



Islamabad POST

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Pak has potential to be a leader in green energy: British HC

Detailed News On Page-08

UNRWA Chief: Siege a silent killer for Gazans

Detailed News On Page-07

Novak Djokovic achieves unique feat in AO

Detailed News On Page-06



NSC, Cabinet endorse peace

Pakistan, Iran agree to mend fences amicably

The forum expressed that Iran, being a neighbourly and brotherly muslim country, existing multiple communication channels between the two countries should be mutually utilised to address each other's security concerns in the larger interest of regional peace and stability

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: In a significant diplomatic move, Pakistan has opted to strengthen its ties with Iran, as confirmed by the recent decision endorsed during a Cabinet meeting led by caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar ul Haq Kakar, aligning with the resolution reached at the National Security Council (NSC) meeting. The Cabinet emphasized the importance of nurturing amicable relations with neighboring countries, particularly highlighting the commitment to foster a positive relationship with Iran. The backdrop of strained relations between the two nations emerged when Iran encroached upon Pakistani airspace, prompting a necessary response from Pakistan. Subsequent to this incident, officials from both countries engaged in comprehensive dialogues aimed at restoring and normalizing bilateral relations. This recent diplomatic maneuver underscores Pakistan's dedication to resolving conflicts through diplomatic channels and cultivating harmonious connections with its neighbors. The collaborative efforts of both nations in the ongoing talks exemplify a commitment to mutual understanding and cooperation. As the diplomatic discourse continues, there is optimism for the restoration of a stable and friendly relationship between Pakistan and Iran, fostering regional stability and cooperation. Earlier, The National Security Committee meeting was held under Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on 19 January, 2024, to deliberate upon matters of national security. The forum undertook a wholesome review of the situation and lauded the professional, calibrated and proportionate response by the Armed Forces of

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FM expresses Pak readiness to work with Iran

Iran regrets Pakistan air space violation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Friday extended an olive branch to Iran to work on "all issues" after both countries launched air strikes into each other's borders, targeting terrorists. The resolve came during caretaker Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani's telephonic conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, according to a statement from the Foreign Office. FM Jilani, as per the Foreign Office's statement, expressed Pakistan's readiness to work with Iran on all issues based on the spirit of mutual trust and cooperation. "He underscored the need for closer cooperation on security issues," the statement quoted Jilani as saying in his second telephonic conversation with Abdollahian within three days.

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ISLAMABAD: Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar presiding over the meeting of the National Security Council, which was attended by the services chiefs and cabinet members part of the NSC. - DNA

Missing persons issue for govt to resolve, not court

Justice Kayani orders provision of security for Baloch protesters

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) disposed of the petition seeking to prevent the harassment of Baloch protesters on Friday and ordered authorities to provide security to protesters advocating for the recovery of missing individuals. The hearing was presided by Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani. The court also instructed the relevant departments to submit details related to cases against Baloch protesters within seven days.

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Saudi envoy commends Naqvi

Pakistan keen to further cement relations with KSA

Chief Minister Punjab reiterates his resolve to finish the public welfare project completion task at the earliest

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Saudi Arabian Ambassador Nawaf Saeed Ahmad Al-Maliky visited the Chief Minister's office in Lahore on Friday and met with Punjab CM Mohsin Naqvi. Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi warmly welcomed Ambassador Nawaf Bin Saeed Ahmed Al Maliky. The ambassador of Saudi Arabia also recognized the extraordinary speed of completion of public projects by Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi and paid tribute to his public services. The Saudi ambassador said that Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi's tireless efforts are visible in Punjab, especially in Lahore and Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi and his team are seen working all the time.

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Flights using Pak airspace drops by 50%

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: In view of the escalating tensions between Pakistan and Iran, the number of overflying flights and those using Pakistani airspace has decreased by 50%. On Thursday, the number of flights using Pakistani airspace was 450. According to sources, on normal days, 700 to 750 flights per day fly over Pakistani airspace. The number of overflying flights has now

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Briefs

US closely watching Pak-Iran situation

Escalation not in interest of parties: Kirby

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States is monitoring the situation between Pakistan and Iran "very, very closely", while urging the two countries to avoid escalating tensions, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Thursday. "These are two well-armed nations and again we don't want to see an escalation," Kirby told reporters traveling with President Joe Biden aboard Air Force One.

Yasmin Rashid

Nawaz afraid of 73-year old woman

ABBAS HASHMI

LAHORE: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf senior leader Dr Yasmin Rashid says PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif is a coward man who is afraid of a 73-year-old woman. Talking to the media at the Anti-Terrorist Court on Friday, she said public would deal with him if he came out for election rallies. The people must come out of their homes on Feb 8 and exercise their right to vote, she urged. "My workers and supporters are not allowed to run my election campaign."

Holiday Notice

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

Smooth election process

ECP instructs security staff to remain neutral

The directions from the commission came after caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar constituted a seven-member committee mandated with ensuring the smooth conduct of the upcoming general elections

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: With general elections just a few weeks away, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has issued guidelines for law enforcement agencies tasked with ensuring security cover for the Feb 8 polls. In a comprehensive code of conduct for security personnel, the electoral watchdog emphasised the need to remain "neutral and impartial", particularly during the voting process, and "not act in favour of or against any political or candidate in any manner". The directions from the commission came after caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar constituted a seven-member committee mandated with ensuring the smooth conduct of the upcoming general elections as well as overseeing their security arrangements. In a notification dated Jan 18, a copy of which is available with Dawn.com, the ECP clarified that its code of conduct would not

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ECP to move LHC over symbol remarks

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has decided to file a civil miscellaneous application (CMA) in the Lahore High Court (LHC) over the court's remarks in the verdict pertaining to the election symbol case. The electoral body's move comes after an LHC Bahawalpur bench on January 16 - in response to writ petitions filed by several candidates over the election symbol allotment issue - had remarked that the ECP and one of its returning officers (RO) were "not

Continued on Page 06

Bilawal hits out at Nawaz: Maryam lauds her father's steadfastness

Bilawal Bhutto also announced launching a programme at union council level to eradicate hunger in the country



DNA

RAHIM YAR KHAN: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Friday took a dig at Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supreme Nawaz Sharif as election campaign goes full throttle in the country. Appreciating the party supporters' enthusiasm at Liaquatpur rally, the former foreign minister said Sharif was spotted in PML-N's rally in Hafizabad a day earlier and, "I fear he may

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Imran says he's 'ready to talk'

Says his biggest mistake was to accept a weak government

COURT REPORTER

RAWALPINDI: After being behind bars for months, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan said Friday that he is a politician, who is "open for dialogue" and is "ready to talk". "For the last 19 months I've been saying that I'm ready to talk [...] I'm a politician," Khan told journalists in Rawalpindi's Adiala jail, where he's incarcerated in numerous cases. The PTI chief, who was ousted in a no-confidence move in April of 2022, has been facing consecutive setbacks in the lead up to the general elections. First Khan was jailed in May last year, then the PTI was hit with an exodus of leaders and cases being lodged

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BUSINESS CLASS PASSENGERS CAN ENJOY 3 NIGHTS FOR FREE IN A 5 STAR HOTEL.

IGP assures support to martyrs' families

PESHAWAR : Inspector General of Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Akhtar Hayat Khan on Friday visited Bajaur to meet with the families of martyred police personnel and offered prayers for the elevated ranks of the martyrs. He assured the families of all kinds of support and boosted their morale. He mentioned that all facilities under the martyr's package would soon be provided to everyone. "Our heroes, who sacrificed their lives for the defense of the country, will not go in vain," he said. The IGP emphasized that special care would be taken for the well-being of the children of the martyrs. During his visit to Police Lines Bajaur, he met with tribal elders and police officers, stressing the need to work collaboratively to tackle challenges. The IGP stated that in the war against terrorism, district police and tribal elders have made significant sacrifices, and sustained efforts are required for the establishment of lasting peace. Those involved in the incident have been identified and will soon be in the hands of the law. —APP

Police antiquities to be preserved in museum

LAHORE : Additional IG Operations Punjab Shahzad Sultan has said that the important antiquities related to the history of Punjab Police such as FIRs of most important incidents, policing equipment used by the officials in different era of time, weapons, uniforms, ranks etc. are of significant importance, which will be displayed in the best manner in the museum of the Central Police Office. He said that the artefacts in the Police Museum are the guardians of the historical heritage of the Punjab Police which are being preserved and displayed in a better way so that various delegations, diplomats and personalities visiting to the Central Police Office can view them and learn about the history of Punjab Police. He expressed these views while inspecting the construction work of CPO Museum at the Central Police Office Thursday.

Steps being taken to ensure gas supply to consumers

QUETTA : In-charge of SSG Quetta Zone Haji Naseer Lehri on Thursday said that all necessary measures were being taken to ensure gas supply to all consumers of Quetta city in the winter season as it is colder than other cities. He expressed these views while talking to the National Party (NP) candidate of PB-44 Haji Atah Muhammad Bangulzai called on him at his office. Haji Naseer Lehri told Haji Atah Muhammad that gas pressure had been restored in Saryab and other areas at the request of him who had demanded gas issues in his constituency. —APP

ISSI welcomes President of counterpart Italian think-tank

There was a particular focus on Pakistan-Italy relations, which both sides acknowledged as robust and enduring in nature

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD : The Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a fruitful in-house session with Mr. Andrea Margelletti, President of the Centre for International Studies (Ce.S.I.), Italy. The meeting brought together key representatives from both organizations, including Director General ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood; the Director and Research team CSP; and members of the Italian mission in Pakistan. The exchange of views covered key global and regional developments of mutual interest. There was a particular focus on Pakistan-Italy relations, which both sides acknowledged as robust and enduring in nature. They expressed gratification that the bilateral relationship was steadily expanding across a broad spectrum. In the global and regional arena, the two sides discussed Ukraine and the security issues in Europe; developments

in the Asia-Pacific; situation in the Middle East since 7 October 2023; regional stability in South Asia; post-August 2021 Afghanistan; and recent developments in West Asia. These in-depth exchanges underscored the shared commitment of both institutions to actively promote and contribute to mutual understanding on issues related to global peace and

stability. The dialogue reflected a shared recognition of the intricate interconnections between regional and international dynamics, underscoring the importance of cooperative efforts in fostering a more secure and harmonious global environment. The session concluded with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Institute

of Strategic Studies Islamabad and the Centre for International Studies. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, on behalf of ISSI, and Mr. Andrea Margelletti, representing Ce.S.I., signed the MoU, reaffirming their commitment to deeper collaboration between the two think-tanks on various research initiatives and academic endeavors in the future.



To mobilize children with disabilities in Pakistan

Niaz support, Moawin foundation join hands

DNA

ISLAMABAD In a historic move that unfolded yesterday, Niaz Support and Moawin Foundation are pleased to announce a groundbreaking collaboration aimed at empowering children with disabilities in Pakistan. Hussain Odhwani, the Founder of Niaz Support and Admiral M. Asif Sandila, the esteemed former Chief of Naval Staff and Chairman of Moawin Foundation formalized their dedication to this noble cause by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The mission of this collaboration is to provide mobility solutions to children with disabilities, enabling them to access education and build a brighter future. Both organizations have already begun actively assessing areas across Pakistan, identifying children in need of mobility assistance. Through a joint effort, Niaz Support and Moawin Foundation will work towards providing custom-tailored wheelchairs, considering the unique needs and body measurements of each child. The ultimate goal is to foster their



complete inclusion in society. Staff and Chairman of Moawin Foundation, expressed his enthusiasm for the partnership, stating, "We believe that every child, re-

gardless of physical challenges, deserves the opportunity to receive an education. This collaboration with Niaz Support aligns perfectly with Moawin Foundation's vision of empowering the marginalized." Hussain Odhwani, Founder of Niaz Support, emphasized the importance of this initiative, saying, "Our aim is to break down barriers hindering the education of children with disabilities. By providing them with customized wheelchairs, we are not only offering mobility but also opening doors to education and a better future." On January 19, 2024, the formal signing of the MOU transpired at the Moawin Foundation Head Office. Commander (R) Dr. Naeem Tariq, GM Programmes of Moawin Foundation, and Hammad Malik, Honorary Ambassador of Niaz Support, appended their signatures to the MOU in the presence of Admiral (R) M. Asif Sandila and Hussain Odhwani, accompanied by representatives from both organizations. This marks a noteworthy stride in fostering a more inclusive and accessible society for children with disabilities in Pakistan.

President SCCI, RTO Peshawar collaborate on tax reforms

PESHAWAR : President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) Fuad Ishaq and Chief Commissioner, Regional Tax Office Peshawar Zafar Iqbal have agreed to hold an open forum at the Chamber level aiming to resolve the problems of the business community at their doorstep. According to the details, an important meeting between SCCI President Fuad Ishaq and Chief Commissioner RTO Peshawar Zafar Iqbal held at the Regional Tax office, said a press release issued here on Friday. The meeting was attended by SCCI Senior Vice President Sanullah Khan, Vice President Ijaz Khan Afridi, Commissioner Inland Revenue RTO Peshawar Dr Syed Farooq Jamil and Additional Commissioner Audit RTO Peshawar Fazli Malik. During the meeting, the participants thoroughly discussed reforms in the tax system, reduction in tax rates and holding of an open forum at the Chamber level for immediate resolution of taxpayers' problems.

LESCO detects 59 power pilferers

LAHORE: The Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) found 59 power pilferers in various sub-divisions of Defence East Division and 40 in Lakhnan Sharif area during its anti-power theft campaign, according to the company's spokesman here on Friday. The Defence East Division officials conducted a checking operation in various sub-divisions and found seven people stealing electricity by hooking wires on transmission lines and 10 were pilfering power by tampering with the electricity meters. Also, the display of 14 meters was found completely inactive. Similarly, seven consumers were found using electricity directly from the main supply line. The spokesman said that in Bedian Road Sub-Division, four accused were stealing electricity through hooks and another four through tampering with meters. Display of nine connections was unclear while three meters were found completely inactive. At the Airport Road, three accused were found stealing electricity through hooks and six through tampered meter, while display of five connections was found unclear and two completely inactive. —APP

Business leaders urged govt to cut interest rates

BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Members of the business community urged the government and State Bank of Pakistan to cut interest rate to flourish industries, trade and businesses and improve the economy of the country. The business community said prices of import items and raw materials increased exorbitantly owing to gradual increase in policy rate by the central bank, consequently cost of doing business also increasing and inflation also jacked up. According to details, a meeting of businessmen was held under chairmanship of Industrialists Association Peshawar president Ayub Zakori in IAP office, said in a press release issued here on Friday.

Besides, IAP former presidents, executive members and senior members and industrialists, members of the business community were present on the occasion. The participants of the meeting said that the further increase in policy rate will work under the prevailing scenario. Ayub Zakori said the previous increase in policy rate to 22 percent has struck a mortal blow to an already struggling business community. The decision has further pushed up the cost of doing business and dampen prospects for reining in cost-push inflation, he added. "At 25-26pc interest rate, it is hard to borrow from the banks," he said, adding that it will be hard for the government to earn revenue due to decline in large-scale manufacturing. Participants of the meeting said it is very hard for

business and industry to survive on high interest rates at a time when the soaring power and gas tariff had already pushed up the cost of doing business, making exports uncompetitive in the world market. Despite several rounds of negotiations between the government and the business community, no remedial measures have been proposed to spur industrialisation. Instead, industries have been burdened with countless taxes and duties, the IAP chief added. "I don't know where we will end up," he added. "Inflation in Pakistan appears more entrenched which mainly stems from substantial exchange rate depreciation, unprecedented hike in international commodity prices, multiple rounds of hikes in energy tariffs and other measures prescribed under the International

Monetary Fund (IMF) programme." We are going up at a critical juncture for the economy, thus making the future more challenging. The IAP chief said every sector of trade and industry is severely affected due to stoppage of imported goods, as a result the economy is going towards a total closure and default. Ayub Zakori said many industries are now facing shortage of raw material and are on the verge of cutting their production. He further more said the current economic situation is very disturbing; SMEs and large-scale industry (LSM) are suffering from slowness. The participants said production has stopped and operational expenses are also becoming difficult to meet, which has increased the fear of unemployment.

Sindh urges online salary transactions for workers

KARACHI : The caretaker Sindh government instructed industrialists to ensure online transactions of salaries of industrial workers and implementation of labor rights and other relevant laws and rules. Sindh Provincial Steering Committee for Business and Human Rights, met here on Friday with caretaker provincial minister of Law and Human Rights Muhammad Umar Soomro in chair, also called for elimination of forced or voluntary labor, child labor and discriminatory practices on the basis of gender, color and creed at the workplace. According to a statement issued here, the meeting was attended by Secretary Human Rights Sindh Tahseen Fatima, Secretary Industries Rashid Ahmed Solangi, Chairman Sindh Human Rights Commission Iqbal Ahmed Detho, secretaries and officers of other departments concerned and industrialists. Umar Soomro directed the Departments of Labor and Industry that the salaries of the workers working in the industries and factories should be made online under the law so that it is known whether they are getting the wages set by the government or not. He warned that action should be taken against those who do not comply with the law. The meeting was briefed by all the relevant departments about progress made on the important regulations of GSP Plus. The caretaker minister said that non-implementation of labor rights and environmental protection and not addressing the governance issues may negatively impact the GSP Plus status. Secretary Industries Rashid Ahmad Solangi said that all the industrialists in Sindh were required by law to deposit the salaries of industrial workers in their bank accounts but many industrialists were not following it. Chairman Sindh Human Rights Commission, Iqbal Ahmed Detho while briefing the meeting, said that complaints were being lodged from many places that workers were not being paid as per notified minimum wages and commission have also issued notices to several industries and institutions in the regard. —DNA

COMSTECH organizes public lecture on game changing technologies

He said that Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, Metaverse, Quantum Computing, Robotics and automation, and drones are some of these game changing technologies

ISLAMABAD: COMSTECH organized a public lecture on game changing technologies on January 18 at COMSTECH. Prof. Dr. Javaid Leghari, former Chairman Higher Education Commission, Senator, former Acting Coordinator General COMSTECH and President of the Forum for Dialogue and Diplomacy, Houston. Prof. Leghari said that in the rapid evolving landscape of innovation, we find ourselves on the cusp of a new era driven by groundbreaking technologies that have the potential to revolutionize every aspect of daily lives. He said that Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, Metaverse, Quantum Computing, Robotics and automation, and drones are some of these game changing technologies. Prof. Leghari discussed the examples of the use of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, metaverse, robotics and automation. Prof. Leghari said that in today's world skills are becoming more important than degrees. He informed that technology companies are not asking for degrees, they are looking for skills, and 3, 6, or 9 month's skill development course is more effective than a degree. He suggested COMSTECH to keep follow these technologies developments and take these technologies to the OIC member states for the better uplift of the socio-economic and science and technology development at the rapid speed. Prof. Leghari informed that these technologies are changing the world at a very fast pace, and we have to focus, learn, and practice these game changing technologies to keep up with the rapidly changing world. Advisor COMSTECH on Media and Outreach, Mr. Murtaza Noor presented souvenir to him on behalf of COMSTECH. The lecture was attended by more than 50 participants from different backgrounds in-person at COMSTECH lecture room. Prof. Dr. Javaid Leghari is a former Senator and Chairperson of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. He has served as acting Coordinator General of COMSTECH, founding president of SZABIST, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering and Director of Space Power Institute at SUNY Buffalo, and Commissioner at the Ministry of Education, UAE. Currently, he is the President of the Forum for Dialogue and Diplomacy, Houston. —DNA



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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
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Motorway Police.....9266044
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RDA.....5555864
TMA.....5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Water Tank

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ISLAMABAD: A nullah flowing in G 7 is littered with garbage. Since there are no proper garbage disposal arrangements by the CDA in the area that is why residents consider it convenient to through garbage in the Nullah. Resultantly, during heavy rains the nullah overflows inundating the nearby localities. —Photo Mudassar Raja

Cooked beef imported from Pak cleared customs in China

In contrast, Pakistan only contributes .5% to the world's beef consumption. According to a report released by China Animal Agriculture Association, China's beef consumption is projected to continue increasing until 2025

DNA

ISLAMABAD: 500 kilograms of frozen boiled beef from Pakistan passed the territorial inspection of Tianjin Customs and entered the Chinese market, being the first batch of cooked beef imported by China from Pakistan.

In recent years, cooperation between China and Pakistan in various fields has been continuously strengthened. Since last year, both sides have signed protocols on the export of Pakistani cooked beef and dried chili peppers to China, achieved access to Pakistani fresh cherries to China, and reached an agreement on the export of Pakistani dairy products and animal skins to China. In 2022, global beef consumption

reached 56.961 million tons, with China's beef consumption reaching 9.87 million tons, accounting for 17% of the total. In contrast, Pakistan only contributes .5% to the world's beef consumption. According to a report released by China Animal Agriculture Association, China's beef consumption is projected to continue increasing until 2025. It is expected that by 2035, China's beef consumption will reach 14 million tons, with a projected gap of more than 3 million tons. "We learned through the import access list published by the General Administration of Customs that Pakistani cooked beef has recently gained access. After contacting Pakistan Organic Meat Company Limited through the online platform, we

learned more about their product, then signed a cooperation agreement," Ma Weilong, General Manager of Tianjin Longjing International Logistics Co., Ltd., which imported the goods, told the reporter of Gwadar Pro. "Pakistan is a viable export partner of China due to its proximity and logistics advantages. We are also the cheapest nation in providing goods to the world. The quality and price of Pakistan's beef are far superior to those of many other countries," CEO of Organic Meat said. Pakistani heat-treated beef that is allowed to be imported refers to meat products that are made from boneless skeletal muscle of cattle under 30 months of age, which are pre-boned and fat-removed and then heated to

an internal core temperature of above 70 for at least 30 minutes. "It only took less than one day from pick-up at the port to customs clearance, which greatly saved customs clearance costs and allowed imported food to be put on domestic shelves for sale as soon as possible," said Liu Haizhou, deputy general manager of Longjing. "Beijing and Tianjin Customs attach great importance to this batch of goods. They greatly improve customs clearance efficiency through the application of automated electronic customs declaration and inspection technology," Ma added. "This is the first time we have cooperated with a Pakistani partner. In the future, Longjing will have more in-depth trade cooperation with Pakistani cooked beef factories."

community and China," he added saying continuous cooperation in games will bring beget deep harmony and closeness between both the countries.

China donates sportswear to Gwadar players

sociation (DFA). Whereas 18 clubs are enlisted to District Cricket Association Gwadar. The need for providing kits to the young players

was felt when they were observed playing in random cloths. Facilitating the local sportsman with basic sportswear is first of its kind



friendly gesture in Gwadar. "This gesturing has opened up a new era of cementing people of people bond between China and Pakistan and promoting local players in Gwadar," local football player Zahid Baloch told Gwadar Pro. COPHC official said that such act of benevolence will steer to engender people to people connectivity and boosting up social contact with local people of Gwadar. "In my opinion, it will also lay down robust foundation of resilient relationship between Gwadar sports

Pakistan's Gemstone Industry : a shining potential or an untapped market

AYESHA JEHANGIR KHAN

Pakistan is abundant in gems and minerals. We are blessed with a rich geographical landscape possessing an immense array of precious and semi-precious gemstones. Despite this natural wealth, the potential of the gemstone industry in country is unfortunately untapped and unheeded. Empowering the gemstone sector in the country is not just about unlocking the economic potential of these precious stones but also about promotion of local craftsmen, generating job opportunities, and contributing to the general progress of Pakistan. This sector should be affiliated with sustainable development goals of Pakistan. Environmental conservation and mindful mining practices must be prioritized to ensure responsible gemstone extraction, preserving the ecological balance of the regions where these precious stones are found. Having possession of the fifth largest reservoir of gemstones in the world, Pakistan gemstone industry has the potential to become a significant contributor to Pakistan's economy. We export gemstones worth at least \$3.7 billion annu-

ally with the largest contributor being All Pakistan's commercial exporters Alliance (APCEA). The existence of women in Pakistan's Gemstone sector is next to none. A very meagre percentage of women are in this industry and this is one of most untouched industry for women to participate and earn a livelihood. APCEA has introduced an unprecedented women empowerment committee initiative for inclusion of women in this sector in 2024. With latest and suitable investment and infrastructure growth, we can increase and modernize the gemstone extraction, processing, and export capabilities, paving way for generating significant revenues. To achieve this pinnacle, Government and Private sector must come together to encourage and empower this industry. Promotion and government assistance can create a ripple effect by creating employment prospects at many levels from mining, polishing to supply chain, miners and lapidaries to traders and vendors. By providing training and education in gemstone extraction, cutting, and processing techniques, Pakistan can foster and enlarge a skilled workforce that enhances value to the gems and improves the quality of finished products, making them more competitive in the global market

particularly advancing local communities in gem-rich regions namely KPK province, Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Kashmir region. We need to emphasize training and relaxed ruled for export by government. A robust gemstone industry can place Pakistan as a competitive player in the international stage. By adopting ethical mining practices, confirming transparency, and embracing quality control, Pakistan's gemstones can attract buyers worldwide, fostering a positive image for the country in the global gemstone trade. Conclusion: The need to empower Pakistan's gemstone industry is not only rooted in economic deliberations but additionally in its potential to bring about holistic expansion. By investing in infrastructure, skill development, and sustainability, Pakistan can harness the true potential of its gemstone resources, leading to economic growth, job creation, and a constructive impact on local markets. Pakistan's gemstone industry has the power to glow radiantly as a symbol of economic prosperity on the global stage. —The writer is the Award Winning Entrepreneur, Humanitarian Chairperson Women Empowerment Committee APCEA Email: ayisha.irt@gmail.com

Railways Hospitals to be opened for general public

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Railways has planned to open all its hospitals for the general public to provide state-of-the-art medical facilities to its employees and the general public across the country. "The decision to open all the hospitals of the department in January has been taken on the directions of Minister for Railways, Shahid Ashraf Tarar," an official in the Ministry of Railways told APP. The official said the minister has appreciated the management of Pakistan Railways for already opening the Cairns Hospital, Lahore for the general public within a stipulated time frame. "Pakistan Railways will take all possible measures to improve railway health sector services in which the expertise of private health experts will also be taken," the official added. He said that Pakistan Railways will not engage the public-private partners to upgrade and improve the services of hospitals. The department directed the concerned officials to submit a business model shortly to earn revenue from Railway Hospitals. To a question, he said Pakistan Railways has started the upgradation of five major railway stations across the country on modern lines to facilitate the passengers and help the department generate more revenue. "The purpose of upgrading the railway stations is to make them commercial hubs for business activities and facilitate the passengers," he added. He said the stations included Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Peshawar and Quetta, while the department was taking other steps to improve the performance of Pakistan Railways and would provide maximum facilities to the masses. The government has allocated Rs 50 million in the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), in the last three years for the up-gradation and renovation of railway stations across the country, he added. The official said the renovation of the railway stations had been approved by the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) and the department had already upgraded six railway stations in different parts of the country.—APP

NATIONAL TRANSMISSION AND DESPATCH COMPANY Ltd. NTDC TENDER NOTICE NO. 05/2023-24

Sealed tenders are invited on percentage rate basis on prescribed forms from registered contractors. Tender will be issued to those contractors, who will produce original or attested copies of the following:-

1. Company profile.
2. Bidders are required to be registered with PEC as valid registration certificate in Category C-5 or above for the current year 2023-24 and having specialization code CE-01, CE-09 and CE-10.
3. Appointment letter of Engineers working with the firm as required by PEC laws.
4. The list/detail of technical and supervisory staff along with attested copies of Degree/Diploma.
5. At least three (3) similar nature works valuing not less than estimated cost completed during last two (2) years. The contractor will have to provide the copies of work order and satisfactory completion certificate with in schedule time otherwise no consideration will be given.
6. Detail of tools & plant available with contractor.
7. Bidder having poor performance for the execution of civil works (present / past) will not be qualified.
8. CDR must be attached with the application in advance in the name of Executive Engineer Civil NTDC Islamabad as mentioned below.
9. Bank statement of at least 3 financial years showing average annual cash flow of at least 40 Million rupees for Serial No. 01 & 02 and 20 Million rupees for Serial No. 03 to 05.
10. 10% performance guarantee in the shape of Bank guarantee only will be accepted from successful bidder before the award of work.
11. All prevailing federal and provincial government Taxes, levies or charges shall be applicable on Contractors. Firm should have registration with Tax authorities as well as active Tax payer.
12. Tenders will be issued only to the owner of the firms or the person holding authority's letter on judicial paper from the owner for the respective work.
13. Tenders where convincing, collusion, pooling amongst the bidders if observed / reported will be canceled.
14. No litigation / No black listing certificate on judicial stamp paper duly attested by 1st class Magistrate.
15. No sealed/improper sealed/in complete/conditional bid/rate offered will be rejected straight away.
16. The authority reserves the right to reject any or all bids as per PPRARule 33(1).

Sr. No.	Name of Works	Earnest money (In the shape of Bank draft/pay order) Rs. (Rupees)	Tender form Cost (Rs.) N/R
01	Dismantling and Re-Construction of Boundary Wall at 220KV Grid Station NTDC Sangjani (ISPR).	Rs. 2,400,000/-	Rs.6000/-
02	Carpeting of Road at 220KV Grid Station NTDC Mari Daudkhel.	Rs. 1,000,000/-	Rs.5000/-
03	Construction of Parking shed 08 Nos vehicles at 220 KV Grid Station Shahibagh Peshawar.	Rs. 100,000/-	Rs.3000/-
04	Construction of Parking shed 08 Nos vehicles at 220 KV Grid Station Bannu.	Rs. 150,000/-	Rs.3000/-
05	Temporary False Ceiling for protection purpose in control building at 220 KV G/S Mardan.	Rs. 110,000/-	Rs.3000/-

Tender will be received for the above said work in the office of the undersigned on 07-02-2024 at 11.00 AM and will be opened on the same day at 11:30 AM publicly. Bidding documents can be obtained on request from the office of Executive Engineer, (Civil) NTDC H-8/2 Islamabad on or before 06-02-2024 during office hours up to 11:00 AM. Tender received after the due time and date will not be considered. This tender is also available on PPRAR website: www.ppra.org.pk.

Executive Engineer (Civil) A.M(N) NTDC H-8/2, Islamabad PH# 051-9250231

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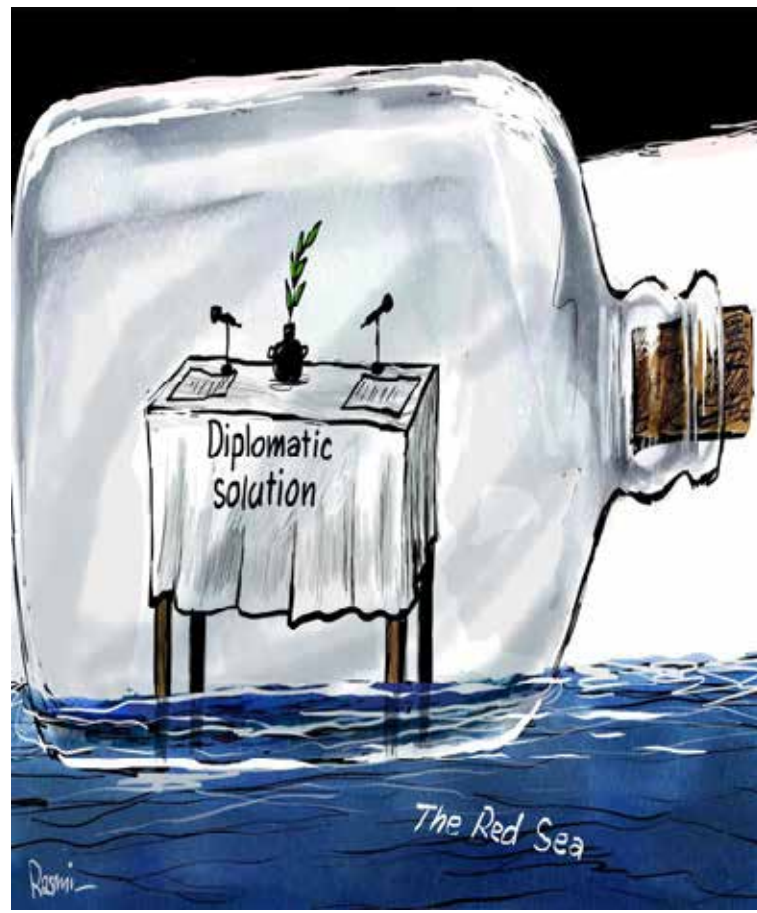
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Manila's island plan recipe for regional disaster

By stressing a plan for the development of disputed islands in the South China Sea does not include "fortifying the BRP Sierra Madre" it grounded on China's Ren'ai Reef in 1999, Manila seems to be trying to assure Beijing the plan newly unveiled by the Philippine military is harmless. But Beijing is not going to buy that. The plan revealed by Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Romeo Brawner Jr after attending a command conference led by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr on Monday has even stirred wide domestic concerns. According to Brawner's comments to the media, Manila plans to "improve" all the disputed islands it is "occupying" in the South China Sea. Also included in the large-scale plan is the acquisition of more ships, radar and aircraft as the Philippines shifts its focus from internal defense to "territorial defense", he said. By whatever standard, the focus of the shift is anything but defensive in nature. Since any attempt to fortify the crumbling World War II-era ship BRP Sierra Madre, in a bid to create a fait accompli, suffices to irk Beijing, Manila is certainly not naive to the degree to which the plan is a provocation to Beijing. In fact, it represents a grave provocation to all the parties the Philippines has disputes with. If the Philippines really follows through on its plan to develop the disputed islands to make them more habitable for its troops, as its military chief of staff said, it is taking the initiative to spark conflict in the waters. Given the huge input the plan will necessarily entail and the lackluster economy of the Philippines, Manila must have received certain assurances of extra but sizable funding and material assistance before plucking up the courage to talk big. But even if the United States, an ardent ally of Manila, has pledged support, the degree to which that will be forthcoming is open to question given it is already providing assistance to Ukraine and Israel, and the outcome of the US presidential election may temper its aggressive and troublemaking foreign policy. After one and a half years in power, by shifting its focus from domestic development to betting the nation's future on power games, the Ferdinand Marcos government has downgraded the Philippines from a key regional player upholding strategic autonomy to a ludicrous puppet of the warmongering US.



The view on Gaza's journalists

No war has killed so many journalists so quickly. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) says that at least 83 media workers have died since 7 October. Seventy-six of them were Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes in Gaza, while three Lebanese citizens were also killed, and four Israelis were killed by Hamas in the 7 October attacks. Even given the total number of deaths in Gaza – at least 24,600, the Palestinian authorities say – the media toll is shocking and disproportionate. On one estimate, it amounts to a tenth of all journalists there compared with a reported one in 100 of the overall population. Reporters Without Borders has warned that journalism is "being eradicated in the Gaza Strip". Chillingly, the CPJ describes "an apparent pattern of targeting of journalists and their families" – including at least two cases where journalists reported threats from Israeli officials and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) officers before family members were killed. Though the IDF say they do not target journalists, it has been established that they have killed people clearly identified as members of the press, and that they have a record of false claims about and impunity for the deaths of media professionals. Prior to the war, a CPJ report found that 20 journalists had been killed by Israeli military fire in 22 years without anyone being held accountable. They included the renowned Palestinian-American reporter Shireen Abu Akleh. Reuters says its journalist Issam Abdallah was killed by an Israeli tank shell in Lebanon in October, in an attack which Agence France Press described as "deliberate and targeted", and which Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch want investigated as a possible war crime. In another case, the IDF said they were targeting a "terrorist" using a drone when they killed two journalists in a car, before suggesting that the men had looked like terrorists because they had a camera drone. Attacks on journalists are not only attacks on civilians, as grave as those are. They also strike at the truth itself: at the ability to establish it, and to share it. International news organisations have been able to access Gaza only extremely briefly and under tight restrictions, all but one embedded with the IDF. Those who live there are the eyes of the world. Beyond the risk of death, says the CPJ, Palestinian journalists have experienced "arrests ... numerous assaults, threats, cyber-attacks and censorship". Nineteen are in prison – putting Israel on the organisation's list of the worst jailers of journalists for the first time, alongside China, Myanmar, Russia and Iran. Most are held under "administrative detention", which allows the Israeli military to detain people in the occupied territories without trial or time limit. The secretary of state, Antony Blinken, has said that the US stands "unequivocally for the protection of journalists during armed conflict". It should act accordingly, holding Israel accountable for deaths and infringements of press freedom, as several groups urged in a letter to Joe Biden last week. The US, the UK and others should also press Israel to allow proper access for international media.

Gaza war highlights need for US lobbying reform

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

Mohammed Baharoon, a well-known Dubai-based think tanker, commented on X: "The US will go to outer space to protect its own national interest, yet today it subordinates its interests in the Middle East to a foreign politician who is facing legal charges," referring to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister. The answer is very simple. The US support for Israel is driven by the pro-Israel lobby. While we look at the lobby as a cabal or some type of conspiracy, it is a totally legitimate operation under US law. Under the First Amendment of the US Constitution, citizens can "petition the government for a redress of grievances"

THE US is backing Israel's campaign on Gaza. The war, which is now in its fourth month, risks spreading into a regional war. The Houthis are attacking ships heading toward Israel, Iraq is witnessing turbulence and a significant confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel is looking more and more likely. A ceasefire is necessary for regional stability. The only one that can coerce Israel into a ceasefire is the US. According to a November Reuters/Ipsos poll, 68 percent of Americans favor a ceasefire. Yet, the US continues to give Israel a blank check. Why? This is mind-boggling. The US is supporting Israel even though the American public is for a ceasefire. To add to that, a regional war is not in the US' interest, especially if it gets sucked into it. US policy toward the Middle East seems to be more about showing support for Israel than attending to the American public's preference or the country's best interest. Mohammed Baharoon, a well-known Dubai-based think tanker, commented on X: "The US will go to outer space to protect its own national interest, yet today it subordinates its interests in the Middle East to a foreign politician who is facing legal charges," referring to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister. The answer is very simple. The US support for Israel is driven by the pro-Israel lobby. While we look at the lobby as a cabal or some type of conspiracy, it is a totally legitimate operation under US law. Under the First Amendment of the US Constitution, citizens can "petition the government for a redress of grievances." This led to the inception of lobbying. A small group of well-funded individuals is pushing the US to adopt a policy that most Americans do not support. American citizens can organize and constitute pressure groups that can plead with the government and push for their policy preferences. This is part of the democratic process, whereby groups can contribute to the country's decision-making process. Pressure groups or lobby groups also finance election

campaigns. Campaign promises can then become policies once a candidate is elected. This all comes across as an expression of democracy. However, when it comes to foreign policy, this system allows certain groups to influence the policy of the entire nation. There is no more flagrant example than the case of the pro-Israel lobby and its influence on US policy toward the Middle East. Today, in the case of the war on Gaza, the discrepancy between the national interest and public opinion and the actual US Middle East policy is very visible. In 2007, Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer wrote a best-selling book on the pro-Israel lobby's influence on US foreign policy. The pro-Israel lobby is a group of organizations that work toward promoting a US Middle East policy that is favorable to Israel. Its most important element is an organization called the American Israel Political Affairs Committee, known as AIPAC. Its members and funders are US citizens and hence it falls under the lobbying laws of domestic groups. Like other domestic lobby groups, AIPAC has the right to finance election campaigns. When foreign states hire a lobbyist or public relations consultant to advance their interests in the US, the agents working for them have to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. This law was put in place to limit the ability of foreign governments to influence US policy. However, domestic groups can organize and advocate for a certain foreign policy outcome and they have a lot of room to maneuver because they are considered as American citizens who have the right to contribute to the country's policymaking. Once the money element is removed from the lobbying for foreign policy, it will become more balanced. In theory, it should be acceptable for American citizens to lobby for foreign policy the same way they have the right to lobby for teacher benefits, elderly rights, etc. However, foreign policy decisions do not only affect the group advocating for them – they affect the entire country.

Unless there is a ceasefire in Gaza soon, the Middle East could easily slip into a regional war. However, neither the US Congress nor the Biden administration has called for a ceasefire. Except for a few voices here and there, policymakers are standing with Israel. Beyond the poll that showed that a majority of Americans are in favor of a ceasefire, major cities are being flooded with pro-Palestine demonstrations. Yet, the policy has not changed. In fact, what we see today is the undemocratic result of lobbying: A small group of well-funded individuals is pushing the US to adopt a policy that most Americans do not support. It is time for the US to change the law to prevent its national interest being dictated by one small group. Domestic lobby groups should be restricted to lobbying on domestic policy. If they want to lobby on foreign policy, they should register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Once the money element is removed from the lobbying for foreign policy, it will become more balanced and more in tune with the real interests of the country. Activists in favor of a ceasefire recently revealed how much certain politicians have received from AIPAC. President Joe Biden is the leading recipient of AIPAC funds. When a lawmaker depends, to a large extent, on the financing of their campaign by a single generous donor, are they likely to go against that benefactor's will? I would say it was very unlikely. AIPAC is known to go after those politicians whose votes or opinions it disapproves of by generously financing their rivals. Money should no longer be a factor that can affect foreign policy decisions. One would think that now would be a good time to make this change. Unfortunately, now more than ever, politicians need AIPAC's money to finance their campaigns, as the US is about to enter an election season. Until a US administration takes the bold step to free America's foreign policy from the control of a privileged few, expect more and more disastrous decisions, especially regarding the Middle East.

– Sourced by Arab News

DRC shambolic polls should be a wake-up call for SADC

Tafi Mhaka

Understandably, Chamisa asserted the polls were a "blatant and gigantic fraud", while his party called for a rerun. And just like the DRC's Fayulu, he refused to challenge Mnangagwa's corrupted triumph in court, alleging Zimbabwe's Constitutional Court was "captured". Meanwhile, a SADC electoral observer mission (SEOM), led by Dr Nevers Mumba, the former vice president of Zambia, delivered a scathing preliminary analysis of the August 2023 poll. Among others, the SEOM criticised aspects of ZEC's Delimitation Report of 2022, and highlighted the contentious decision to exclude Saviour Kasukuwere, a former Mugabe-era Zanu-PF minister, from the presidential race

ON January 9, the Constitutional Court of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) confirmed incumbent President Felix Tshisekedi's landslide victory in the hotly disputed December 20, 2023 election, but failed to pull the Central African nation out of its full-blown electoral crisis. According to the DRC's Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and highest court, Tshisekedi legitimately won a second and final five-year term in office with an impressive 74 percent of the vote, ahead of Moise Katumbi and Martin Fayulu, who placed second and third respectively. However, in the eyes of many, including failed presidential contenders Fayulu and Katumbi, the country's synchronised presidential, local, provincial and national polls were a complete "farce", and perhaps even less trustworthy and legitimate than the shambolic 2011 and 2018 elections. The joint observer mission from the Catholic Church and the Church of Christ of Congo (ECC) said they documented 5,402 cases of serious irregularities at polling stations. The churches said these alleged anomalies – malfunctioning voting devices, unopened polling stations, vote buying, plundering of polling materials, shoddy electoral lists, and ballot stuffing – could have compromised "the integrity of the results". On Christmas Eve, while the shambolic election was still ongoing in many localities where the state failed to open polling stations on election day, the Archbishop of Kinshasa Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo voiced the feelings of countless angry voters in the country when he said: "What should have been a great celebration of democratic values quickly turned into frustration for many." Indeed, it was extremely frustrating to see the DRC repeat the mistakes of the past, ignoring insistent warnings. Last April, for example, Fayulu, who many independent observers believe won the country's controversial December 2018 presidential poll, published an opinion piece on this very page warning his country was "heading towards another sham election" and encouraging CENI to change course and ensure a "free and fair" presidential poll before it is too late. Denis Kadima, the president of CENI, however, chose to ignore this and other similar counsel. Confident as ever, he even launched a thinly veiled attack on the opposition a few days before the polls opened, claiming there were "political games in this country that are not ready for elections" who "discredit the process, no matter what we do". When the sheer scale of the electoral fiasco became obvious in late December, Kadima went on to call Fayulu and other candidates who understandably demanded a rerun "bad losers". In the end, Fayulu and others refused to challenge Tshisekedi's win in court, saying state institutions were not trustworthy or independent. Now, the Congolese people are forced to accept the results of a clearly bungled poll and a leader with a crisis of legitimacy for the second time in five years.

It is time to admit that electoral malfeasance and incompetence have become a substantial menace to societal cohesion, peace and development in the DRC. And regrettably, this is a widespread and deep-rooted problem across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Take Zimbabwe, which has failed to hold a single truly free, fair and transparent election since its independence from British colonial rule in April 1980. President Emmerson Mnangagwa has won two disputed elections – in July 2018 and August 2023 – over his chief rival, Nelson Chamisa, leader of the main opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) party. Last year's polls, for example, were deemed a colossal failure after many polling stations opened late or failed to open at all. The anomalies were particularly prevalent in Harare and Bulawayo, traditional strongholds of the opposition, raising suspicion the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) wanted to suppress votes there and give the ruling Zanu-PF party a helping hand. Meanwhile, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Election Resource Centre (ERC) stated Zanu-PF actors were engaged in voter intimidation tactics throughout the country. Understandably, Chamisa asserted the polls were a "blatant and gigantic fraud", while his party called for a rerun. And just like the DRC's Fayulu, he refused to challenge Mnangagwa's corrupted triumph in court, alleging Zimbabwe's Constitutional Court was "captured". Meanwhile, a SADC electoral observer mission (SEOM), led by Dr Nevers Mumba, the former vice president of Zambia, delivered a scathing preliminary analysis of the August 2023 poll. Among others, the SEOM criticised aspects of ZEC's Delimitation Report of 2022, and highlighted the contentious decision to exclude Saviour Kasukuwere, a former Mugabe-era Zanu-PF minister, from the presidential race. In this regard, the mission found that "some aspects of the Harmonised Elections, fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021)". A plethora of delays, it added, had "a knock-on effect as they dissuaded voters from voting in the first place" and effectively had "the unfortunate effect of creating doubts about the credibility of this electoral process". At the same time, government-owned media launched a vicious smear campaign against Mumba, accusing him of being on a Western-sponsored "regime change mission", all without offering a shred of evidence. Meanwhile, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa came to Harare's defence, as he usually does, by declaring that other countries, like the US, also have electoral challenges – as if millions of frustrated and disfranchised Zimbabweans care at all whether such problems are also experienced to some extent in Washington.

This is not a problem only for Zimbabwe, or the DRC, or whatever country that experiences the latest election debacle either. It is important to uphold SADC electoral standards, in every single member country, as Mumba boldly advocated for in his preliminary report, to improve our shared wellbeing in Southern Africa. SADC leaders have failed us all. The ability to deliver peace, stability and socioeconomic change through the ballot box has been turned into a mere pipe dream in most SADC countries. Zimbabwe has extensive socioeconomic problems, including an underperforming economy, a dilapidated health sector, and high unemployment for many decades. And every suspicious election only serves to deepen these woes. Amid persistent insecurity in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces, the mineral-rich DRC appears to be on the same path as Zimbabwe, and I'm afraid SADC leaders seem willing to idly watch the rapid deterioration of the country's fragile democracy. Instead of deflecting attention to sloppy practices in Western countries, Ramaphosa and his colleagues must insist that every SADC country adheres to the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. And whenever infringements arise, SADC must impose punitive measures. With five years to prepare for elections, SADC member states have no plausible excuse to hold substandard polls and effectively endanger the sociopolitical stability of their countries. To be clear, whom the Congolese or Zimbabweans choose to elect as their president is not a matter of contention, but the electoral processes in the DRC and Zimbabwe must always be open, fair and transparent. They must enhance democracy and not foster outright suspicion, division or violence. In August 2005, SADC officially established the SADC Electoral Advisory Council, with a mandate to transform election observation, the conduct of democratic elections and the prevention of electoral-related conflicts in the SADC Region. Thus far, it has definitely underachieved. SADC leaders have clearly diminished the council's envisioned effectiveness over the last 18 years, just as they have shamelessly endeavoured to change, undermine and disregard Mumba's preliminary report on Zimbabwe's sham election. Mozambique's October 2023 municipal polls, Angola's August 2022 general elections, Tanzania's 2020 presidential election, and Malawi's 2020 presidential election were also plagued by serious electoral contraventions, including accusations of fraud, ballot tampering, violence and repression. This, unquestionably, is indicative of a wider malaise in Southern Africa: democratic backsliding. Going forward, SADC leaders must actively monitor the workings of electoral bodies and implement effective interventions without fail. The Congolese people and Zimbabweans deserve better.

– Sourced by Al Jazeera News

Briefs

Switzerland
rejects
Russian
criticism
over Ukraine
summit

DAVOS : Swiss President Viola Amherd has rejected criticism by Moscow of a possible peace summit hosted by Switzerland aimed at ending the Russia-Ukraine war. Speaking to reporters at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Amherd emphasized that Switzerland has always been on the side of international humanitarian law. "When you are on the side of the civilian population, you are on the right side," she said.

Russia has repeatedly criticized Switzerland for "abandoning its neutrality" after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, saying that such a peace summit would be "meaningless and harmful." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was in the capital Bern for an official visit, met with Amherd on Jan. 15. Speaking at a joint press conference, Zelenskyy said they would start planning on Jan. 16 for the peace summit with Switzerland. Zelenskyy said only countries that support Ukraine's territorial integrity would be invited to the summit, that Russia would not take part in the talks and that he hoped China would attend. —APP

India's airline
orders 150
Boeing Max
aircraft

HYDERABAD, India: India's newest airline will buy 150 Boeing 737 Max aircraft, in the first major announced sale for the manufacturer since a panel blew out of another Max model in midflight earlier this month, the airline announced Thursday. Akasa Air CEO Vinay Dube announced the order of the Boeing 737 Max 10 and 737 Max 8-2000 planes at an airshow in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad. The airplanes will increase the airline's total Boeing orders to 226, Dube said. It currently operates a fleet of 22 Boeing 737 Max 8 and Max 8-2000 planes. None of the planes is the same model as the Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 Max 9 on which a door plug blew out shortly after taking off on Jan. 5 from Portland, Oregon, leaving a hole in the fuselage. The cabin lost pressure and the plane was forced to descend rapidly and make an emergency landing. No serious injuries were reported. Since launching operations in 2022, Akasa Air has captured about 4 percent of India's domestic market, serving 18 destinations. It is looking to expand its network in India and South Asia. —APP

UK health
agency warns
of measles
outbreak

LONDON: Britain's public health agency warned on Friday that an outbreak of measles in central England could spread to other towns and cities unless urgent action is taken to boost vaccination uptake.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has declared a national incident, signalling a growing public health risk. It said there had been 216 confirmed cases and 103 probable cases in the West Midlands since Oct. 1 last year, with the majority being in children aged under 10.

"With vaccine uptake in some communities so low, there is now a very real risk of seeing the virus spread in other towns and cities," UKHSA Chief Executive Jenny Harries said. A report from the World Health Organization and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in November said there had been a "staggering" annual rise in measles cases and deaths globally in 2022. Measles is one of the most contagious viruses in the world but is preventable by two doses of vaccine. The COVID-19 pandemic massively disrupted routine immunization efforts worldwide, and the bounce back has been slow. Harries said immediate action was needed to boost uptake of the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine in areas where it was low. —Agencies

ICCI, UNICEF sign MoU for
economic empowerment

President ICCI, and Abdullah A. Fadil, UNICEF representative Pakistan signed the MoU during a ceremony held at ICCI

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD : The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have signed an MoU to collaborate on many initiatives to promote the economic empowerment of marginalized people and make progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Pakistan. Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President ICCI, and Abdullah A. Fadil, UNICEF Representative Pakistan signed the MoU during a ceremony held at ICCI. Speaking on the occasion, Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari, President, Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry lauded the efforts of UNICEF Pakistan to address issues in health, education, child protection, skills development, climate change, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene and social protection and other fields. He assured that ICCI would support UNICEF in its initiatives to advance children's rights and economic empowerment of neglected segments of society. He said that ICCI would mobilize its members to support UNICEF and facilitate partnerships between ICCI members and UNICEF in areas of interest for the well-being and welfare of poor people. Abdullah A. Fadil, UNICEF Representative in Pakistan thanked ICCI for signing the MoU and added that UNICEF Pakistan would



like to strengthen its cooperation with ICCI to undertake joint initiatives in the areas of education, youth entrepreneurship, climate change, and others. He said that UNICEF will provide technical support to ICCI in sensitizing the business community for better

protection of children's rights and bringing out-of-school children to the formal education system. ICCI and UNICEF will advocate jointly for the formulation of conducive policies and regulatory frameworks for creating an enabling environment to promote

business and investment activities, empower marginalized people of society, and improve their living standards. Engr. Azhar ul Islam Zafar Vice President ICCI, Khalid Iqbal Malik Group Leader, Zafar Bakhtawari former President ICI & Secretary Gen-

eral UBG Pakistan, Ms. Josiane Khoury Partnerships Manager UNICEF, Faseeh Ullah Khan, Maqsood Tabish, Raja Muhammad Imtiaz, Sheikh Muhammad Ejaz, Ch. Muhammad Ali, Khalid Chaudhry and others were also present on the occasion.

S.Korea urges UN to address
North Korea's threats

North Korea's escalating test-launches in violation of the existing UN sanctions – five ICBMs, more than 25 ballistic missiles

FOREIGN DESK

UNITED NATIONS: South Korea called on the divided UN Security Council "to break the silence" over North Korea's escalating missile tests and threats. "It's a big question," South Korea's UN Ambassador Hwang Joonkook told reporters after an emergency closed meeting of the council on the North's first ballistic missile test of 2024 on Sunday. South Korea is serving a two-year term on the council. The Security Council imposed sanctions after North Korea's first nuclear test explosion in 2006 and tightened them over the years in a total of 10 resolutions seeking – so far unsuccessfully – to cut funds and curb its nuclear and bal-

listic missile programs. The last sanctions resolution was adopted by the council in 2017. China and Russia vetoed a US-sponsored resolution in May 2022 that would have imposed new sanctions over a spate of intercontinental ballistic missile launches. Since then, the two veto-wielding permanent council members have blocked any council action, including media statements. North Korea's escalating test-launches in violation of the existing UN sanctions – five ICBMs, more than 25 ballistic missiles and three satellite launches using ballistic missile technology in 2023 – coupled with new threats from the North's leader Kim Jong Un have raised regional tensions to their highest point in years.

On Monday, Kim declared North Korea would abandon its commitment to a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of its constitution to eliminate the idea of a shared statehood between the South with its nukes if provoked. Before Thursday's council meeting, US Deputy Ambassador Robert Wood told reporters Kim's provocations "are of great concern." He said the 15 council members need to be reminded that North Korea is violating sanctions and its obligations to the council, "and we have to

insist that they adhere to those obligations, and for all Security Council members to enforce those resolutions." By contrast, China's UN Ambassador Zhang Jun, whose country is a close ally of North Korea, called on all parties involved in the Korean Peninsula to stay calm and refrain from actions that would further raise tensions. In a message clearly aimed at the United States and South Korea, Zhang expressed hope that while attention is mainly on North Korea, "other countries are also responsible to avoid further escalation." France's UN Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere told reporters that North Korea's actions are "getting worse and worse," with regular ballistic missile launches.

Hungary doubts
Sweden's suitability
for NATO

LONDON : Sweden has not done enough to convince Hungarian authorities that it is a suitable candidate for NATO membership, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chief of staff said at a press conference Thursday. Gergely Gulyas urged the country to work on bilateral relations when it comes to the Nordic country's NATO bid to "strengthen trust" while at the same time noting that Sweden joining the alliance is not a priority for Hungary. Gulyas described the relationship between the two countries as "one of allies legally right now" that cannot be considered friendly. Orban's aide further suggested that the Swedish government take the necessary steps to find out "what questions the Hungarian parliament has" about Sweden's NATO bid. Hungarian authorities have said on numerous occasions that Hungary will not be the last country to approve Sweden's membership. However, at the same time, Orban told the parliament last September that ratifying the Scandinavian country's NATO bid was not urgent. Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership in May 2022, abandoning their longstanding non-alignment policies, a decision spurred by Russia's war on Ukraine, which started in February that year. Finland, which shares a 1,340-kilometer (832-mile) border with Russia, became a member of NATO on April 4, 2023, bringing the number of member states to 31. Sweden's membership however is still pending ratification by member countries Türkiye and Hungary, but the Turkish parliament's general assembly may debate its NATO membership bid in the coming weeks. —DNA

Germany eases
citizenship path
despite migration rows

BERLIN: Germany is expected on Friday to approve a law that shortens the path to citizenship and makes it easier to hold multiple nationalities, moves designed to ease crippling labor shortages by making the country more attractive to migrant workers. The new law, a signature policy of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition of centrist and left-leaning parties, comes as Germany is convulsed by rows over the burden that migration is placing on public services at a time when money is scarce. "We have to keep pace in the race to attract skilled labor," said Interior Minister Nancy Faeser ahead of the vote in the Bundestag that will pass the new law. "That means we need to make an offer to qualified people from the world over, just as the United States and Canada do. German citizenship is obviously part of that." Under the new rules, citizenship will be available after five years' residence, reduced from eight, in line with neighboring countries such as France. For people who are "exceptionally well integrated," three years will be enough. Rules on dual nationality, now normally allowed only for citizens of other EU countries, would be loosened. That would potentially let tens of thousands of Turks, including third-generation immigrants, become voting members. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs, Dr. Shamshad Akhtar chairing a meeting on drugs pricing mechanism. —DNA

Greek PM aims to strengthen ties with Türkiye

He said the improved relations between the two NATO allies have yielded prompt and concrete results, including visa facilitation for Turkish citizens

WEB DESK

ATHENS : Greece seeks to build on recent positive steps taken with Türkiye, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said. Referring to the ongoing thaw between the two countries since last February, when twin earthquakes caused severe casualties and destruction in southeastern Türkiye, he said, "I'm not naive. We have seen dramatic changes in Türkiye's politics in recent years, but I want to be optimistic and I want us to build on the positive steps that both countries have taken in recent months," during a discussion with Ravi Agrawal, the editor-in-chief of Foreign Policy magazine, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

He said the improved relations between the two NATO allies have yielded prompt and concrete results, including visa facilitation for Turkish citizens for 10 Greek islands in the northern Aegean for up to seven days and the decreased flow of irregular migrants to Greece. Even if Greece and Türkiye do not resolve the issue of demarcation of the continental shelf and economic exclusive zone, which he called the only major problem between the countries, they should be able to coexist and focus on a positive agenda, said Mitsotakis. On Dec. 7, 2023, President Recep Tayyip Erdo an paid a landmark visit to Greece after the two neighboring countries experienced a tumultuous relationship in recent years. Erdo an said in a news conference with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens that there is no issue between Tür-



kiye and Greece that cannot be resolved and that they want to "turn the Aegean into a sea of peace and cooperation." Türkiye and Greece announced the Athens Declaration on Friendly Relations and Good-Neighbourliness, in which they stressed that they are committed to fostering friendly relations, mutual

respect, peaceful coexistence and understanding and seeking resolution to any dispute between in line with international law. The two countries have been at odds for decades over a series of issues, from territorial water claims over the Aegean to the rights of the Turkish minority in Greece. Ties were largely restored to the level they were in the early years of the Republic of Türkiye under the Tsipras government in Athens. Erdo an was the first sitting Turkish president to visit Greece in decades when he traveled there in 2017. Relations deteriorated over irregular migration and hydrocarbon exploration rights in the Eastern Mediterranean and maritime zones under the incumbent Mitsotakis government. However, the sides recently extended an olive branch

to each other again. Turning to Israel's ongoing attacks on Gaza since Oct. 7, Mitsotakis reiterated the country's concern over the growing number of civilian casualties in the enclave, which is increasingly shared by the international community. Drawing attention to the over 10,000 children who are among the casualties, Mitsotakis said: "I don't think that Israel is strategically interested in creating a new generation of orphans." Also mentioning the escalating tensions in the Red Sea, which included missile and drone attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on commercial shipping and naval vessels and airstrikes by the U.S. and U.K. in response, he said it is a significant problem that not only concerns Greece but also the global shipping industry.

Siege a silent
killer for
Gazans

NEW YORK CITY: The head of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East on Thursday called for an urgent humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, to provide some relief for the population there and clear the way for a much-needed increase in the supply of essential goods, including the reopening of commercial channels. Anything short of that will only prolong "the misery of an entire population," said the organization's commissioner-general, Philippe Lazzarini. Speaking during a visit to Gaza, his fourth since the war began in October, he said the war has gone on "far too long" and warned that there can be no winners in this conflict, which is only causing "endless chaos and growing despair." Over the past 100 days, he added, the people of Gaza have gone from "the sheer shock of losing everything, in some cases every member of their family, to a debilitating struggle to stay alive and protect their loved ones. —APP

Turkey
eradicates
100+
terrorists in
Iraq, Syria

Ankara : Türkiye's Defense Ministry said security forces eliminated as many as 114 terrorists in cross-border operations into the north of Iraq and Syria weeks after a PKK attack that killed nine soldiers and injured four others in the Metina district near the Turkish border of Iraq. A total of 2,396 terrorists have been "neutralized" in Iraq and northern Syria since Jan. 1, 2023, a ministry official told reporters in the capital, Ankara. Turkish authorities use the term "neutralize" to imply that the terrorists in question surrendered or were killed or captured. The PKK – listed as a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the United States, Britain and the European Union – is responsible for over 40,000 civilian and security personnel deaths in Türkiye during an almost four-decadelong campaign of terror. Since Turkish operations have driven its domestic presence to near extinction, the PKK has moved a large chunk of its operations to northern Iraq. Ankara maintains dozens of military bases there, and it regularly launches operations against the PKK, which operates a stronghold in the Qandil Mountains, located roughly 40 kilometers (25 miles) southeast of the Turkish border in Irbil province, although the area is under de jure control of the Kurdistan Regional Govern. —APP

Somalia
demands
cancellation
of maritime
deal

ADDIS ABABA : Somalia has ruled out mediation with Ethiopia unless Addis Ababa cancels a controversial maritime deal with its breakaway region of Somaliland. "There is no space for mediation unless Ethiopia retracts its illegal MoU and reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia," the Somali Foreign Ministry said in a statement posted on social media on Thursday. The two countries have a history of stormy relations and territorial feuds, fighting two wars in the late 20th century. Somaliland's government on Thursday alleged Somalia had "intentionally reneged on all agreements made with Somaliland" including on security matters and air space access. The statement came after the Somali Civil Aviation Authority said it denied entry on Wednesday to an Ethiopian Airlines overflight to the Somaliland capital, Hargeisa. On Thursday, the authority also refused entry into Somali airspace to a Thai-registered cargo plane flying from Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates to Hargeisa. The African Union's Peace and Reconciliation Council, a conflict resolution body, on Wednesday urged the two neighbours "to exercise restraint, de-escalate and engage in meaningful dialogue towards finding a peaceful resolution of the matter." —DNA

Briefs

PTI's Kastro arrested in May 9 case

DNA

FAISALABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader and candidate for the provincial assembly (PP-118) Khayal Kastro was arrested on Friday. He was held in May 9 case outside the session court when he reached there for his bail regarding the case. In a post shared on X, PTI said, "Our candidate for the PP seat, Khayal Ahmed Kastro, has been abducted." As per media reports, when PTI leader Khayal Kastro reached district court for bail in the arson case, the officers in plain clothes forcibly took him away in a car. It is pertinent to mention that Kastro was wanted to police in May 9 case.

Elahi expresses support for Imran

DNA

LAHORE: The President of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chaudhry Pervez Elahi spoke to journalists after his court appearance on Friday, where he reiterated his support for Imran Khan and PTI. He said he would never leave anyone in difficult times and accused the government of trying to prevent PTI from contesting the upcoming elections. He said that the government was afraid of Imran Khan and PTI, and that their 'ladlas' (favorites) could not sleep because of their popularity. He said that the people had rejected the PML-N and their 'ladlas', who did not have the courage to face the public. He claimed that PTI was not being allowed to conduct a free election campaign, and that their candidates' homes and election offices were being raided. He questioned who was being made happy by spreading fear in PTI.

Pakistan has potential to be a leader in green energy

British High Commissioner visits UK-supported solar farm helping tackle climate change in South Punjab



DNA

ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner Jane Marriott CMG OBE visited Atlas Solar Farm in Southern Punjab, as she stressed

the impactful partnership between Pakistan and United Kingdom for sustainable energy. Ms Marriott has seen first-hand how Britain partnerships with Pakistan are leading the global transition to green energy. The Atlas Solar Farm, supported by the UK government's development finance institution

British International Investment, provides an additional 100 MW of clean and affordable power to over 100,000 residential consumers. In turn, this helps them to avoid 106,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions per annum.

In a statement, British High Commissioner said Pakistan has immense potential to be a leader in solar, which could power the whole country. The UK is already investing in this innovation, playing a key role in a healthier more sustainable future, she said. Apart from her visit to the solar farm, the High Commissioner engaged with development partners in South Punjab, discussing various initiatives aimed at bolstering the region's growth. One such initiative is the substantial aid provided by the UK government that has aided the Punjab government in significantly reducing its debt by Rs. 469 billion. This has been achieved through optimizing wheat operations and carrying out pension reforms that have cut liabilities by a colossal Rs. 2.7 trillion. Such efforts underscore the depth of the UK-Pakistan partnership, extending beyond energy and into the very fabric of fiscal health and stability. In a testament to the diverse nature of UK-Pakistan cooperation, the High Commissioner also visited the MG Apparel manufacturing plant, a subsidiary of Mahmood Textiles Limited. This plant plays a crucial role in the fashion ecosystem of the UK, exporting a significant volume of clothing. It stands as an embodiment of the intertwined economic ties between the UK and Pakistan, a relationship that spans energy, finance, and fashion.

UN chief urges Pakistan, Iran to de-escalate

DNA

NEW YORK: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has expressed deep concern over the current tensions between Pakistan and Iran, urging them to de-escalate and resolve all their issues peacefully. The UN Secretary-General in a statement asked both sides to exercise maximum restraint to avoid any further escalation.

Antonio Guterres underlines that all security concerns between the two countries must be addressed by peaceful means in accordance with the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and good neighbourly relations. US President Joe Biden said Thursday that air strikes by Pakistan and Iran on each other's territory showed Tehran was not "well-liked", as the White House warned against any escalation. Tensions between nuclear-armed Islamabad, a key US ally, and Washington's foe Tehran have soared after Iran struck alleged militant targets in Pakistan and Pakistan responded in kind.

Govt moves SC against IHC nullifying cypher jail trial

MEHTABPIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: The federal government contested IHC November 21 decision on Friday invalidating Imran Khan's jail trial in the cypher case. In its petition, the government has argued that the IHC failed to assess the facts appropriately before declaring the special court designated to hear the cypher trial null and void. It maintained that the high court does not have the authority to abolish the status of a special court. Advocate Raja Rizwan-Abasi submitted the application on behalf of the federal government. Imran Khan, special court judge AbulHasnatZulqarnain, DG FIA, IG, DC, and chief commissioner Islamabad, among others, have been named as respondents in the petition. On November 22, the IHC declared the proceedings of PTI chairman Imran's and vice chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi's trial conducted in jail in the cypher case so far as null and void. The court declared that the notification issued by the law ministry on August 29 - which read that the Law and Justice Division had "no objection" to PTI chairman's trial in the cypher case being held at Attock jail - was without lawful authority and no legal effect "for want of an order by the appropriate government and fulfilment of requirements provided in Section 352 of the CrPC [Code of Criminal Procedure] as well as Rule 3 in Part-A of Chapter-1 in Volume-III of the Rules and Orders of the Lahore High Court". In its short order, the court also declared the law ministry's notifications about Imran's jail trial issued on September 12, September 25, October 3, and October 13 to be "without lawful authority and no legal effect". It added that the law ministry's notifications issued on November 13 and November 15 after decisions made by the cabinet were "of no legal consequence". The short order read that the November 15 notification could not be given a "retrospective effect". "Consequently, the proceedings with effect from August 29 and the trial conducted ... in jail premises in a manner that cannot be termed as an open trial stand vitiated," the order read.

IHC stops court from testifying witnesses in Iddatcase

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday stopped the trial court from recording statements of witnesses in the case against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi's solemnising nikah in an unIslamic way. The directives were issued by IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq during today's hearing of the case. Imran, who was removed from prime minister's office in April 2022, and his wife have denied all charges in the case registered by Bushra's former husband, KhawarManeka, in November 2023. At the hearing's outset, Imran and Bushra's counsel Barrister Salman Akram Raja apprised the court that the entire district judiciary was present in Adiala Jail to record statements of witnesses. The IHC chief justice then directed him to provide details of the case as he would stop the trial court from recording the witnesses' statements. Even if the witnesses' statements were accepted, the nikah took place 48 days after the divorce, Raja said.

Death toll reaches 24,762 in Gaza

NEWS DESK

GAZA: Israeli occupation forces (IOF) continue to commit the genocide in the Gaza Strip for the 105th consecutive day, through dozens of airstrikes, artillery shelling, and the use of fire belts, while carrying out bloody massacres against civilians and committing horrific crimes in infiltration areas. This comes amidst a disastrous humanitarian situation resulting from the blockade and the displacement of over 90% of the population. Local media reported that the IOF aircraft and artillery continued their intense bombing and shelling on various parts of the Gaza Strip on Friday, targeting houses, gatherings, facilities, and streets, resulting in hundreds of martyrs and wounded. For his part, the UNRWA Commissioner-General said, "There is very little information about the northern Gaza Strip, where access to the area is still highly restricted. I was not allowed to visit." He added, "Our convoys and aid trucks are often delayed for long hours at the inspection point. At the same time, many desperate people are now approaching our trucks to directly obtain food from them, without waiting for distribution. By the time Israeli authorities give our convoys the green light to pass, the trucks are almost empty." A total of 24,762 Palestinians have been killed and 62,108 have been injured in Israeli strikes on Gaza since October 7, the Gaza health ministry said in a statement. Some 142 Palestinians were killed and 278 injured in the past 24 hours, the ministry added. Meanwhile, Leaders of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries have denounced Israel's military campaign in Gaza and demanded an immediate ceasefire there, during the annual summit of the 120-member bloc. "Since Oct 7 we have witnessed one of the cruelest genocidal acts ever to be recorded by history," Cuba's vice president, Salvador Valdes Mesa, said in a speech to delegates.



LAHORE: Saudi Arabian Ambassador Nawaf Saeed Ahmad Al-Maliki calls on Caretaker Chief Minister Punjab CM Mohsin Naqvi. - DNA

Afghanistan's recovery hinges on international aid: UNDP report

DNA

UNITED NATIONS: Economic recovery in Afghanistan hinges on international support for boosting productivity and reinstating women's rights, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) said in a new report released Friday. The report paints a bleak picture of socio-economic conditions since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, with the erosion of women's rights and a banking system near collapse, identified as major areas of concern. The Afghan economy has not recovered from the cumulative 27 per cent shrinkage experienced since 2020 and appears to be stabilizing at a very low level of activity. This is largely due to restrictions on the banking sector, disruptions in trade and commerce, weakened and isolated public institutions and almost no foreign investment and donor support for sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. Public institutions, particularly in the economic sector, continue to lose technical expertise and capabilities, including women employees, which is further

exacerbating the situation. Although progress has been made in some areas - including in maintaining stability and security, and controlling opium production and illicit trade - it has not been enough to change the country's trajectory. Furthermore, the humanitarian and economic crises, as well as restrictions on women's rights, have had a severe impact on the female population. Women not only have limited access to public spaces, they also now consume less food and experience greater income inequality compared to men. The proportion of women working across all sectors has also dropped dramatically, from 11 per cent in 2022 to just six per cent this year. The report also introduces the Subsistence-Insecurity Index (SII), which utilizes 17 non-monetary indicators across three dimensions to measure deprivation. Nearly 70 per cent of Afghans are unable to fulfill their basic needs for food, healthcare, employment and other daily requirements, according to the index. International assistance has been vital in Afghanistan. It has saved millions from starvation, prevented thousands

of livelihoods and microenterprises from disappearing, and helped stave off economic collapse. However, aid flows are declining at a time when an overwhelming majority of the population remains highly vulnerable, Stephen Rodrigues, UNDP Resident Representative in the country, said. "The assistance and efforts require complementary investment to stimulate the recovery of the private sector, financial system, and overall production capacity of the economy," he said. The report stressed the need to address challenges in the banking system, including the microfinance sector - crucial for supporting women-led micro and small enterprises, which have experienced a 60 per cent contraction since 2021. Women's economic participation must be at the forefront of any efforts aimed at addressing the crises in Afghanistan, UNDP said. The agency called for integrating local economic development, resilience against shocks and robust private sector-led growth to sustain livelihoods. It also called for a focus on lasting recovery and prioritizing the needs of all vulnerable Afghans, particularly women and girls.

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