighted the

significance of optimizing allocations for natural gas, revisiting priority orders, and revising Petroleum and LPG policies for the conversion of domestic consumers from natural gas to LPG. He also advocated for devolution of power to ease business processes and investment in Genco's for efficiency improvement. Muhammad Ali emphasized the need for investment and capacity building in transmission lines between the south and north regions. He underscored the importance of E&P sector reforms, a supportive investor policy, and stakeholder inclusiveness to channel untapped natural resources.

Tufail Multichem successfully implements SAP S/4HANA

ISLAMABAD: The implementation of SAP S/4HANA positions Tufail Multichem Industries Pvt Ltd. as a technologically advanced and future-ready organization. This move not only ensures current competitiveness but also lays the foundation for scalability and adaptability in the years to come. TMC Pvt. Limited (Formerly Tallymarks Consulting), serving as the Systems Integrator (SI), played a crucial role in the successful execution of the project. Saqib Ahmad, Managing Director, SAP Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan said, "The implementation of S/4HANA at Tufail

Multichem marks the initial phase of an advancing technology roadmap. This implementation will provide an elevated standard of compliance and control for daily operations, offering a more profound, timely, and precise understanding of business operations and its finances." Tufail Multichem holds a significant position in the Chemicals industry. Their product portfolio, serving as the raw material for various well-known household items, coupled with a customer base that includes leading multinational brands and a continually expanding export business, renders

Tufail Multichem a crucial and highly visible entity in SAP's portfolio. Adeel Shahid, Senior Executive Director, Tufail Multichem said, "At Tufail Multichem, the adoption of SAP S/4HANA marks a pivotal step in our commitment towards operations excellence. We believe this implementation will empower us to streamline processes, enhance critical decision-making, and elevate our business to new heights of efficiency and innovation. We are excited about the transformative potential this cutting-edge technology brings to our operations, enabling us to



KARACHI: Caretaker Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Hon'ble Aneeq Ahmed is being presented with memento during the seminar on "Religious Minorities and Interfaith Social Tolerance in Pakistan" at Iqra University Karachi.—DNA

SECP registered 2,095 companies

ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) registered some 2,095 new companies in December 2023, bringing the total number to 209,604. "The total capitalization for the newly incorporated companies is Rs 2.6 billion," an SECP news release said on Thursday. "Around 57% of Pakistani companies are private limited companies, with 41% being single member companies. The remaining 2% are public unlisted companies, not for profit associations, limited liability partnerships, and foreign companies," it added. Three foreign companies had established businesses in Pakistan, with 99 foreign applicants registered through eServices. The trading sector took the lead with incorporation of 288 companies, followed by information technology with 286, services with 238, real estate development and construction with 220, education with 107, tourism with 98, e-commerce with 66, marketing and advertisement with 51, power generation with 47, textile with 44, corporate agricultural farming with 43, mining and quarrying with 41, healthcare with 40, chemical with 39, transport with 38, pharmaceutical with 37, engineering with 35, fuel and energy with 34, cosmetics and toiletries with 32, lodging with 24, communication with 19, paper.—APP

Sea Guard-24 exercise concludes in Karachi

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy maiden Maritime Security Exercise SEA GUARD-24 concludes with a debrief session at Karachi. Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. While addressing the session, Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami appreciated the efforts put in by all stakeholders in making the exercise a success. He also underscored that this exercise clearly demonstrates PN resolve to address prevailing simmering issues with a tangible way

head to ensure security in maritime zones of Pakistan. The aim of exercise was to overview response procedures against maritime security incidents and to identify gaps and propose ways to improve the response mechanism. Exercise SEA GUARD-24 gave an opportunity to fortify and rejuvenate the bond of diverse maritime stakeholders of Pakistan ranging from shipping, fishing, law enforcement and private entities through a common pedestal of Joint Maritime Information Coordination Centre (JMICC). EX SEA GUARD served as a platform for all stakeholders to engage in tactical exercises, exchange best prac-

tices and foster mutual understanding. Senior officials of Federal and provincial stakeholders from MOD, MOMA, MoI, MoF, Ministry of Narcotics Control, Pakistan National Shipping Corporation, Anti-Narcotics Force, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, GPA, KPT, Port QASIM, BYCO Petroleum, in addition to various prominent figures from private sector and fishing community attended the closing session of the exercise. The participants were presented with analytical review of the practical scenarios as well as challenges and recommendations accrued from Table Top discussions conducted at JMICC.

NCHR, Bank Al Habib join hands to empower women

ISLAMABAD: The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and Bank Al Habib have signed a Letter of Interest (LOI) committing to work together and empower women and girls through sport-based human development interventions. "The NCHR is currently engaged in a project around this theme through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), supported by the High Commission of Canada in Pakistan. However, the NCHR has identified the need to support the most vulnerable and marginalized group within this project - the Women United Football Academy

in Quetta. "The LOI serves as a comprehensive framework outlining the terms of the agreement for Bank Al Habib's sponsorship of the Hazara Women United Football Academy in Quetta," an NCHR press release said. The strategic partnership, the NCHR said, aimed to bolster the Academy's capacity to train and equip more girls, thereby extending the impact of the ongoing CFLI project. "Moreover, the sponsorship is designed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Academy beyond the completion of the CFLI project." The NCHR mentioned that its initiative 'Empower

Her' was designed to tackle the challenges that hinder girls and women from participating in sports, particularly football, in Pakistan. "Despite significant progress in various fields, girls and women in Pakistan still encounter numerous barriers to access and participation in sports. These challenges include limited sports infrastructure, inadequate funding, deeply ingrained societal stereotypes and gender biases, a shortage of training and developmental opportunities, and a dearth of female representation at all sport-levels.—APP



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SCCI urges NPO to conduct forensic audit of IPPs

The SCCI chief demanded the participation of chamber members and the business community of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in training programs conducted under the NPO

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president, Fuad Ishaq has urged National Productivity Organisation (NPO) to conduct a forensic audit of Independent Powers Producers (IPPs). The SCCI chief demanded the participation of chamber members and the business community of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in training programs conducted under the NPO. He also called for uninterrupted electricity and gas supply to industries and businesses in the province. The chamber president lauded the role of NPO for inclusive, innovation-led productivity growth under APO Vision 2025 Outreach Program. Fuad Ishaq was addressing as chief guest at the launching ceremony of NPO Vi-

sion 2025 organised in collaboration with National Productivity Organization at chamber house on Thursday. Besides, the SCCI senior vice president San-ullah Khan, vice president Ijaz Khan Afridi, executive members Haji Ghulam Hussain, Qurat Ul Ain, Ismail Safi, and Aurangzeb, Ihsanullah, Nisar Ahmad, Faiz Rasool, Intiaq Muhammad, NPO General Manager Wajih Abbasi, Head of Agro-Food, NPO Fahat Imtiaz, Regional Officer NPO Wasiullah Khan, members of business community, traders and industrialists were present in a large number on the occasion. During the launching ceremony, NPO GM Wajih Abbasi in his comprehensive multi-media presentation informed the participants regarding Vision APO 2025, which is meant to achieve "inclusive, innovation-led productivity growth in Asia and

the Pacific. Senior officials said NPO has planned to organise 60 events throughout the country in this year, and in this regard, today the organization started by arranging this launching ceremony at SCCI house. The NPO officials assured in the light of SCCI president recommendations, the organization will take initiatives for conducting forensic audit of IPPs and to ensure KP business community participation in training programs and arranging more sensitization events to enhance national productivity. Fuad Ishaq addressing the participants said that the energy crisis is a major issue of the country. e said the power crisis would be addressed by a thorough review of IPPs. KP is currently deprived of its constitutional rights on gas and electricity, the SCCI chief said. He added KP is surplus in gas and electricity production despite that gas is

unavailable to industrial, commercial and domestic consumers in the province whereas the gas tariff increased exorbitantly for KP and it also put into the basket of RLNG, which is completely unjust and not acceptable. Fuad Ishaq asked the federal and provincial governments to take steps on an emergent basis and ensure electricity and gas supply to consumers in KP. On the occasion, the SCCI chief emphasized the need to adopt modern and innovative tools and methods to enhance productivity, in this regard, initiatives and the role of NPO are highly laudable. He expressed the hope that today's event will prove beneficial and fruitful for the participants and business community which can adopt the latest methods to enhance the quality of products, enhance productivity and meet competitiveness at global level.

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

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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
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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
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PIMS.....9261170-79
Polyclinic.....9218300-09
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CDA.....9208301-04
Met Office.....9250360-6
RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480

Business community asked to help in tax broadening

Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that UBG has recently won the elections of FPCCI and close liaison between FPCCI and NADRA would help facilitate the business community of the entire country

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: Lt. Gen. Muhammad Munir Afsar, Chairman NADRA said that his organization and FBR are in collaboration to expand the tax base and register new taxpayers to improve the tax revenue of the country and said that the business community should cooperate in such efforts. He said this while talking to a delegation of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) that called on him led by Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI. Lt. Gen. Muhammad Munir Afsar briefed the business community about the key initiatives of NADRA to facilitate the citizens. He said that NADRA e-Sahulat is a low-cost e-services platform, which provides a secure payment and collection facility to the citizens. This network consists of over 17,000 active franchisees connected with telcos and banks and employing thousands of youths besides adding revenue to retailers' income. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry lauded the efforts of NADRA to promote digitalization in Pakistan. He said that NADRA has already set up its Facilitation Desks in Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry to



provide its services to the business community and NADRA should also set up its Facilitation Desk in ICCI so that ICCI members can avail NADRA's services under one roof in Chamber. He said that FBR is putting more burden on the existing taxpayers and assured that the business community would cooper-

ate to broaden the tax base. Faad Waheed, Senior Vice President ICCI proposed that NADRA should maintain a database of suppliers and vendors that would help in promoting business activities. Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar, Vice President of ICCI said that Pakistan needs to

promote e-governance to provide efficient services to the citizens, and the role of NADRA in realizing this goal is very important. Khalid Iqbal Malik, Group Leader ICCI said that NADRA has successfully delivered international projects for Bangladesh, Nigeria, Kenya, Sudan, Fiji, and Somalia and the business

community feels proud of its good performance. Zafar Bakhtawari, former President ICCI and Secretary General UBG Pakistan said that UBG has recently won the elections of FPCCI and close liaison between FPCCI and NADRA would help facilitate the business community of the entire country.

Finance Minister lauds digital transformation efforts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Federal Minister for Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, here on Thursday commended the initiatives undertaken by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Karandaaz for the digital transformation of Pakistan. Speaking at the 'Pakistan Digital Stake' Workshop here, the Minister said the creation of Digital Stake by these organizations was in line with the government's policy of digitization. She said digital transactions play a

vital role in empowering both urban residents and business individuals, offering them the flexibility to complete financial transactions promptly and with ease. The collaborative efforts extend beyond the private sector, with active participation from key government institutions such as the State Bank of Pakistan, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) and the Accountability Bureau. These entities are contributing significantly to the implementation of the 'Pakistan Digital Stake,' reinforcing the government's commitment to the digitization agenda,

she added. Dr. Shamshad Akhtar underscored the importance of the project for Pakistan's progress, asserting, this initiative was of utmost importance for the development of the country adding the government would use all available resources to ensure its success. The minister reiterated the government's commitment to financial inclusion, economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction, and transparency in governance. Drawing inspiration from the positive impacts of digital transformation in the United Arab Emirates, Estonia, and Singapore, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar expressed confidence in the potential of 'Digital Stake' to bring similar improvements to Pakistan. The 'Pakistan Digital Stake' aims to establish the country on digital lines, creating opportunities for millions of Pakistanis to engage in daily financial transactions seamlessly. Dr. Shamshad Akhtar asserted that the success of this initiative on a global scale reflects its immense potential. In a move towards further innovation, the Finance Minister highlighted the collaboration between the State Bank and Karandaaz, resulting in the establishment of the 'Raast' platform.

Political hustle bustle everywhere

ISLAMABAD: As February 8 upcoming poll season approaches fast in the country, political hustle and bustle is seen in every nook and cranny of the country, including twin cities, where almost every constituency is being festooned with colorful party flags and posters displaying according to code of conduct. Social media during the current election atmosphere in the country was playing an important role in enabling the country's politicians to reach out to the voters and provide them with a platform to connect easily, according to a report aired by a private news channel. "The printing and selling of election-related items has also picked momentum, and wholesalers and vendors have expressed happiness over the increasing demand and sales of party posters," said a citizen. "As time passes and the general elections are drawing near, the political parties will continue their political wars on social media grounds," said a youngster while favoring a party and posting a picture of his favorite politician. "In Islamabad and other cities, various corner meetings, political camps, and rallies have become routine matters, said a politician while commenting on the election drive. "Portraits and stickers of different political leaders could easily be noticed on rickshaws, wagons, Suzuki pickups, cars, and private buses," said a student. "These electioneering processes have seen widespread use among social media users, where enthusiastic youth and women were actively campaigning for their preferred candidates, said another citizen of Punjab City." "This election will be unique due to the increased number of young and female voters," said another politician.—DNA

Secretary information commends PID's efforts

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Shahera Shahid on Thursday commended the Press Information Department (PID) for providing stakeholders an opportunity to organize a series of seminars on general elections.

Addressing a seminar titled the "Changing Landscape of Pakistani Electorate and Role of Political Parties in Fair Representation," she said the primary objective of these seminars is not just to inform but also to provide a platform for individuals to speak with confidence. She emphasized the inclusion of media in discussing economic matters and urged them to contribute ideas for steering the country out of challenges. She highlighted the commencement of a debate to discover ways to improve the country's situation by overcoming challenges. Despite facing challenges, she said the PID was conducting seminars with the goal of overcoming difficulties.



'Use of technology vital to increase literacy rate'

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr. Arif Alvi on Thursday stressed the need to increase use of the technology in the education sector of Azad Jammu and Kashmir to increase the overall literacy rate in the area. He was talking to a delegation of Kashmir Education Foundation which called on him at Aiwan-e-Sadr. The president said the education could be brought to the remote and difficult areas with the help of technology. He said the use of information technology in the education sector will reduce costs while it would also help increasing the number of students.

COMSTECH, OIC to strengthen cooperation

ISLAMABAD: Coordinator General of COMSTECH, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, and Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Houssein Ibrahim Taha, in a meeting held on Thursday, expressed commitment to strengthen cooperation and foster advancements that benefit the diverse member states of the OIC. The meeting was held at the OIC General Secretariat in Jeddah, according to a message received here. This meeting, aligned with the 7th Annual Coordination Meeting of OIC institutions, witnessed the active participation of key figures, including officials from OIC, COMSTECH, Chairman BoG University of Lahore Awais Raouf, and Rector UOL Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ashraf.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Choudhary presented a comprehensive overview of COMSTECH's achievements in 2023 and the preceding four years, outlining future programs and initiatives for OIC Member States. Notable highlights included the initiation of training for 18 ophthalmologists from various OIC African Member States at LRBT Pakistan. Dr. Iqbal said in the meeting, "COMSTECH currently welcomes researchers from OIC Member States to Pakistani universities through the COMSTECH Consortium of Excellence Program." He said that already COMSTECH has announced science and technology and fellowship programs for Yemen, Palestine, Nigeria, Mauritania, Somalia, Kyrgyzstan, Gambia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran.

The discussion also touched upon various initiatives, including the COMSTECH-ISDB cataract surgery campaign in Africa, the COMSTECH OIC Technology Portal, the COMSTECH Distinguished Scholars Program, the COMSTECH Virology Fellowship Program, the CCoE Fellowship and Training Program, the COMSTECH-HFS program, the COMSTECH-TWAS program, the COMSTECH Science in Exile Fellowship Program, and a Special Program for Muslim Minority Youth and Young Scientists in non-OIC member states. In a significant development, Mr. Awais Raouf, Chairman BoG, the University of Lahore, expressed the university's commitment to establishing a 400-bed hospital and four institutions.—APP

Businessmen voice concern over decreasing Pak-Afghan trade

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: In light of the prevailing conditions impacting bilateral and transit trade, Junaid Makda the President of the Pakistan Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) voices profound apprehension. All five major border crossings—Chaman, Torkham, Ghulam Khan Kelay, Angoor Adda, and Kharachi—are presently closed. The ongoing closure has led to significant financial losses for stakeholders and businesses, with billions of rupees incurred in detention and demurrage charges. Furthermore, the spoilage of perishable items in trucks stranded at the closed borders has added to the economic impact, affecting the livelihoods of many involved in the trade sector. The closure of these vital border crossings has also resulted in a halt to export and import activities to the CIS countries, leaving traders and businesses in a state of uncertainty. This situation not only disrupts the flow of goods and services but poses a severe threat to the stability of Pakistan's economy.—APP

Posters urge people to observe Indian Day as Black Day

ISLAMABAD: The posters pasted in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir have said that January 26, the Indian Republic Day, will be observed as Black Day in the territory. According to Kashmiri Media Service, the Hurriyat organizations through posters displaced in Srinagar and other areas said the oppressed people of Kashmir, by observing January 26 as Black Day, will tell the world that India's so-called Republic Day is in fact a blot on the face of its democracy and secularism. They said, the people of IOK are in no way ready to accept India's illegal occupation over their motherland so they will observe the Indian Republic Day 26 January as Black Day and hoist black flags on the rooftops of their houses, shops, pillars and electricity poles and send a message to the world that it is not a Republic Day but a Black Day for them. The posters urged the people to observe a complete strike on January 26 to protest against Indian illegal occupation and state terrorism so that India's.—APP

Over 2,000 cases reported on ICT-15 App in three months

ISLAMABAD: In the past three months, over 2,000 cases have been reported on the ICT-15 app, created to provide citizens a platform to inform the police about any unlawful activities, illegal resident foreigners in urban areas, and criminal elements. Additionally, the citizens can obtain immediate assistance from the police by sending images, videos, or audio messages related to any incident or occurrence, a public relations officer said. According to the details, following the special directives of the Islamabad Capital City Police Officer (ICCP), Dr. Akbar Nasir Khan, Islamabad Capital Police's "ICT-15" application promptly assists urban residents in emergencies in the federal capital. He said that this app proves to be extremely helpful in providing immediate assistance to urban residents during any emergency. In the past three months, 2,158 cases were recorded on the "ICT-15" app, with 43 cases related to the police, distributed as 23 in October, 15 in November, and five in December. Moreover, Islamabad Capital Police promptly resolved these cases, considering merit and transparency. The "ICT-15" app ensures that the police can reach the scene of assistance in minimal time upon receiving information.—APP

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Briefs

Pakistan assumes Regional Leadership of INSARAG

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan took the helm of INSARAG (International Search and Rescue Advisory Group) as the Regional Chair of Asia Pacific for 2024, marking a significant stride in global disaster response coordination. The official handover ceremony occurred during a pivotal global meeting via video link, where New Zealand gracefully transferred the regional chairmanship to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Pakistan, according to a news release issued here. As the newly appointed Regional Chair, Chairman NDMA was represented by Raza Iqbal, Executive Director Plans, NDMA, who, on behalf of the Chair, pledged to foster international collaboration and enhance disaster response capabilities across the Asia-Pacific region. Under Pakistan's leadership, NDMA outlined key activities to fortify disaster response capabilities, i.e., the 1st International Rescue Challenge (Lahore), the Asia-Pacific Earthquake Response Exercise (Lahore), where NDMA, with the support of Punjab Emergency Services, Rescue 1122, will host an earthquake response exercise, simulating a seismic event to enhance preparedness and coordination in earthquake-prone regions, and the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting (Islamabad), bringing together member states to strategize and collaborate on disaster response initiatives.

Kaspersky predicts key cybersecurity threats

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Experts from Kaspersky, a global cybersecurity and digital privacy company, explore some of the key cybersecurity trends parents should be aware of, and provide tips on how to safeguard their children's online activities. According to a UN research, about 80 percent of young people claimed they interact with AI multiple times a day. With the development of AI, numerous little-known applications have emerged with seemingly harmless features. However, AI apps, specifically, chatbots can easily provide age-inappropriate content when prompted. According to latest online statistics, 91 percent of children aged 3-15 play games on any device. For some games, unmoderated voice and text chat is a large part of the experience. With more young people online, criminals can virtually build trust in the same way they would in person. Firstly, cybercriminals gain the trust of young players by luring them with gifts. Once they have the confidence of a young gamer, they then obtain their personal information by suggesting that they click on a phishing link.—DNA

Saadat Hasan Manto remembered

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Renowned great Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto remembered on his 111th birth anniversary on Thursday. He was born on May 11, 1912 in Samrala, Ludhiana, British India. He migrated to Pakistan after partition in 1947. Some of his publications are, Atishpare, Manto Ke Afsane, Dhuhan, Afsane Aur Dramas, Laazat-e-Sang, Thanda Gosht, Baghair Ijazat, Burque, Ratti, Masha and Tolah. He also wrote several famous letters to Uncle Sam, which were published in the English language as well. On January 18, 2005, the Government of Pakistan issued a postage stamp to commemorate his services on his 50th death anniversary. For most of his lifetime, Manto resided in Lahore. He died on January 18, 1955. On August 14, 2012, Manto was also honored with the Nishan-e-Imtiaz award by the Pakistani government.

PEMRA advises media to abide by ECP code of conduct

The ECP specified that the media should refrain from expressing biased opinions that undermine Pakistan's ideals, sovereignty, security, independence, and the integrity of the judiciary and other national institutions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority on Thursday advised national electronic media to abide by the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan. The directives issued by the PEMRA stated that all its licensees were obliged to abide by the code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan in the run of the elections being held on February 8. The code of conduct applying to print, electronic, digital media, and social media

influencers was released by ECP on October 14 last year for the national media and outlined various guidelines required to adhere to during the campaign and polling. The ECP specified that the media should refrain from expressing biased opinions that undermine Pakistan's ideals, sovereignty, security, independence, and the integrity of the judiciary and other national institutions. Furthermore, any statements or accusations that pose a threat to national unity and the law-and-order situation will be strictly prohibited from being broadcast. The code prohibits the inclusion of material that engages in attacks

against candidates or political parties based on gender, religion, or community. Any violation of the code will be treated seriously, and allegations made by one candidate against another will require confirmation from both sides before prosecution can commence. In order to ensure compliance with the code, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA), Pakistan Information Department (PID), and the Cyber Digital Wing of the Ministry of Information will actively monitor the coverage given to political parties and candidates. To support the electoral watchdog in

implementing the code, PEMRA, PTA, PID, and the Cyber Digital Wing of the Ministry of Information will provide assistance. To ensure the smooth functioning of the election process, the media campaign will conclude 48 hours before election day and the electoral process will not be interrupted. Besides, surveying in polling stations or constituencies that may adversely impact voters will be avoided. Only accredited media representatives will be allowed to enter the polling stations, accompanied by a camera to document the polling process. However, the secret ballots will not be videotaped, and media representatives

will observe the count without cameras. The code also emphasises that media representatives must not engage in activities that obstruct the election process before, during, or after the voting. The broadcast of election results will be prohibited until one hour after the end of polling, it will be stated explicitly that the results are unofficial and incomplete, and they will only be considered final when officially declared by the Returning Officer. It is important to note that a journalist or media organisation may have their accreditation terminated if they violate the code of conduct.



RAWALPIND. Ambassador of Egypt, H.E. Dr. Ihab Abdel Hamid Hasan called on Minister for Defence, Lt Gen (Retd) Anwar Ali Hyder at Ministry of Defence.—DNA

Study reveals gaps in enfranchising flood-hit population

ISLAMABAD: A recent research published by the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) has revealed huge gaps in enabling the population of the flood-hit areas of Sindh and Balochistan to use their fundamental right to vote. The CPDI on Thursday held a stakeholders' dialogue on the study made by Naseer Memon, a development professional expert on climate change, disaster management and livelihoods. The author told the participants that he compiled the study after having detailed group discussions with the people of flood affected areas of Sindh and Balochistan, including women and youth, besides stakeholders engagements and inclusive surveys to gauge the prevailing ground pulse in the wake of general elections 2024, scheduled for February 8. Chairperson of Senate's Standing Committee on Climate Change Seeme Ezedi, speaking during the dialogue, said use of vote right was an important public responsibility that

should be ensured by the masses to bring a change in their lives. She noted that it was an uphill task to make the people realise their right to vote during electoral campaigns. "The issues pertaining to voters highlighted in the study are serious gaps that will hamper efficient electoral process. The flood impacted populace bearing expired CNICs (Computerised National Identity Cards) can be extended by the NADRA," she added. Senator Ezedi underscored that the 2022 flood devastation washed away over 13,000 kilometers roads and some 1,444 bridges in Balochistan and Sindh where population was still awaiting relief and assistance. "In this situation," she said, "the indigenous population of those areas have lost its motivation to vote, but it is now the responsibility of the area candidates contesting polls to encourage them to vote." Senator Ezedi proposed to utilise the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) mobile voter registration

vans as mobile polling stations to ensure voting in the flood-affected areas. The ECP and the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) could collaborate in that regard. Former Senator Farhatullah Babar complemented the CPDI team for its endeavour to bring the forgotten flood-hit population on the radar of media and relevant departments. "Around 10 million women in the country lacked CNICs who are disenfranchised to poll in the general elections. The right to vote should be a prerogative of the masses and not their obligation being imposed on them," he said. Babar said many countries like Turkiye and Bolivia despite facing natural catastrophes held elections, and their practices should be replicated in Pakistan to make the election all inclusive. Former member of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Shagufta Malik said that the disaster prone areas had lost critical infrastructure that impeded smooth polling prospects in

that region. She asked the ECP to keep in mind the social and cultural norms of the provinces while laying out its polling stations' plans and systems. She also raised her concerns over the growing security risks due to communal conflicts in the tribal region and suggested to ensure beefed up security arrangements. The research author while sharing the study insights, said the targeted districts in the research were Khairpur, Naushahro Feroz (Sindh) and Naseerabad and Jaffarabad from Balochistan. He said the study linked the polls and flood devastation as floodwater was still stagnant in those areas and the media had lost its focus of coverage of these areas. There seven critical issues reported in the study were mainly of lost CNICs, flood-damaged road infrastructure, political influence in post-flood relief operations, accidents amid road damages, house damage and family displacement and intra-community conflicts, he added.—APP

Govt releases Rs3,097.50 mln for agri sector uplift projects

ISLAMABAD: The government has released an amount of Rs3,097.50 million for various agriculture and livestock uplift projects under the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) 2023-24 as against the total allocation of Rs8.850 billion. The amount was released during the first 06 months of the current financial year (July-December) for the completion of different ongoing development schemes, besides initiating the new projects of vital importance, said an official in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. Talking to APP here on Monday, he said that out of the total released funds, an amount of Rs429.97 million had spent so far on different development schemes during the period under review for achieving sustainable agriculture growth and economic development of the country. The government has allocated Rs 8.850 billion for the Ministry of National Food Security and Research in its PSDP) 2023-24 for different projects relating to agriculture and livestock sectors' development in the country, he added. He said that under PSDP 2023-24, an amount of Rs8.599 billion would be spent on the completion of 21 ongoing developmental projects, whereas Rs 250 billion was allocated for three new schemes during the current financial year to achieve sustainable agriculture growth. The government has allocated Rs2,800 million for a national program for the improvement of watercourses phase-II, and Rs. 900 million for the national program for enhancing the command area in Barani areas of Pakistan and Rs. 700 million for the promotion of olive cultivation on a commercial scale, he added. Meanwhile, Rs500 million was earmarked for locust emergency and food security, Rs400 million for water conservation in the Barani areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Rs300 million for promoting research for productivity enhancement in pulses and Rs 248 million was allocated for the production enhancement of wheat during the current financial year. In PSDP 2023-24, he said that the government has allocated Rs147 million for better cotton initiative, Rs100 million for cage culture cluster development and Rs 240 million for the establishment of consumer sourcing seed authenticity system and strengthening of labs of PSC&RD. An amount of Rs500 million was also allocated for the national oil seed enhancement program, Rs130 million for the productivity enhancement of sugarcane Rs235 million for the productivity enhancement of rice and Rs440 for pilot shrimp farming cluster development. Besides, the government has also allocated Rs100 million for the Pakistan-Korea joint program on certified seed potato production system, Rs100 million for professional capacity building in agriculture national reforms and Rs. 50 million for the horticulture support programme.—APP

Wasif Ali Wasif remembered on his death anniversary

ISLAMABAD: An illustrious Urdu poet, writer, and Sufi intellectual, Wasif Ali Wasif, was remembered on his 31st death anniversary for his distinctive literary style. Born on January 15, 1929, in Khushab, Wasif Ali Wasif gained widespread acclaim for his short essays, exploring themes such as love, life, fortune, fear, hope, expectation, promise, prayer, happiness, and sorrow, all with the profound objective of elucidating the true essence of Islam. A master of aphorism, Wasif possessed a miraculous ability to encapsulate a spectrum of meanings within a few carefully chosen words, many of which have evolved into contemporary proverbs. His book "Kiran Kiran Suraj," a collection of these aphorisms, remained a bestseller for numerous years. Wasif Ali Wasif departed this world on January 18, 1993, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire generations. He found his final resting place in Lahore.—APP

Pakistani traders eye long-term venture in Lhasa

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani traders eye long-term venture in Lhasa after successful 2024 Nepal, India, and South Asia Commodity Expo. The Expo kicked off in Lhasa, China, promising a nine-day extravaganza of cultural and economic exchange. "I'm planning to open a branch in Lhasa this year and operate here for the long term," said Faisal Rashid, a Pakistani dealer who showcased distinctive Pakistani handicrafts at the expo. It is estimated that his stall will generate a sales volume of five or six hundred thousand Chinese yuan these days. Rashid, in fluent Chinese, introduced his unique Pakistani handicrafts on site. He has been doing business in China for several years. "I spend most of my time in Beijing," he told China Economic Net (CEN) mentioning that the Chinese market is a vast and quality one and he loves the friendly nature of its people. "The expo offers a diverse range of foreign goods," noted a local resident named Danzeng, "I'm gonna buy my grandchildren something as gifts for the upcoming Chinese New Year." Expressing his admiration for Lhasa's conducive business environment, Faisal Rashid highlighted the kindness of local friends and the openness and inclusivity extended to foreign traders. "It's a place full of good business atmosphere and friendly people," Faisal said, adding that he had participated in an International Tourism and Culture Expo held here last year and achieved noteworthy sales.—DNA

IT exports witnesses remarkable surge in December 2023, Minister

ISLAMABAD: Interim IT Minister Dr Umar Saif Thursday said that Pakistan's Information Technology exports experienced a remarkable surge of 22% in December 2023, reaching a total of \$303 million where annually millions of youths across the country will get opportunities to sit and work. Talking to PTV news channel, he explained that Pakistan has recently undertaken historic steps to facilitate the country's burgeoning workforce of freelancers and to promote the IT industry. The government had launched an initiative to build 10,000 co-working spaces across Pakistan for online freelancers, he added. Dr Saif said that information and communications technology is the main key to opening the door to stabilising and strengthening Pakistan's economy. "Our target is to achieve the target of \$10 billion, adding, that we have paved the way for the next government will continue these policies and to uplift the IT industry through reforms, he said." He also stressed that financial institutions to embrace this transformation and harness the power of artificial intelligence and innovative technology.—DNA

Pakistan draws USD 56.9 million FDI from China in recent month

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan secured USD 56.9 million in foreign direct investment (FDI) from China in December 2023, contributing to a cumulative Chinese investment of USD 292.8 million in the first six months of FY 2023-24. Gwadar Pro reported this on Thursday quoting the latest statistics from the State Bank of Pakistan. In the corresponding period of FY 2022-23, Pakistan received USD 333.1 million in FDI from China. In December, China retained its position as the leading investor in Pakistan by injecting USD 56.6 million, constituting 23.4% of the total USD 243.3 million investments received by the country from various nations worldwide. Similarly, China's FDI accounts for 32% of the total USD 933.7 million FDI that Pakistan attracted in the July-December period of FY 2023-24. The sectors attracting FDI include Power, Construction, Oil & Gas exploration, Textile, Trade, Transport, Communication, Information Technology and others.

China donated 10,000 doses of FMD vaccines to Livestock Department

ISLAMABAD: The Government of China has donated 10,000 doses of the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) vaccine to the Livestock and Dairy Development Department, Punjab. A Chinese delegation, consisting of experts in animal vaccines and poultry, delivered the vaccines to Secretary Livestock Muhammad Masood Anwar. The invitation for the visit to the province was extended by Secretary Livestock to the Chinese experts. Mr. Anwar briefed the delegation about the potential of the Livestock sector in Punjab, adding that the purpose of the visit was to promote Chinese investment in the Livestock sector and vaccine production. The Chinese delegation expressed its interest in contributing to the well-being of livestock in Punjab along with enhancing trade cooperation. "We want to protect Punjab's cattle from diseases along with trade cooperation," the delegation was quoted as saying in the statement. The Chinese experts also briefed Pakistani officials on MFD vaccines manufactured by Shanghai Shenlian Biomedical Corporation.—APP

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EU's Red Sea plan shows it seeks autonomy

By moving ahead with its plan to establish its own naval operation to protect commercial shipping in the Red Sea, the European Union has shown it wants to keep strategic autonomy and not act under the banner of the United States. According to reports, Spain, which opposed previous plans, will not block the latest one, clearing the way for the details to be worked out. There is now a push to get final approval of the plan at the EU foreign ministers' meeting on Jan 22. "The idea is to have a European mission that can be operational as soon as possible," Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said. While 10 countries supported the US-led air strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen, including the EU members Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, vowing in a joint statement released by the White House "not to hesitate to defend lives and protect the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways", the EU is right to try and unite the bloc so it can act on its own initiative. To join a US-led operation in the Red Sea for shipping protection means, first of all, submitting to US decisions on what actions are to be taken, and thus becoming tools for its pursuit of its broader agenda in the region. US "interests" in the crisis do not necessarily align with the priorities set out by the EU. Besides, in response to the intensifying US-led air strikes, Houthi militants have reacted fiercely by vowing that all US and UK ships are "legitimate targets". "The ship doesn't necessarily have to be heading to Israel for us to target it," said its spokesperson. The UK has already set a not-so-smart precedent in making its flagged vessels targets by Pavlovianly following the US' lead. The EU is wise to avoid doing the same. The EU already has an independent maritime security operation, the Spain-led Atalanta mission in the northwestern Indian Ocean, which was launched in response to piracy off the Somali coast. By not joining US-led military operations in the Red Sea, the EU would also reinforce the possibility of easing the tensions in the Red Sea, which are a spillover effect of the Gaza conflict, via peaceful, political means. The key solution to the problem in the Red Sea lies in ending that conflict. While the importance of the Red Sea as a global goods and energy trade passage is beyond question, and the need to protect commercial shipping is imperative, the US' use of force is only aggravating the risks and does not address the root cause, which is its refusal to restrain Israel's military operations in Gaza. The EU is showing good judgement in not wanting to be party to the US' murky, and clearly self-serving agenda in the region. It's time for reason to prevail and the US' unconscionable actions not to be supported, so that concerted efforts can be made to end the conflict in Gaza. That is the best way to extinguish the fire in the Red Sea.



Canada up to its bootlicking tricks again

The Canadian government published a list of 11 "Sensitive Technology Research Areas" along with a list of 103 "Named Research Organizations" with which cooperation in the areas identified would be considered a potential national security risk. Any research in such areas involving collaboration with the named entities, which are allegedly connected to foreign military, defense or security apparatuses, would be disqualified for federal funding. While the policy will not take effect before September, the government may act accordingly now "should risks be identified", said a statement issued by three government ministers, citing Canada's new "Policy on Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations of Concern". In the current atmosphere of geopolitical complexity, it has become habitual for countries to worry about national security and for them to make moves to address perceived risks, real or otherwise. The politicizing of such concerns, however, and the abusing and manipulating of remedial actions not only poison international relations, but also impede scientific and technological advancement. The 11 research areas cover literally all the realms of emerging technologies that are believed to be of critical importance for future scientific and technological advancement. Among the "Named Research Organizations" that allegedly "may pose" a threat to Canadian national security and sensitive research are 85 Chinese research institutions supposedly suspected of being "military, national defense or state security entities". The Canadian move will deal an additional blow to the already icy ties with China. In Beijing's eyes, this is but another sign that Ottawa is determined to follow in the United States' footsteps. The move "seriously undermines scientific exchanges and cooperation between China and Canada, and is not conducive to improving and stabilizing bilateral relations," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning. "The Chinese side is strongly dissatisfied with and resolutely opposes it," she said. Scientific and technological exchanges and cooperation between the two sides are two-way and mutually beneficial, she pointed out. And as many have observed, such national security scrutiny will inevitably have a chilling effect on both Canadian and international scientific and technological progress. The Canadian policy is certainly detrimental to the scientific and technological communities of China and Canada, for it will erect insurmountable obstacles to normal exchanges and collaboration. Instead of obstructing such exchanges and cooperation, Ottawa should create the conditions and atmosphere for improving and developing scientific and technological exchanges and cooperation.

After India, Iran learnt a bitter lesson

Qamar Bashir



It was not just the act itself but the sense of treachery from a country considered a brotherly friend that intensified the emotional response. The people of Pakistan felt an acute sense of being backstabbed, not by a known adversary like India, but by a nation with whom they shared a bond of brotherhood and solidarity. This event has not only caused

The Pakistani Armed Forces, renowned for their professionalism and tactical expertise, executed Operation Marg Bar Sarmachar (translated as "Death to Fighters") with remarkable precision and effectiveness. This operation, a direct response to Iran's intrusion, showcased their strategic prowess through a meticulously planned and executed strike, approximately 80 kilometers inside Iranian territory. Utilizing advanced military technology, including killer missiles, loitering ammunition, and standoff mortars, the operation targeted and successfully neutralized hideouts of the Baloch terrorist outfits BLA and BLF. This carefully calibrated retaliation, far from being an act of aggression, was a necessary measure of self-defense. The operation's flawless execution, coupled with its strategic restraint, under-

scores Pakistan's position as a responsible military power, fully capable of defending its national interests while adhering to international norms and standards of warfare. This decisive action sent a strong message about Pakistan's ability to respond to threats with precision and professionalism, cementing its status as a formidable force in the region. In total disbelief, the unprovoked and aggressive action by Iran was perceived in Islamabad and across Pakistan as a profound betrayal and deceit by a nation long regarded as a close ally sparked a deep-seated anguish among the Pakistani armed forces, government, and citizens alike. It was not just the act itself but the sense of treachery from a country considered a brotherly friend that intensified the emotional response. The people of Pakistan felt an acute sense of being backstabbed, not by a known adversary like India, but by a nation with whom they shared a bond of brotherhood and solidarity. This event has not only caused a strategic reevaluation in Islamabad but has also left an indelible mark on the collective psyche of the Pakistani nation, reshaping perceptions and potentially altering the course of regional alliances and diplomatic relations. Perhaps soon after the attacks, Iran realized that it has committed a strategic and tactical mistake by equating Syria and Iraq with Pakistan in terms of military retaliation capabilities, especially considering Pakistan's status as a nuclear-armed nation with highly trained armed forces. It realized that while Syria and Iraq due to various internal and external factors, were not in a position to respond with equivalent military might, Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state with a well-trained and equipped military, presents a vastly different scenario. The capacity for significant military response from Pakistan is considerably higher, making any aggressive action towards it riskier. Pakistan's status as a nuclear power adds a critical dimension to its defense capabilities. The nuclear deterrent is a significant factor that any adversary must consider before engaging in military actions against Pakistan. Nuclear capabilities are not just about the potential use of nuclear weapons, but they also serve as a strategic deterrent in international relations, signaling severe consequences in the event of escalated conflicts. This incident resurrected the memories of India's similar incursions in the past and the stern lesson it learned from Pakistan's decisive and skillful retaliation. It seemed as though Iran had overlooked or disregarded the clear message Pakistan had sent in the past about its military capabilities and resolve to defend its sovereignty. In 2019, Pakistan's response to India's Balakot airstrike was a masterclass in military strategy and diplomatic tact. Swiftly intercepting an Indian aircraft and capturing its pilot, Pakistan turned a potential escalation point into a diplomatic opportunity. The release of the Indian pilot was a calculated gesture of de-escalation, earning global acclaim for Pakistan's commitment to restraint and peace. This move significantly bolstered Pakistan's international standing, projecting it as a nation prioritizing stability and diplomatic engagement over extended conflict, especially crucial given the nuclear capabilities of

both countries. In stark contrast, the recent tensions with Iran, sparked by Iranian missile strikes resulting in civilian casualties in Pakistan, prompted a different kind of response. Pakistan's military retaliation, precisely targeting militants within Iran's borders, demonstrated assertiveness while carefully avoiding a broader military engagement. This situation diverges from the 2019 scenario with India, reflecting a more intricate and evolving diplomatic challenge. These two episodes collectively highlight Pakistan's sage approach to regional challenges. The nation has shown its capacity to blend decisive military action with diplomatic sensibility effectively. The response to India in 2019 displayed Pakistan's adeptness in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Conversely, the current situation with Iran tests Pakistan's ability to navigate ongoing regional disputes, maintaining a balance between self-defense and a commitment to regional and international peace. These instances underscore Pakistan's role as a key player in a volatile regional landscape, capable of managing complex international relations while steadfastly upholding its national security and sovereignty. Amidst the already tumultuous landscape of the Middle East, where Israel conducts airstrikes in Gaza and the West Bank, and Hezbollah faces off in Lebanon, the region is a tinderbox of conflict and human suffering. The United States' operations against the Houthi tribe in Yemen, aimed at ensuring the Red Sea's strategic trade route remains open, add another layer to this complex scenario. In such a volatile environment, Iran's decision to launch attacks on three Muslim countries is not only ill-timed but also exacerbates the region's instability. This period is especially harrowing for civilians caught in the crossfire. Daily, innocent lives are lost as collateral damage in the ongoing conflict between Hamas and Israel, while many more suffer the brutalities of winter without adequate food or shelter. It's a time when leadership and unity among Muslim nations are more critical than ever. Instead of opening new battlefronts, exacerbating existing conflicts, and adding to the regional turmoil, this moment calls for a concerted effort towards de-escalation and peace. Iran, with its significant influence in the region, had the opportunity to exercise leadership by working alongside other Muslim countries to douse the flames of conflict. Such actions could have fostered a much-needed sense of unity and purpose among nations already burdened by war and strife. In these pressing times, the focus should be on humanitarian assistance, diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts, and steps towards lasting peace, rather than engaging in actions that further ignite the volatile landscape of the Middle East. In the wake of the highly charged and volatile episode between Iran and Pakistan, it is imperative that both nations exercise prudence and seek a path towards de-escalation. The hope is that this unfortunate incident will soon be relegated to the background, paving the way for the restoration of normal diplomatic channels. It is crucial for Iran and Pakistan to collaboratively develop a robust,

credible strategy to dismantle safe havens for militants within their borders. This approach should be transparent, verifiable, and based on mutual trust and cooperation. To effectively counter the menace of terrorism, both nations must engage in regular, in-depth dialogues at various levels, particularly among intelligence agencies and military units. These discussions should aim to foster understanding, share critical information, and coordinate efforts more efficiently. Additionally, conducting joint and coordinated operations along the border regions could prove instrumental in uprooting the entrenched terrorist networks that threaten the security and stability of both countries. Such collaborative efforts would not only signify a commitment to combating terrorism but also demonstrate a shared dedication to regional peace and security. By joining forces, Iran and Pakistan can set a powerful example of how cooperation and strategic partnership can overcome challenges and contribute to a safer, more stable region. The urgency of re-establishing a constructive and cooperative relationship between these two nations cannot be overstated, especially in a region that has long been plagued by conflict and instability. The leadership of both countries should recognize that their people aspire not for war and conflict, but for growth, development, and peace. The path to a prosperous future lies in creating conditions that enable citizens to lead happy and contented lives. This can only be achieved by avoiding war and channeling resources towards the betterment of their nations. Iran and Pakistan have the opportunity to exemplify how countries can contribute positively to regional peace, emphasizing diplomatic engagement over military confrontation. Such efforts would not only benefit their own citizens but also set a precedent for conflict resolution and humanitarian consideration in international relations.

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

Europe must prepare for worst-case scenarios

Andrew Hammond

However, even bigger political and economic shocks may be to come during the rest of the decade. This view was outlined on Tuesday by Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency. Following Donald Trump's victory on Monday in the Iowa Republican caucus, De Croo warned that, "if 2024 brings us 'America First' again, it will be more than ever Europe on its own." However, he went on to say that Europeans "should not

Recent global shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and Ukraine war, have impacted Europe perhaps more than any other continent. So much so that the period since 2020 is now sometimes seen as a new time of troubles. However, even bigger political and economic shocks may be to come during the rest of the decade. This view was outlined on Tuesday by Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency. Following Donald Trump's victory on Monday in the Iowa Republican caucus, De Croo warned that, "if 2024 brings us 'America First' again, it will be more than ever Europe on its own." However, he went on to say that Europeans "should not fear that prospect. We should embrace it by putting Europe on a more solid footing – stronger, more sovereign, more self-reliant." What De Croo highlights here is the need for the EU specifically – and possibly Europe at large – to use 2024 to plan ahead for what could be another tumultuous period. With regard to Trump, there are concerns in Europe that, if he gets a second term as US president, he could try to withdraw the country from NATO, which underpins European security, and end its support for Ukraine in the war against Russia. There is a need for the EU to use 2024 to plan ahead for what could be another tumultuous period. However, the range of economic and political issues of concern goes well beyond Trump, meaning key European decision-makers are looking ahead to a more holistic range of issues in the period to 2030. This period covers not only the next term of the European Commission, but also the next UK parliament, the US presidency, a Russian presidential term and also the current term of Chinese President Xi Jinping. In thinking through these 2030 scenari-

os, the core uncertainties likely to have the most impact in shaping Europe's future at a genuinely historic time are at least twofold. A first key question is whether the geopolitical context will worsen or improve for Europe in the period to 2030. Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, much depends on the future foreign policy not just of Moscow, but also other nations, including the US and China. A second question is whether the EU and Europe more broadly can boost their economic competitiveness and close the growth gap with the US. In 2008, the EU's economy was larger than that of the US: \$16.2 trillion versus \$14.7 trillion. By 2022, however, the US economy had grown to more than \$25 trillion, whereas the combined EU and post-Brexit UK economies had only reached \$19.8 trillion. As Christian Ulbrich, the CEO of global real estate services firm JLL, has said: Europe's "wealth is melting away at rapid speed" and there is a pressing need for key reforms. Much uncertainty remains about the overall fortunes of the EU in the years ahead and it is particularly hard to ascertain the future economic trajectory of the bloc. What is for sure, however, is that the geopolitical context outside of Europe is unlikely to improve significantly from where it is today – and it may even grow significantly worse. This is probable, whether or not Trump wins the 2024 US presidential election. The geopolitical context outside of Europe is unlikely to improve significantly from where it is today. In today's increasingly multipolar world order, the revisionist powers of Russia and China are flexing their muscles. This worries many politicians and, only last month, German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius warned of the possibility of further Russian aggression in Europe by 2030. International Monetary Fund Deputy Managing

Director Gita Gopinath added that the world is heading toward "cold war two." Much more uncertain, however, is whether Europe will be able to recover its competitive economic advantage vis-a-vis the US economy and other world powers in the next five years. This may be possible if the shocks of recent years are not repeated, but there is a significant chance of further turbulence, especially in a more challenging geopolitical context. The problem, as Francois Geerolf of the French Observatory of Economic Conditions asserts, is that, "with each crisis, the eurozone permanently loses a few points of growth to the United States." But it remains possible that the next few years could see a combination of faster European economic growth and a more challenging international context. This might give rise to a type of "Fortress Europe" scenario, in which stronger economic growth provides significant new resources to pursue strategic autonomy, which would help enhance EU security. This could include an embryonic EU military – a key project championed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen when she was German defense minister. However, it is also plausible that, by 2030, a more challenging international context is combined with stagnating European economic growth. This might see the EU lack the huge financial resources needed to pursue an expensive strategic autonomy pathway. Taken together, the period to 2030 will therefore be another highly uncertain one for Europe. While the continent can hope for the best, it urgently needs to build resilience to prepare for the worst so as not to get caught off guard by the economic and political perils that may lie ahead. —Sourced by Arab News.

Briefs

China offers mediator's...

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Iran claimed targeted a militant organisation, Pakistan also launched an attack overnight resulting in the killing of several militant targets residing in the border region in Iran. According to Tehran, the attack by Islamabad has claimed at least seven civilians. During a press conference in Beijing, China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said the Chinese side sincerely hopes that the two sides can exercise calm and restraint and avoid an escalation of tension. "We are also willing to play a constructive role in de-escalating the situation if both sides so wish," she added.

CEC stresses security...

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The meeting was told that there were threat alerts in some parts of the country, but no stone would be left unturned to hold peaceful elections and that arrangements for the installation of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras at all sensitive polling stations were also complete. Besides timely supply of funds to all departments concerned was being ensured. The Balochistan chief secretary (CS) said peace committees were also being formed at the polling station level to help maintain a peaceful atmosphere at the polling stations. The Punjab CS said clear policy instructions should be issued on changes in the allotment of election symbols so that the elections were not delayed. To this, the CEC said the printing of ballot papers was going on. "Therefore, if any changes are made in the election symbols now, it will be difficult to hold elections in those constituencies."

PM forms high-level...

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order situation. Previous election campaigns have witnessed spasms of violence, with scores of candidates and voters targeted by bombings and gun attacks. Last week, an independent candidate running for the provincial assembly was killed alongside two aides when his car was hit by a spray of gunfire as he campaigned in the province, police said. Meanwhile on Tuesday, in an order issued by his office, caretaker Sindh Chief Minister Maqbool Baqar warned "there have been multiple reports of attacks on candidates" running for the election. Some have been "kidnapped in broad daylight", he said, describing it as a "rising tide of crime".

Pak-UAE sign over...

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countries have decided to further consolidate the economic cooperation through landmark projects," Tarar said at the signing ceremony in Davos. "The signing of Investment Framework Agreements highlights the importance of Pakistan as gateway to Asia and commercial dividends associated with its strategic location." Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, who is also the CEO of DP World, said Pakistan was a growing market and they were proud of contributing to its trading ability.

Experts react to...

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"This morning Pakistan undertook a series of highly coordinated and specifically targeted precision military strikes against terrorist hideouts in Siestan-o-Baluchistan province of Iran," the FO mentioned. "If Iran had any concerns, it should have informed Pakistan," Senator Rehman insisted, highlighting the need for restraint by both countries. She maintained that Pakistan has old ties with Iran and there is a need to improve relations. However, she also acknowledged that such skirmishes along the Pakistan-Iran border have been taking place for many years. "It would be better if the two countries do not allow this kind of conflict to escalate further," she added.

Arthur, Bradburn, Puttick resign from their respective positions
Pak cricket officials resign after portfolio changes

Mickey Arthur, Grant Bradburn and Andrew Puttick inform PCB to leave their respective jobs by end of January

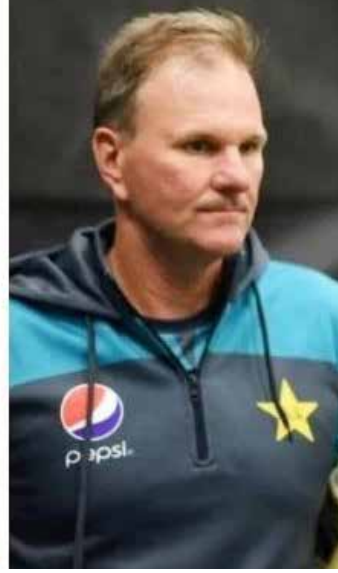
OUR CORRESPONDENTS

LAHORE: In another blow to the Pakistan men's cricket team, top officials Mickey Arthur, Grant Bradburn, and Andrew Puttick have chosen to vacate their positions after changes in their portfolios. Arthur, Bradburn, and Puttick, who were assigned duties at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Lahore after a change in their portfolios in November 2023, have resigned from their respective positions.

In April 2023, Arthur was appointed Director of the Pakistan men's cricket team while Bradburn was announced head coach of the Pakistan national men's side earlier last year. Former South Africa cricketer Puttick was Pakistan's batting coach since April 2023. Prior to his recent stint, Arthur



was the head coach of the Pakistan Men's Cricket Team from



2016 to 2019 during which Pakistan attained the No. 1 spot in the



ICC Test team rankings and won the 2017 ICC Champions Trophy.

In international cricket, Arthur has also served as the head coach of South Africa, Australia, and Sri Lanka. 57-year-old Bradburn, who had previously represented New Zealand in 18 international matches from 1990 to 2001, served as the fielding coach of the Pakistan men's team from 2018 to 2020 before taking up the Head of High-Performance Coaching role at NCA till October 2021. Under his tenure as head coach, Pakistan achieved the No. 1 spot in the ICC ODI team rankings. All three individuals informed the Pakistan Cricket Board of their decision to leave their respective jobs by the end of January 2024. The decision was taken amicably between all the stakeholders. The PCB wishes them well in their future endeavours and is grateful for their services, an official statement read.

Hazlewood, Travis put Aust in command against WI

DNA

ADELAIDE: An inspired spell of bowling from Josh Hazlewood and a brilliant attacking century from Travis Head put Australia in complete control of the first Test against the West Indies on the second day at Adelaide Oval on Thursday. After Head smashed 119 from 134 balls to take Australia to 283 and a first-innings lead of 95, Hazlewood took four wickets for just two runs at the start of the West Indies second innings to deal a hammer blow to the visitors. At stumps on the second day, the West Indies were 73-6, still 22 runs from making Australia bat again. Joshua Da Silva was not out 17, with Justin Greaves

dismissed off the last ball of the day's play. Josh Hazlewood removed the top four West Indies batsmen in a superb spell of seam bowling. He dismissed Tagenarine Chanderpaul for a first ball duck, then in his next over he had captain Kraigg Brathwaite caught by Travis Head at a deepish short leg. The West Indies were 7-3 when Alick Athanaze gloved a bouncer to keeper Alex Carey, then 19-4 when Kavem Hodge edged to Steve Smith at second slip. Kirk McKenzie and Greaves tried to rebuild the innings and took the score to 40 before McKenzie tried an expansive drive off Cameron Green, only to spoon the ball to Marnus Labuschagne at short cover. Greaves and Da Silva batted

sensibly and looked certain to take the West Indies safely to stumps, only for off-spinner Nathan Lyon to trap Greaves lbw for 24. On a pitch that troubled every other batsman, Head seemed to be playing on a different surface, bringing up his seventh Test century with a glorious cover drive to the boundary. He eventually fell after making a brisk century, caught brilliantly on the boundary by Kavem Hodge off the bowling of Alzarri Joseph, but by then the damage had been done and Australia were firmly in control. The Australians were expected to dominate a below-strength West Indies, who have three players on debut in this match. But led by exciting newcomer Shamar Joseph, the

visitors took regular wickets throughout the first two sessions to initially keep the Australians on the back foot. Joseph, playing only his sixth first-class match, ended with 5-94 in a magnificent Test debut. Australia had reshuffled their batting order on the retirement of David Warner, moving Steve Smith to opener so they could bring Green back into the side. The first part of that experiment failed when Smith fell for 12 on Wednesday, so the Australians would have been hoping for big runs from the towering Green. But he was gone for 14 in just the second over on Thursday morning, caught by wicketkeeper Da Silva off Shamar Joseph to leave the Australians 67-3.

PCB issues NOC to 4 cricketers for global leagues

The PCB is carefully evaluating each case individually, underscoring meticulous approach in assessing permissions for national cricketers

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has given its nod by issuing No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to four prominent national cricket players, paving the way for their participation in international cricket leagues. The quartet set to make their mark in foreign leagues comprises T20I captain Shaheen Shah Afridi, Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, and Wasim Jr. Notably, Shaheen Afridi has secured a spot with the Desert Vipers in the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) ICLT20, while Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, and Wasim Jr. have committed to teams in the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). Rizwan will represent the Comilla Victorians, Babar Azam is poised to wear the jersey of the Rangpur Riders and Mohammad Wasim Jr is geared up to represent the Khulna Tigers. Sources within the PCB have revealed that Fakhar Zaman and Azam Khan are currently awaiting approval for their league participations. PCB is carefully evaluating each case individually, underscoring the meticulous approach in assessing permissions for national cricketers. It is worth noting that the tenth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and the second edition of ICLT20 are set to begin on January 19, 2024. - DNA

Vaughan believes 'Bazball can save Test cricket'

LONDON: Former England captain Michael Vaughan pinned high hopes on England's famous aggressive approach towards Test cricket, called Bazball, asserting it can save the longest format. Michael Vaughan, in an exclusive interview with renowned English cricketing magazine, Wisden, opened up the state of Test cricket globally and opined that ICC should distribute funds around the world to promote the format. "If we genuinely have people at the top level who want to save Test cricket, they can position money around the world and some of the structures around countries to make sure their pathway programmes are in a good state of health," he said. "I do think they've allowed a lot of countries just to go about their business with no money, no structure, no expertise to help them out," Vaughan added. However, Michael Vaughan insisted that despite all the backlash from the cricketing world, Bazball is "actually doing something which could save Test cricket". "I love the way England have been playing," said Vaughan. "Rather than the rest of the world going, 'Oh shut up England, stop boasting, you're not changing the planet... well, they are actually doing something which could save Test cricket and that's why I admire Ben and Baz hugely. "I know you need different styles, but if everyone bought into the logic of going out there to win and not being too concerned about the draw, Test cricket would be in a better place." Vaughan became the latest critic of the World Test Championship (WTC) and claimed that it would not solve any problems. It's been frustrating for many years that in this great format we do very little other than go, 'Oh, we'll just have a Test Championship, that's going to solve all the problems'. No, it's not." - Agencies

Rybakina shocked by Blinkova in record-breaking tie-break

MELBOURNE: Forty-two points, 14 combined match points, 31 draining minutes - and that was just the tie-break. Elena Rybakina and Anna Blinkova played out an epic Australian Open second-round match on Thursday - one that was settled by the longest tie-break in Grand Slam singles history. Russian Blinkova eventually converted her 10th match point to win the second-round match 6-4 4-6 7-6 (22-20). "This day I will remember for the rest of my life," she said. Rybakina missed eight match points of her own in an enthralling encounter at Melbourne Park, which lasted two hours and 46 minutes. The Kazakh third seed - who finished runner-up to Aryna Sabalenka last year - is the highest women's seed to fall so far. The previous longest women's tie-break was Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko's 4-6 6-3 7-6 (20-18) victory over Ana Bogdan in the Wimbledon third round last year. Those 38 points matched the men's record from the first set of Andy Roddick's victory against Jo-Wilfried Tsonga at the 2007 Australian Open. Roddick lost the tie-break but won in four sets. "There were moments I enjoyed - and other moments it was super tough," Blinkova said on court. "I had so many match points. I tried to be aggressive at these mo-

ments but my hands were shaking, and my legs too. I tried to be calm as hard as I could. Super happy to win in the end." - Agencies

Australia edge Syria 1-0 to reach AC knockouts
Australia followed hosts and holders Qatar into the last 16 of the Asian Cup with an unconvincing 1-0 victory

SPORTS DESK

SYDNEY: Australia followed hosts and holders Qatar into the last 16 of the Asian Cup with an unconvincing 1-0 victory over Syria on Thursday. Jackson Irvine scored the winner on the hour with his second goal of the tournament, swivelling in the box before poking the ball through the legs of goalkeeper Ahmad Madanieh. Graham Arnold's Socceros are into the knockouts with a group game to spare but will have to play better than this if they are to lift the Asian Cup for a second time. India play Uzbekistan in the same group later in the day. Lower-ranked Syria nearly went ahead inside five minutes when their Colombian-born striker Pablo Sabbag pinged the ball off the foot of Australia's post. Sabbag was left bloodied in the face midway through the half after a stray forearm by Aiden O'Neill, and the midfielder was booked. But Australia, who reached the last 16 of the Qatar World Cup before a 2-1 defeat to eventual champions Argentina, were by now in control. Arnold criticised his side for failing to make more of their set-pieces in their 2-0 open-

ing win over India, and 10 minutes before the break Australia nearly went ahead from a corner. Defender Gethin Jones won the ball with a looping header and midfielder Irvine - who scored in the India victory - just failed to reach the ball on the stretch at the far post. Ranked 91 in the world to Australia's 25, Syria were hardly in it as an



attempt from outside the box curled over. Arnold trudged down the tunnel for half-time with a shake of the head. "Thanks to the crowd for cheering me, encouraging me. It helped me so much, gave me so much energy to fight until the end," said Blinkova, who will face Jasmine Paolini in the next round on Saturday.

"I had so many match points. I tried to be aggressive but my hands were shaking and my legs, too. I tried as hard as I could to be calm and I am super happy in the end. I told myself to be solid, keep putting balls in the court, and finally it worked out." By the 57th minute he had seen enough and made a triple change, throwing on the attacking midfielders Riley McGree and Samuel Silveira, plus midfielder Keanu Baccus. It did the trick and three minutes later Australia took the lead through Germany-based midfielder Irvine. They were mostly comfortable after that, but there was nearly embarrassment for goalkeeper Maty Ryan when he spilled a tame effort from distance in the 67th minute, scrambling back to claw the ball off his goal-line. The final round of matches in Group B is on Tuesday, when Australia play Uzbekistan and India face Syria.

Saudi FM calls on PM Kakar

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heritage and shared interests. He emphasized that Pakistan's desire to deepen bilateral engagement including through trade, investment and people-to-people exchanges," PM Kakar's office said in a statement. "The two sides also reviewed regional developments. Prime Minister Kakar noted that close brotherly relations between the two countries were a factor of regional stability." Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have deep cultural, defense and economic ties, deeply rooted in history and religion. PM Kakar appreciated the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and underlined the highest esteem the people of Pakistan held for the leadership and the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, his office said. The Pakistan premier arrived in Switzerland on Sunday to attend the 54th WEF summit, where he was scheduled to attend three thematic events, including 'Preventing An Era of Global Conflict,' 'Restoring Faith in the Global System,' and 'Preventing Economic Fracture.'

Pakistan to be made...

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If I were not ousted from the PM office, the country would be prosperous, and there would be no inflation," said Nawaz Sharif. He further added that his government would have ensured a new motorway passing through Hafizabad, similar to the one currently traversing Lahore. Expressing his vision for the nation, Nawaz stated, "My mission is to stand the country on its own feet. We will construct motorways in Hafizabad, just like we did in Lahore." He concluded his address, affirming his commitment to the progress and prosperity of Pakistan, asserting that the PML-N would continue its efforts to bring economic stability and development to the nation. Maryam Nawaz, Senior Vice President of PML-N, during her address, emphasised the importance of recognising the historical significance of May 28 - the day Pakistan announced that it had successfully conducted five nuclear tests in the Chagai district of Balochistan - as opposed to May 9, which she deemed as a day when the country was thrown into flames.

Bilawal optimistic...

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Make me premier to see the implementation on the 10-point agenda," Bhutto-Zardari said. Speaking about the flood-stricken people, Bhutto-Zardari said, "We want to build houses for the flood victims. Naushahro Feroze had witnessed more losses from the flash floods. We will have to extend support to the flood victims at any cost." He reiterated that his party was looking to provide ownership rights to the women. "The process of constructing 2 million houses for people is underway. "Give us more seats in the upcoming elections so that we can address the matters in line with the ballooning inflation and unemployment."

PM, FM cut short...

FROM PAGE 01

which is paramount and cannot be compromised," she reiterated her remarks already issued a short after Pakistan carried out a series of "highly coordinated" and "specifically targeted" precision military strikes in Siestan-o-Baluchistan province of Iran. She said the prime minister who was currently in Davos to attend the World Economic Forum and the foreign minister attending the NAM Summit and Third South Summit in Uganda, have cut their visits short "in view of the ongoing developments." Asked about any third-party mediation to de-escalate the situation, she said that she was not aware of any such development. She said Pakistan considered the Iranian people as friends and brothers and had no interest in escalating the situation and hoped that "our adversaries understand this". Pakistan had always chosen the path of dialogue and would continue to engage with neighbours including Iran to ensure peace prevailed, she remarked.

Briefs

Erdogan
applauds
Turkish
airlines'
economic
impact

ANKARA : President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hailed Thursday the contribution of Türkiye's flag carrier, Turkish Airlines (THY), to the country's economy, congratulating the company for the accomplishments achieved. "According to the figures for 2023, Turkish Airlines has contributed \$56 billion (TL 1.68 trillion) to our country's economy, with approximately \$16 billion in service exports, solidifying its leadership in this field," Erdo said in a video message sent to the Turkish Airlines Management Summit, expressing his hope for the success of the summit and wished it to be auspicious. "In line with our 'Century of Türkiye' vision, we are confidently and decisively moving toward the future. The success level of our country in the aviation sector is steadily rising," he said. "Turkish Airlines, not only being the most valuable brand in Türkiye but also the airline flying to most countries in the world, is making a name for itself with its contributions to our country's economy," the president added. At the same time, he expressed they were pleased to see that Antalya, the shining star of world tourism, is "also getting its share from the strong wings of Turkish Airlines."—Agencies

Cholera
outbreak
in Zambia
surpasses
400 deaths

LUSAKA : Zambia is reeling from a major cholera outbreak that has killed more than 400 people and infected more than 10,000, leading authorities to order schools across the country to remain shut after the end-of-year holidays. The outbreak in Zambia began in October, and 412 people have died, and 10,413 cases have been recorded, according to the latest count on Wednesday from the Zambia Public Health Institute, the government body that deals with health emergencies. The Health Ministry says cholera has been detected in nearly half of the country's districts and nine out of 10 provinces, and the nation of about 20 million people has been recording more than 400 cases a day. "This outbreak continues to pose a threat to the health security of the nation," Health Minister Sylvia Masebo said, outlining it was a nationwide problem. The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, called the fatality rate of around 4 percent in the three-month outbreak "a devastatingly high number." When treated, cholera typically has a death rate of less than 1 percent. A large soccer stadium in the capital city has been converted into a treatment facility.—APP

IMF grants
Kenya \$941
million loan

NAIROBI : The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said it has granted Kenya a new loan of more than \$941 million to help buttress the finances of the cash-strapped East African nation. Kenya is grappling with a host of economic challenges, including a vast debt mountain, a cost of living crisis and a tumbling currency. The IMF said in a statement published on Wednesday that its executive board had approved the \$941.2 million loan, with an immediate disbursement of \$624.5 million. Total payments under various credit facilities amount to about \$2.6 billion, it added. The Washington-based agency forecasted Kenya's economic growth to be around 5% this year from an estimated 5.1% in 2023. "Kenya's growth remained resilient in the face of increasing external and domestic challenges," Antonette Sayeh, IMF deputy managing director and acting chair, said in the statement. The credit arrangements for Kenya "continue to support the authorities' efforts to sustain macroeconomic stability."—DNA

Palestinians face security threats, not Israel: FM

If we do not demonstrate the sufficiency of this, today this crisis will hit the Palestinians, tomorrow it will be another Muslim nation," Fidan warned

NEWS DESK

ANKARA : The world must see the truth: It isn't Israel whose security is under threat but Palestinians and countries in the region, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Thursday as Israel continues pounding on the Gaza Strip for over three months now. "It's unacceptable to legitimize Israel's attacks on Palestine under the pretext of security," Fidan told reports alongside Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi in Amman. "If we cannot come together and defend such a rightful issue in an honorable and strong manner, if we do not demonstrate the sufficiency of this, today this crisis will hit the Palestinians, tomorrow it will be another Muslim nation," Fidan warned. In a thinly veiled jab at Western nations' singular emphasis on Israeli hostages, he said: "A mentality that only talks about Israel's security and overlooks the security threat Palestinians face is bringing not peace but war to the region." The Israeli offensive — launched

in the wake of a deadly attack by Palestinian resistance group Hamas in southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which Israel says 1,200 people were killed — has displaced most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million and claimed the lives of more than 24,000 people. Describing what Israel has been doing "with the claim of ensuring its own security" as "nothing but expansionism and occupation," Fidan said, "The fact that Israeli territory grows after every war and crisis is the most concrete evidence of this." Stressing that Israel's "massacres must stop" and the blockade on Gaza must be lifted "immediately," Fidan also slammed Israel for "stealing Palestinian land through occupation, which it calls 'settlements,' in the West Bank." The Israeli army has been making unlawful arrests in the occupied West Bank, including at least 6,000 Palestinians since Oct. 7, where tensions have been running high. At least 360 Palestinians have since been killed and nearly 4,000 others injured in the occupied territory, according to figures released by the Health Ministry. Türkiye



welcomes South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Fidan continued, noting that Ankara wishes the court's temporary injunction ruling to stop the Israeli attacks would create an opportunity for a permanent cease-fire. The international community has been waiting for ICJ's decision since the hearings concluded on Jan. 12, where South Africa's legal team asked the court to put in a special emergency request for provisional measures to halt the deadly Israeli campaign. Regional crises "The Middle East

doesn't need more conflicts and problems," Fidan said, pointing to the repercussions the war in Gaza is having on regional tensions, particularly Palestine's neighbors, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. Armed groups backed by Iran have launched attacks in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen in solidarity with the Palestinians. Safadi too underscored the "essential" need to end the war in Gaza and avert an escalation of violence in the wider region. "Israel should allow displaced Palestinians in Gaza to return to their homes," Safadi said. "With regard to the current priorities, they are clear: ending the aggression in Gaza, letting in sufficient permanent humanitarian aid to all parts of the Strip, south and north, stopping the destruction, and working immediately for the return of displaced Gazans to their areas and homes," he said. Bilateral ties The Turkish diplomat also touted Jordan for its "stable political and economic structure" and as "a nation that must always be accounted for in the Middle East geopolitics." He said he and

Safadi had the opportunity to discuss the Syrian refugee crisis and the security crisis arising due to the civil war since 2011, as well as potential moves to tackle shared issues and maintain bilateral relations around these. "We are maintaining dialogue on both bilateral and multilateral platforms and following the decisions taken at the Joint Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League," Fidan noted. The pair previously traveled to several Western nations, including the U.S., Canada and Belgium, as part of the Gaza contact group of the Arab League and the OIC to strengthen the shifting global stance for Israel to stop its attacks. Fidan praised "concrete results" from these initiatives, which he believes have contributed to the pro-Palestine shift in international public opinion. "Regional crises concern Türkiye and Jordan very closely and therefore, we attach great importance to regular consultations," Fidan said, adding that the Türkiye-Jordan Joint Economic Commission would hold its first meeting in the coming term.

Japan buys
Tomahawk
missiles
from US

WASHINGTON : Japan entered into an agreement with its ally, the United States, to acquire 400 long-range Tomahawk missiles. This move is part of Japan's efforts to enhance its military capabilities in response to regional security concerns. Faced with growing Chinese military clout and a nuclear-armed North Korea, the Japanese government plans to double its defense spending to the NATO standard of 2% of GDP by 2027. A sale of up to \$2.35 billion for two types of Tomahawks, which have a 1,600-kilometer (995-mile) range, was approved by Washington in November. "The conclusion of this signing starts the procurement of the Tomahawk missiles," a defense official told reporters on Thursday after the deal was signed in Tokyo. —APP

Singapore
minister
charged with
corruption
resigns

SINGAPORE : Singapore's Transport Minister S. Iswaran resigned after being charged with corruption in the biggest political scandal in almost four decades, which has cast a pall on the city-state known for clean governance. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong accepted Iswaran's resignation as a cabinet minister and lawmaker, according to a statement from Lee's office. Iswaran, who's out on bail, rejected the 27 charges against him, including allegedly obtaining tickets to musicals and soccer matches in the U.K. "I am determined to uphold the integrity of the party and the government, and our reputation for honesty and incorruptibility," Lee said in the statement, referring to the ruling People's Action Party. "Singaporeans expect no less." Iswaran, 61, is the first key minister to get embroiled in a graft probe since 1986 when then-Minister for National Development Teh Cheang Wan was investigated for accepting bribes. Teh denied receiving the money and died before he could be formally charged. Iswaran, 61, is the first key minister to get embroiled in a graft probe since 1986. He and property tycoon Ong Beng Seng were arrested in July in a case that's challenged Singapore's reputation for clean governance at a time when Lee is seeking to step aside after almost two decades of leading the country. —APP

Women in
Germany
earn
18% less
than men

BERLIN : The Federal Statistics Office reported on Thursday that, on average, women in Germany earned 18% less than their male counterparts last year. This disparity is primarily attributed to a plateau in earnings following childbirth and the adoption of part-time employment by women. The data show that the gender pay gap in Europe's biggest economy has remained unchanged since 2020. That is down from 23% when records started in 2006. On an adjusted basis, the gender pay gap for 2023 was 6%, said the office. Women's earnings start to stagnate from the age of 30 years, the average age for women to have their first child in Germany, said the office, while men continue to earn more. "This could be because women interrupt their careers more frequently during their working lives for family reasons and work part time," said the office, adding that career advancement and pay rises are therefore less frequent. On average, women earned 20.84 euros per hour, compared with 25.30 euros for men. However, at 7%, the gap is far narrower in the former communist East compared with 19% in western Germany. A study published on Wednesday showed the number of women at the helm of Germany's top companies is shrinking. —APP

Russia's Lavrov rejects US
proposal for nuclear talks

WEB DESK

MOSCOW : Russia's top diplomat has rejected a United States proposal to resume a dialogue on nuclear arms control, saying that it is impossible while Washington offers military support to Ukraine. Speaking at a news conference on Thursday, Sergey Lavrov accused the West of fuelling global security risks by encouraging Ukraine to ramp up strikes on Russian territory and warned that Moscow will achieve its goals in the conflict regardless of Western support for Kyiv. Commenting on a US proposal to resume contacts in the sphere of nuclear arms control, Lavrov said that Moscow has rejected the offer. He said that for such talks to be held, Washington first needs to revise its current policy towards Russia. Lavrov

charged that Washington's push for the revival of nuclear talks has been driven by a desire to resume inspections of Russia's nuclear weapons sites. He described such US demands as "indecent" in view of Ukraine's attacks on Russian nuclear-capable bomber bases during the conflict. "Amid a 'hybrid war' waged by Washington against Russia, we aren't seeing any basis, not only for any additional joint measures in the sphere of arms control and reduction of strategic risks, but for any discussion of strategic stability issues with the US," he said. "We firmly link such possibility to the West fully renouncing its malicious course aimed at undermining Russia's security and interests." The minister said Washington's push for restarting nuclear arms talks is rooted in a desire to "try to establish control over our nuclear arsenal and minimise nu-

clear risks for itself" but added that "those risks are emerging as a result of forceful pressure on our country." He accused the West of blocking any talks on ending the conflict and inciting the ramping up of attacks on Russia. "Such encouragement and the transfer of relevant weapons shows that the West doesn't want any constructive solution," Lavrov said. "The West is pushing toward the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, and that raises new strategic risks." He reaffirmed that Russia will pursue what it calls the "special military operation" regardless of Western pressure. "We will consistently and persistently press the goals of the special military operation and we will achieve them," he said. "They should have no hope that Russia could be defeated in any way. Those in the West who fantasise about

it have failed to learn history lessons." The foreign minister's comments come as tensions in the nearly two-year conflict show no signs of abating, with Ukraine claiming the same day it struck an oil terminal in Saint Petersburg. A Russian-appointed official in occupied southeastern Ukraine earlier disputed this, saying that Ukraine had tried and failed to target a Russian Baltic Sea oil terminal with a drone overnight. Ukraine's offensive lies on the heels of its continuous push to join NATO, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy most again calling for membership at Davos, the World Economic Forum's annual summit. NATO's chief Jens Stoltenberg said at the summit that Kyiv is "closer to NATO than ever before." During his press conference, Lavrov said that Ukraine must end its push to join NATO before any discussion of peace takes place.

Zelenskyy says
probe launched
on surveillance
of journalists

KYIV : Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that a probe had been launched into the case involving the surveillance of journalists, terming pressure against media personnel unacceptable. Zelenskyy's remarks during an evening video address on Wednesday came after the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said it was investigating the circumstances regarding illegal wiretapping and video recording of employees of a local news outlet, indicating that criminal proceedings have been initiated. The SBU believes "independent and professional" mass media's transparent and unimpeded work is "an important condition for the development of Ukraine as a democratic state," it added. The Bihus.Info news outlet earlier said its employees were under surveillance for months after a video appeared online showing some of its staff members using drugs during a New Year's party. Speaking about strategic discussions held during a meeting with the military leadership earlier in the day, Zelenskyy said "Ukraine needs an ambitious, active perspective" and the country should retain the initiative, adding: "We want the end of the war to depend on Ukrainian actions and not the enemy's." Russia launched a "special military operation" in Ukraine nearly two years ago to "demilitarize" and "denazify" the former Soviet republic. The West, however, terms its aggression and has supported Kyiv through humanitarian, economic and military means. That support, however, is said to be waning amid Kyiv's allegedly failed counteroffensive, changing Western political dynamics.—DNA

Somalia rejects
mediation with
Ethiopia

MOGADISHU : Somalia said on Thursday there was no room for mediation in a dispute with Ethiopia unless Addis Ababa cancelled a controversial deal with the breakaway region of Somaliland. Tensions in the Horn of Africa have escalated after landlocked Ethiopia reached a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland on January 1 that gives it access to the sea. "There is no space for mediation unless Ethiopia retracts its illegal MOU and reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia," the country's foreign ministry said in a statement posted on its official social media accounts. The comment comes after the African Union's conflict resolution body on Wednesday discussed the crisis and called on the two countries "to exercise restraint, de-escalate and engage in meaningful dialogue towards finding a peaceful resolution of the matter". The eight-country trade bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is also holding an extraordinary summit in Uganda on Thursday on the Ethiopia-Somalia feud, as well as the conflict in Sudan. All four countries are part of the bloc, along with South Sudan, Djibouti, Kenya and Eritrea. Somalia says its sovereignty and territorial integrity have been violated by the pact and has appealed for international support. Somaliland is a former British protectorate facing the Gulf of Aden which declared its independence from Somalia in 1991, a move not recognised by the international community. Under the January 1 deal, Somaliland agreed to lease 20 kilometres (12 miles) of its coast for 50 years to Ethiopia, which wants to set up a naval base and a commercial port on the coast.—DNA



JAKARTA : Ambassador Ameer Khurram Rathore met Silmy Karim, DG, Indonesian immigration. They discussed several matters of mutual interest. They agreed to enhance mutual cooperation and coordination on immigration-related matters & to increase tourism.—DNA

UK PM urges lords to pass Rwanda asylum bill

Majority of lawmakers in House of Commons backed controversial bill that would allow government to send asylum seekers to East African country

FOREIGN DESK

LONDON : British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Thursday called on the House of Lords to pass his controversial Rwanda bill, saying it is time now to start flights to the East African country. Speaking at a news conference at 10 Downing Street, Sunak said: "We are making progress to stop the boats. But now it's past time to start the flights." His remarks came a day after a majority of lawmakers in the House of Commons backed the bill that would allow the government to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, approved by a vote of 320-276, was submitted last month and is intended to

overcome a UK Supreme Court block on the plan. The court had ruled in November that the policy was illegal as Rwanda was not a safe country for refugees. As many as eleven Conservative MPs voted against the bill, including former Home Secretary Suella Braverman and former Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick, while 18 abstained, including former Prime Minister Theresa May and Lee Anderson who resigned Wednesday from his role as Conservative deputy chairman. Sunak urged the House of Lords, the upper chamber, to pass the bill, saying "this is an urgent national priority." "It's time to take back control of our borders and defeat the people's smugglers, it's time to restore people's trust that the system is fair," he added. Referring to the vote,



Sunak said that his party proved that they are "completely united" in wanting to "stop the boats." "Only long term solution to have deterrent" The prime minister said he is "proud of the progress" they have made in tackling this issue," adding that for the first time the number of small boat arrivals into Britain went down. In January 2023, Sunak counted tackling

small boat crossings by irregular migrants across the British Channel one of the five priorities of the government, as more than 45,000 migrants arrived in the UK in 2022. Last year saw decrease in the numbers as nearly 30,000 migrants crossed the Channel, over a third less than in 2022, and slightly higher than the number in 2021, when more than 28,000 arrived in the UK. "That didn't happen by accident. It happened because we put a lot of work in and we made a lot of decisions," he said. The British premier mentioned that they are starting to close the bank accounts of 7,000 people "who shouldn't be here" and returned 20,000 people back to their own countries. "Last year, we created new deals with France with Turkey to smash the

gangs upstream," he said, adding: "The only long term solution to this problem is to have a deterrent." Asked if a plane will take off to Rwanda before the general election, Sunak said he has been "crystal clear" that they want to do this "as quickly as possible." Labour Party has 'no plan' Sunak also accused the main opposition Labour Party of having "no plan" to tackle the migrants issue, saying it would take the country back "to square one." "Their priority is not stopping the boats, but stopping the planes removing people who have no right to be here," he said. He added that if the Labour Party were in charge, there would be no treaty, no bill, and "12 months of progress will be squandered."

Briefs

Tareen vows to foster country's economy

DNA

LODHARAN: Isteqam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) patron-in-chief Jahangir Khan Tareen on Thursday vowed to foster the country's economy in a bid to create employment opportunities for the country's youth. Addressing the party workers in Lodhran, Jahangir Tareen said: "For me, the biggest of all the honours is to become your MNA. I need your love and support, and making me win from the constituency will be enough for me."

"I have a belief in the higher power that I will come from the constituency. We will even deliver more than before for Lodhran," Jahangir Tareen said. Underscoring the importance of a strong economy, Jahangir Tareen said, "We will also get strong by having a developed country and a strong economy." The IPP president said, "We will put in all-out efforts to provide health, education, and other facilities in Lodhran. We will develop Lodhran and the entire country in such a way that the entire world will be amazed."

SHC allows Zulfikar, Fahmida to contest polls

DNA

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court on Thursday granted permission to former Sindh home minister Zulfikar Mirza and former federal minister Fahmida Mirza to participate in the upcoming general election which are slated to be held on Feb 8. This decision comes after the court heard constitutional petitions challenging the rejection of the couple's nomination papers. Zulfikar Mirza and Fahmida Mirza had submitted their nomination papers for National Assembly Constituency NA 223, with Zulfikar Mirza also submitting papers for PS 70, 71, and 72. The Returning Officers (ROs) and the Election Tribunal had initially rejected their nomination papers, alleging them of being bank defaulters.

President extends tenure of 3 PHC judges

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Dr Arif Alvi on Thursday extended the tenure of the office of three additional judges of Peshawar High Court. The president extended the tenure of Justice Fazal Subhan, Justice Shahid Khan and Justice Dr Khurshid Iqbal, according to a statement issued by the President House Press Wing. The extension of the tenure will be applicable from January 18, 2024 till consideration by the Judicial Commission of Pakistan. President Alvi extended the tenure of the judges in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 197 of Constitution of Pakistan.

CM Naqvi, Canadian HC discuss skilled manpower employment

Meanwhile, Chinese Consul General Zhao Shirin, along with a delegation of Chinese environmental experts, convened with Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi engaged in a productive meeting with Canadian High Commissioner Leslie Scanlon. Discussions centered around mutual interests, emphasizing the proposed agreement between the Punjab government and Canada concerning the deployment of skilled manpower. Naqvi underscored the longstanding and robust friendship between Pakistan and Canada, highlighting the historic initiative to send young professionals to Canada for employment. Expressing optimism, Chief Minister Naqvi disclosed that this month, a Punjab government delegation is scheduled to visit Canada for the formal signing of the ground breaking agreement. The Chief Minister believes that this accord will not only offer respectable employment opportunities to Pakistani youth but will also usher in a new era in Pak-Canada relations. The deliberations also extended to heightened cooperation on environmental protection, particularly addressing the pressing issue of smog. Acknowledging the efforts to combat smog through artificial rain in Lahore, Canadian High Commissioner commended the significant strides made across various fields in a short span. Anticipating positive outcomes, the Commissioner expressed hope that the upcoming visit of the Pakistani delegation to Canada would further strengthen bilateral relations through increased interactions and exchange of delegations.



Chief Minister Naqvi added that the partnership aims to extend collaboration on multiple fronts. He highlighted achievements such as the swift upgrade of 114 major hospitals and the successful completion of public welfare projects ahead of schedule. Mentioning the innovative initiative of providing 26,000 electric bikes and rickshaws without interest, he emphasized the government's commitment by imposing a ban on petrol bike purchases at the government level in Punjab. Addressing environmental concerns, Chief Minister Naqvi outlined the installation of 5 anti-smog towers in Lahore, with the first

tower expected to be operational in early February. He reassured the public that comprehensive measures were being taken to combat smog effectively. In concluding remarks, Naqvi emphasized that the Punjab government's initiatives are geared towards providing relief and convenience to the common man, underscoring the pivotal role the upcoming visit to Canada will play in furthering bilateral relations. Meanwhile, Chinese Consul General Zhao Shirin, along with a delegation of Chinese environmental experts, convened with Chief Minister Punjab Mohsin Naqvi at the Chief Minister's Office. The primary focus

of the meeting centered on devising strategies to combat the prevalent issue of smog in Lahore. During the meeting, a delegation of Chinese experts presented a preliminary report highlighting the causes of smog in Lahore. According to their findings, factors such as unnecessary use of organic and inorganic fuels, high atmospheric humidity, household dust and gas emissions, and pollutants from coal plants in India contribute to the smog in the region. The experts emphasized a specific ratio of different elements, including carbon dioxide and nitrogen, forming the smog. Commending Mohsin Naqvi's proactive measures in combating smog, the Chinese experts lauded the adoption of an effective policy. Chief Minister Naqvi stressed the need for a comprehensive and robust report to guide future governmental efforts in addressing the smog challenge. Despite school closures, a ban on crop residue burning, and reduced traffic, the persistence of smog remains noticeable. Chief Minister Naqvi expressed appreciation for the arrival of Chinese experts, anticipating a comprehensive report that would aid in tackling the issue. He emphasized the importance of understanding the factors that render smog harmful to health. Chinese Consul General Zhao Shirin acknowledged that solving the smog problem requires time, citing China's successful control efforts over seven years. Expressing gratitude, he thanked Chief Minister Naqvi and his team for hosting and welcoming the Chinese environmentalists.

Azam Khan records statement in Cipher case

DNA

RAWALPINDI: Former Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Azam Khan Thursday testified before the court in cipher case on oath by placing his hand on the Holy Quran and kissing it. He was responding to a demand by Imran Khan's lawyer that he should swear by the holy book before giving his statement. The court had earlier expressed its displeasure at the written application and said that it had already ordered to bring a copy of Holy Quran. Azam Khan narrated the sequence of events that led to the discovery of a cipher message from the US mission in Pakistan that allegedly urged the opposition to topple the elected government and bring a no-confidence motion against it. He said that he received the cipher copy from his staff in March 2022 and gave it to the Prime Minister. He said that the Prime Minister kept a copy of the cipher and it was not found later. He further said that he advised the Foreign Secretary to read out the message from the Master Cipher during a meeting in Banigala. He said it was decided to present the cipher in the federal cabinet. The cabinet sent the matter to the National Security Committee to decide how to respond to the US.

Palestine condemns Gvir statement

NEWS DESK

RAMALLAH: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates condemns in the strongest terms the continued incitement to kill more Palestinians under false pretenses and to target civilians wherever they are. At the forefront of these toxic and racist inflammatory statements is the extremist fascist Minister Ben Gvir broadcasting to the soldiers of the occupation army and the extremist settlers, in which he assured them of his support for shooting any person. (Terrorist) Even if the lives of the soldiers are not in danger, knowing that Ben Gvir is trying to demonize all Palestinians and treat them as terrorists, in the ugliest call to deepen extrajudicial killing and commit massacres practiced by the occupation army in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

PTI gears up for election drive 'commencing Jan 20'

"Workers should bear hardships and await victory on February 8," PTI leader Gohar Khan says

MEHTAB PIRZADA

RAWALPINDI: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is set to kick-start its election campaign on January 20 (Saturday), senior party leader Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said, as the general polls approach fast. The embattled PTI's major rivals – the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) – have already commenced nationwide campaigns and distributed tickets for national and provincial constituencies. Founded by Imran Khan, the party rose to power in the centre in 2018 but was ousted in April 2022 via a no-confidence move. It has since been reeling from the back-to-back setbacks. The party's founder was jailed in May last year, its electoral

symbol – a major voter driving force was taken away this month, and the party – PTI-Nazriati – with which it sought an alliance also backtracked from its commitment.

However, the party has vowed not to boycott the polls and run without its iconic electoral symbol. Since the 'bat' symbol has been taken away, all its candidates will be running with different signs. "The PTI will begin its full-fledged election campaign on Saturday [...] workers should bear hardships till then and await victory on February 8. You are advised to focus on the election campaign," Gohar said on Thursday while engaging with reporters in Rawalpindi.

About the distribution of tickets, as the party has not announced candidates for all the National Assembly seats, Gohar said they would be fi-

nished tonight and a complete list of all party candidates would be issued tomorrow.

With the party already facing several hurdles on its road to election, intense infighting was witnessed as central spokesperson, Raof Hasan, and Vice-President Sher Afzal Marwat levelled allegations against each other in recent days. Marwat, who was campaigning in Karachi, was called back by the party on directions of incarcerated founder Khan through a notification. However, it seems that the party has resolved the issue. "We will not need notifications from now on. He [Marwat] is always in contact with us. He went to Karachi; he will now go again to Sindh, Punjab, and KP," Gohar said, vowing that the leader would lead a full-fledged election drive.

Imran calls for introspection after Iran strikes

PTI founder questions wisdom behind putting one's own country in such a precarious position

COURT REPORTER

RAWALPINDI: Former prime minister and founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan, has strongly denounced Iran's violation of Pakistan's airspace while urging an investigation into the circumstances that led to this incident. In an informal conversation with the media at the Adiala Jail courtroom on Thursday, Khan emphasised the need to assess how the situation escalated to such a perilous point. Expressing concern, Khan questioned the wisdom behind putting one's country in such a precarious position and pondered whether it is in Pakistan's interest to sour relations with Iran. He underscored the importance of

cooperation with Afghanistan to combat terrorism, citing the assurances made by Shah Mehmood Qureshi during his tenure as foreign minister. Highlighting the contrast with Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's tenure as foreign minister, Khan pointed out the lack of visits to Afghanistan, stressing the crucial role Afghanistan plays in ending terrorism. He cautioned against the potential closure of the border by Afghanistan, further complicating the regional dynamics.

Reflecting on his diplomatic efforts, Khan recalled his visit to Iran as prime minister and meetings with its supreme leader. Despite acknowledging the satisfaction of those who desire strained relations with Iran, he urged a consideration of whether such a stance aligns with Pakistan's interests. He criticized the BJP's policy toward Pakistan and advocated for de-escalation rather than exacerbation in the context of Iran. Addressing domestic concerns, Khan commented on the impact of delayed elections, attributing the country's challenges to the lack of electoral stability. He alleged that the postponement of elections aimed to suppress PTI and expressed skepticism about the credibility of a caretaker prime minister. Khan also referred to former army chief Gen (ret) Qamar Javed Bajwa, stating that the situation in Pakistan resembled that of 1970 when party tickets were pivotal. In a strategic move, Khan suggested labeling candidates with "prisoner number 804" in the upcoming election campaign, emphasising the resilience of PTI's vote bank despite challenges. He praised the efforts of lawyers handling cases against PTI leaders and said he wanted to give them party tickets for the upcoming elections.

IMF debt dilemma looms after election: ex-SBP governor

Pakistan's shorter-dated bonds are trading at 96 cents, fairly close to par, though longer-dated ones maturing after 2030 stand at just over 60 cents, well below the 70-cent threshold below which debt is seen as distressed

DNA

KARACHI: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) faces tough choices on how to deal with Pakistan after the February election and how to assess the country's debt situation, former central bank governor Reza Baqir said. The country, which is operating under a caretaker government, secured a \$3 billion loan programme with the IMF in July that helped pull the cash-strapped nation back from the brink of a sovereign debt default. However, the programme was a nine-month standby arrangement, set to expire this spring. "The IMF will have to decide whether to pull the plug on Pakistan or not, and by that I mean it will have to decide about its assessment of debt sustainability," said Baqir, head of sovereign advisory services at Alvarez & Marsal. The Fund labelled



"That's almost like having it both ways," he said, adding investors would be watching whether the Fund would continue to label the debt as sustainable or whether it would offer its support on a debt restructuring as part of a new programme should Pakistan's authorities chose to go down that route. The country's public external debt

stood at just under \$100 billion by the end of September 2023, according to central bank data, with China and its lenders being the single largest creditor to the country. Pakistan's shorter-dated bonds are trading at 96 cents, fairly close to par, though longer-dated ones maturing after 2030 stand at just over 60 cents, well below the 70-cent threshold below which debt is seen as distressed. On Thursday, the bonds suffered sharp falls after Pakistan conducted strikes inside Iran amid rising tensions with its neighbour. Pakistan would also be a potential candidate for a "debt-for-nature"-style debt swap said Baqir, pointing to the deadly 2022 floods that affected more than 33 million people. Debt-for-nature swaps – where countries introduce eco-policies in return for having their debt cut, are growing in popularity after successful recent deals in places such as Belize and Ecuador's Galapagos Islands.

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